



Book The Power of Innovative Thinking

Let New Ideas Lead You to Success

Jim Wheeler
Career Press, 1998

Recommendation

By taking the time to think about the way you think, you can actually become a better, or at least more effective, thinker. That’s the main premise of Jim Wheeler’s brief book, which despite being somewhat simplistic, still manages to convey some valuable insights into thinking patterns. Readers who are new to the study of mental processes will be well pleased with Wheeler’s work, which is written in a non-intimidating, conversational tone. He takes a methodical approach in examining human thought and offers clear suggestions as to how to change your thinking habits to encourage positive results. *BooksInShort* recommends this book to human resources executives, who will find its concepts helpful in training employees, forming teams and identifying potential leaders, and to any executive or student looking for a competitive edge.

Take-Aways

- Three filters affect our thought processes: subconscious, survival and social.
- People use two thinking styles: adaptive and innovative.
- Adaptive thinkers prefer established patterns while innovative thinkers use various mental approaches.
- Both adaptive and innovative thinking is needed to be successful in business. Be sure to include both types of thinkers in any workgroup.
- The four types of thinking skills are strategic thinking, power thinking, creative thinking and analytical thinking.
- Strategic thinking involves considering where you are going, why and how.
- Power thinking requires personal action, a benefit and a commitment.
- Encourage creative thinking by delaying judgment of ideas, generating many ideas, accepting the ridiculous and forming new links between ideas.
- Use analytical thinking to choose the best option from many ideas.
- Innovative thinking uses all four thinking skills in tandem.

Summary

Screening Out Stimulation

People come equipped with mental filters that affect the way they think. These filters are essentially subconscious, social or survival-related screening mechanisms.

Subconscious filters are linked to your values, culture and religious background. Your subconscious filters tell you to do the right thing, and it's because of them that you need to ensure that your employer's policies are not in conflict with your personal value system. Your subconscious filters sometimes will trigger emotions when you hear certain words or phrases. Be aware of your trigger words so you can control your filters and monitor your feelings.

“In today's fast-paced, continually changing business world, you need powerful thinking skills to make decisions quickly and - more importantly - effectively.”

Survival filters help prevent sensory overload. You have sound filters that block out sounds that are not important to you. Close your eyes and listen to the room you are in. Do you hear the hum of the laser printer and the motor in your computer? Perhaps you hear a telephone ringing in a distant office. When you are focused on your work, your mind blocks out these sounds, but does not mask sudden sounds like a ringing telephone or someone calling your name.

“If you want to be successful in your business decisions, you must resolve the conflict between emotion and logic.”

Memory filters are also survival filters. They allow you to perform routine tasks while thinking about something else. You can think about what to cook for dinner while driving your car home from work. Memory filters allow you to operate on autopilot. You must be careful that these timesaving filters do not cause you to miss opportunities. Instead of fixing the same problem the same way you always have, try a different method and your problem may never have to be fixed again.

“It has been proven that the best solutions to problems come only after many solutions have been generated.”

Social filters determine how you behave at work, at home, and in your career. These filters are made up of the written and unwritten rules of conduct that affect you. For example, in a social setting people are more likely to address people they have just met by their first names. In a business setting, you usually use a title of respect and a person's last name, unless you are given permission to be more informal.

“When you only accept logical ideas or solutions, you never stretch your imagination.”

Your filters combine with your goals to create a frame of reference. This frame of reference helps you decide how you will respond to challenges. Knowing your frame of reference can help you separate logical thinking from your emotions. That separation gives you control over the results of your thinking.

Thinking Styles: Adaptive and Innovative

The two types of thinking styles are adaptive and innovative. Adaptive thinkers are more comfortable following established patterns. They like to be well organized and to focus on their goals. They feel pleased when a decision is made. Adaptive thinkers are comfortable handling one task at a time and prefer to learn from one source. They will sometimes lock themselves into a particular thought pattern that hinders their ability to change, but that tendency leads to stability in changing times.

“Survival filters can be an asset to your career if you know which tasks should be routine and which tasks require more concentration.”

Innovative thinkers use a variety of methods to get results. They appear disorganized and are often involved in more than one activity at a time. Innovative thinkers prefer the process to the goal. While they can work in the system, they will go outside for answers.

Neither style is right or wrong. To be successful in business, you need a combination of both styles. Adaptive thinkers can use

innovative thinking techniques to get out of a rut. Innovative thinkers can use adaptive thinking techniques to stay organized and goal-oriented. Groups benefit from having both types of thinkers on the team. Adaptive thinkers help innovative thinkers see the reality of the situation, while innovative thinkers help adaptive thinkers see beyond the individual steps of the plan. The two styles complement each other.

Four Types of Thinking Skills

When you are faced with a challenge, muster all four types of thinking skills. They are:

1. Strategic thinking - Used to consider plans for the future and to develop a course of action in an organized manner.
2. Power thinking - Focuses on the positive side of any situation. This type of thinking helps you negotiate obstacles and make the right decisions when planning for the future.
3. Creative thinking - Helps you look at problems from a fresh perspective. This thinking skill will get you out of the rut of always thinking the same way.
4. Analytical thinking - Keeps you organized while you look for the answers.

“‘Power thinking’ is thinking about how to create successes by using your positive-thinking abilities and developing your self-esteem.”

Only by using these skills together will you come up with the best possible plan of action. Each type of thinking plays a role in generating ideas and finding solutions.

Strategic Thinking

When you are thinking about your plans for the future, you are using strategic thinking. You think about where you are going, why and how. Using your strategic thinking skills keeps your actions in alignment with your goals. Four things drive the strategic thinking process:

1. Vision - State your vision in clear, concise and measurable terms so you can determine when your goals have become reality. The goal of "good physical health" is difficult to measure. Instead, outline that goal in terms you can measure, such as "to be able to run two miles in less than 10 minutes." The better you define your vision, the more likely you are to achieve it.
2. Resources - Your thinking can be driven by the resources available to you. Do you have the money you need to achieve your vision? Are other sources of money available? Do you have enough time to reach your goal? Do you have the people you need to accomplish your vision? Will you need to buy equipment? Do you have the skills you need? Before you move forward with your vision, examine each of these factors.
3. Values - Your values can filter your thinking. Examine your frame of reference and make sure that you are aware of any values you have that may be influencing your vision.
4. Assumptions - Thinking about the future involves making assumptions. You may assume your company will continue to grow just by selling more of its product, or you may assume that you need to diversify into other areas to grow. Whatever you assume, you need to make sure your assumptions are correct.

“To develop your power thinking skills, you need to act.”

Visualize the four drivers of strategic thinking as four gears in a machine. If any one of those gears isn’t moving, strategic thinking will not occur. Every gear must move together for the thinking process to work correctly.

Power Thinking

Your power is demonstrated by your ability to influence people or situations. Power is not good or bad. When you abuse power, it is bad. When you use it to turn your vision into a reality, it is good. Your power can come from the respect people have for your job title, your skills or your knowledge.

“When you use positive thinking, you are strengthening your power thinking skills.”

Power thinkers create success by using their positive-thinking abilities and developing their self-esteem. Use power-thinking skills to achieve your goals. The ABCs of power thinking are action, benefit and commitment.

You need to act to develop power-thinking skills. Start using positive words when speaking. Concentrate on taking a positive approach to problems. Think about other ways you can develop your self-esteem and confidence.

“The basic rule for analytical thinking is to force your thoughts to converge, to make them come together.”

Have a clear idea of how you will benefit from the actions you are taking. While some accidental benefits may occur when you do something merely for its own sake, you become an effective power thinker only when you have a purpose for doing something.

The commitment to act in a positive way is an essential requirement of positive thinking. Make a commitment of time and energy. Act on the easier visions you have for yourself. As you follow through, you are taking the first steps toward a larger commitment. Each step you take makes the next steps easier.

Creative Thinking

When you process familiar information and come up with creative solutions, you are using your creative thinking skills. Every person is creative, just in different ways. Follow these four basic guidelines to recognize and encourage creative thinking.

- Postpone judgment - Delay your judgment of ideas so the other three steps outlined here can take place. People are more willing to throw out ideas when they realize they won't be judged immediately. In the time it takes to judge, you could instead be creating twice as many ideas. You are more likely to find the best possible solutions when you compile a large list of potential solutions.
- Generate many ideas - Sometime you can only find the best solution after coming up with many ideas. The route to quality goes through quantity. A goal of coming up with 50 solutions is not unreasonable. By forcing yourself to come up with this many solutions, you just may come across a gold nugget. When you compile many options, the first third tend to be obvious, the second third are more ridiculous and the final third contains the best, most creative ideas.
- Accept the ridiculous - Don't limit yourself to logical ideas and solutions. You will never stretch your imagination this way. You may need to entertain many ridiculous ideas before finding one that has a basis in reality.
- Form new links - Build on existing ideas when you create your list of options. Find a way to link one crazy idea with another. An employee with the 3M Company developed an adhesive that did not stick properly. When the glue was between two pieces of paper, one piece could be easily lifted off the other. The employee used the useless bits of paper to mark pages in his hymnal. This "useless" product is now a multi-million dollar seller for the 3M Company. The only limitation for the number of combinations you can create is your imagination.

Analytical Thinking

You need analytical thinking to decide on the best solution after you have generated many options. Your analytical thinking tools can help you overcome the barriers caused by your frame of reference. You can make good decisions and create effective plans. To use analytical thinking, force your thoughts to converge. Take all the different directions you generated with creative thinking and unite them under the guidance of positive judgment.

“When you use analytical-thinking skills to converge your thoughts, you need to be guided by positive judgment.”

Use positive judgment by using your power-thinking skills to find the best possible solutions. Keep yourself organized with your strategic-thinking skills. Never ignore the new and the different, but keep your eyes on your objective. Make choices that apply to your goal.

By taking the time to think about your thinking, you stay in control. Control allows you to deal with things in a proactive way and assures you that your solutions will lead to correct decisions. As your results become more positive, you will become more positive.

About the Author

Jim Wheeler first wrote this book ten years ago. It was recently reissued.
