

# boundary-less thinking

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“There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things.”

Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*



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The world is non – linear.

Our brains tend to function linearly.

It is very difficult to fit a <sup>NON – LINEAR</sup>

exterior

into a linear interior!

This helps explain why our thinking seems so out of sync with the way the world works. It helps explain why things seem so chaotic and complex, and why *boundaries* are so hard to tear down.

LINEAR THINKING  
THINKING

NON-LINEAR

(BOUNDARY - LESS)

analytical, logical, either-or  
being correct is essential

synthetic, ill-logical, *and*,

being correct is not  
essential; being “wrong”  
or not worrying about  
being “right” helps to  
break out of patterned  
thinking and see  
connections otherwise  
unseen

takes most direct path that  
leads to solution; solutions are  
obvious; looks for the answer  
quest for certainty

explores less likely paths;  
asks “what if” questions;  
looks for alternatives

quest for understanding

pays attention to boundaries

see’s boundaries as  
challenges

Its not either/or-its both, linear *and* non-  
linear thinking. The idea is to know which  
to use when.

Humans have an inherent need to wrest order out of disorder, which is why boundary-less thinking is hard, but:

- ⚡ Order and disorder lie within the whole of any dynamic, complex system. **Some disorder is necessary for organizational health.**
- ⚡ Complex systems adapt to change and unexpected events better if they **function on the boundary between order and chaos.**
- ⚡ In non-linear systems **cause and effect are both disproportional and unpredictable.**

“In Italy for thirty years under the Borgias they had warfare, terror, murder and bloodshed, but they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and the Renaissance. In Switzerland they had brotherly love, and 500 hundred years of democracy and peace and what did that produce? The cuckoo clock.” Harry Lime, played by Orson Wells in the 1949 film, *The Third Man*.

## About Assumptions

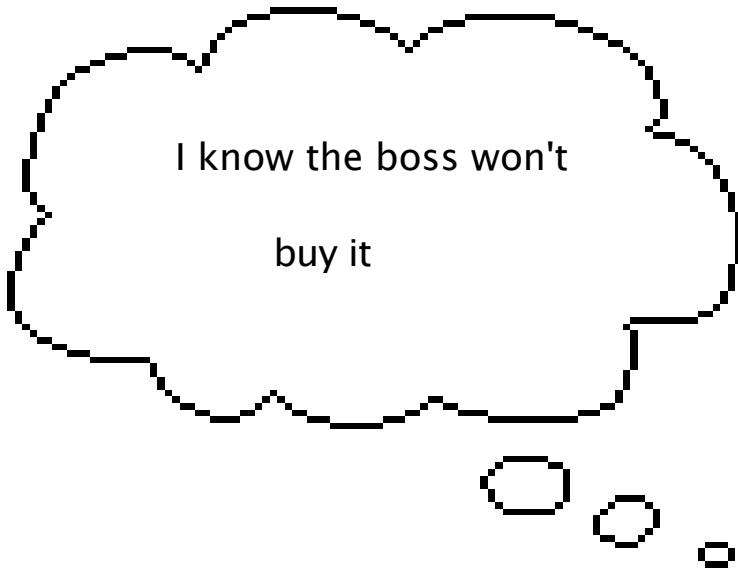
Most behavior, whether it be in an organization, community, or individual rests on a variety of tacit assumptions, almost always unquestioned.

But, *systemic change is virtually impossible in the face of unexamined, unchallenged assumptions.* The task of the Boundary-Less Thinker is to think without the constraints of habit and self-imposed boundaries, to challenge dogma, to surface and question underlying, unwitting, and usually untested assumptions that drive behavior.

Underlying many of the specific assumptions (shown next) is a general assumption, largely self-imposed, frequently predicated on fear, that *we are powerless to change the system or influence the boss.*

“We need states of mind that don’t hold rigidly to ideas and in which assumptions are not defended against evidence of falseness.”

David Bohm



**Other often imagined assumptions:**

The client won't go for this!

How do you know if it will work?

We haven't done it that way before!

It'll cost too much!

It's not a good fit for us!

Etc.,etc., add your own...

## UNLEARNING (this is noT forgetting)

Unlearning is to be able to say, with reason, the contrary to what you know.

The more wise one becomes, the more one is able to contradict one's own ideas.

**Sufi Indian Sayings**

When seeking a creative approach to a problem or a fresh way of looking at an issue, think of the exact **OPPOSITE** of the thought you have or the obvious answer.

**Rovin's Principle of the Opposite**

Simply, ask: is there another way?

## About Error

There is no learning without error.

There is no innovation without failure.

A highly regarded leader was asked:  
to what did he attribute his success;  
he replied that it was due to making good  
decisions; he was then asked what was the  
basis of his good decisions to which he  
replied experience; he was then asked how  
did he get this experience to which he  
replied-- making bad decisions.

**“Mistakes are the Portal of Entry.” James Joyce**



## "Systems Thinking" in a few words

(Boundary-less thinkers are systems thinkers)

"Systems thinking" is an organizing principle of thinking about the world and its systems, be they mechanical, biologic, or social. A system is more than the sum of its parts: it is the product of them.

*A system's defining feature(s) comes from the interactions of its parts, not from any one part.*

Everything~is~connected~to~everything~else.

This means *you can't change just one part* and expect benefit to the whole. Changing one part may cause harm to the whole.

In any change effort, the leader's focus on the interactions is essential. Systems thinking leaders *think more about integrating than directing.*

# Starting from Scratch

## (Idealized Design)\*

- ☺ The opportunity to create the greatest change and be the most *creative* is when you start from scratch. Whether an organization, unit, project, or a relationship, starting something new offers more possibilities than trying to change an existing entity. It is also easier and more fun!
- ☺ Idealized design/redesign provides the opportunity, if only in your mind, to start from scratch, be playful, and not consider constraints. It helps you come closer to what you really want, rather than what you think you have to settle for.

\* (Developed by Russell Ackoff)

“In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert’s there are few.” Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginners Mind*

## **NO PLAN SURVIVES THE BATTLE\***

No matter:

how much data you collect,

how long you plan for it,

how good it looks on paper,

you don't know if a new product or service or method of management or any other change will work or be profitable until you try it!!

**THIS MEANS THAT IMPLEMENTATION AND PLANNING OCCUR SIMULTANEOUSLY.**

**THIS ALSO MEANS YOU CANNOT KNOW WHETHER YOU HAVE ASKED THE RIGHT QUESTION(S) UNTIL YOU BEGIN TO LOOK FOR ANSWER(S).**

\* (Von Moltke, Prussian army general, circa 1900)

***NO SYSTEM CAN AT ONCE BE  
CORRECT AND COMPLETE***

“A system perceived as completed is no longer responsive to its environment and thus contains error.”

Kurt Gödel

Adapted from the mathematical  
proof of his Incompleteness  
Theorem

English translation:

Regard all decisions as temporary, there are  
no final answers..... be in draft form

or

“When its over - its not over!”

Yogi Berra