

Individual Reflection

Dialectical Thinking – Background 1(5)

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Dialectical Thinking - Background

The Art and Practice of Transformational Sensemaking

Logical Thinking

Logical thinking is characterized by: Static. In pursuit of one answer. Reasoning to support your case. Either/or. Better/worse. Right/wrong. Linear cause-effect.

There are three main patterns of logical thinking:

Inductive: Resting on laws and regulations to support your case.

Deductive: Linear cause and effect reasoning supporting your case.

Abductive: Generalizations and general conclusive reasoning to support your case.. E.g. "I dismiss these parts of the bigger whole, and therefore I dismiss the whole." "These details of the bigger scene are true, so I hold the entire scene as true."

Create awareness of when you use logical thinking, and experiment with using dialectical thinking patterns for what you observe, using the guidance below.

Dialectical Principles:

Dialectical thinking is characterized by four principles. Read these, and reflect on how you may embrace them.

Holism:

There is always a bigger whole to be considered. No thing can be viewed in isolation.

Dynamism:

Everything that exists is in constant motion and change. Always becoming what not already is, and leaving some of what it is behind.

Relationship:

Each and every thing is related in some way to something else. Those relationships give the thing its essence.

Transformation:

Significant change is occurring via movement of forms, in which the new form transcends and includes the former.

To evolve our dialectical thinking capabilities, we can explore the general process of dialectical thinking - the process of differentiation, elaboration, integration. To differentiate something from its whole. To elaborate this in different ways and finally to integrate the elaborations into a new coherent whole.

Dialectical thinking widens our ability to see, sense and make sense of our reality. This brings about a deeper understanding and renewed and wider perspectives.

In a world where everything is connected, interrelated and in constant movement, the dialectical thinking framework provides a way to make visible and talk about sometimes hidden aspects of reality.

Shannon & Frischherz describe in their book *Metathinking - The Art and Practice of Transformational Thinking*, how we can open up our dialectical thinking capabilities.

In a dialogue with Shannon & Frischherz, they describe that we are born with logical and dialectical sensemaking capacity. But, throughout the western educational system, the logical ways to think and experience the world are so dominant that our dialectical abilities are suppressed, or even partly forgotten.

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Dialectical Thinking – Holism 2(5)

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Dialectical Thinking : Holism - Structural Thinking

“There is always a bigger whole to be considered. No thing can be viewed in isolation”.

S1: Differentiation of elements in a whole representing a stable entity in its own right.

(E.g. A branch of a snowflake. A team in an organisation. A person in a team. An atom in a molecule. Non-reductionist. Study the whole.)

- ∞ If you look at the smaller parts/elements of what you observe, what elements show themselves?
- ∞ Where do you find corresponding elements in other parts of your life?
- ∞ If you were to look at what you observe from an even higher level, what is the bigger picture that emerges?

S2: Elaboration of elements with reference to the structure, hierarchy and functionality of the elements.

- ∞ What gives what you observe its significance and stability?
- ∞ What you observe is part of a larger system, how would you describe the structure of that larger system?
- ∞ How are the smaller parts embedded, and structured in the larger whole?
- ∞ Looking at the smaller parts, and at the larger system: what structural patterns do you see?

S3: Integration of different elements and perspectives into the structured bigger entity as a system.

- ∞ How is what you observe re-born in this now? Again and again...
- ∞ How might what you observe change if seen in different contexts?
- ∞ How does your view of what you observe change when you consider it in different contexts/perspectives?
- ∞ How could parts change? Be something else?
- ∞ If you would change a smaller part. How may the system change if that change were escalated?

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Dialectical Thinking : Dynamism - Process Thinking

“Everything that exists is in constant motion and change. Always becoming what not already is, and leaving some of what it is behind”

P1: Differentiation of a changing element, linking its current state to the past and future.

- ∞ How has what you observe emerged from past history?
- ∞ How have its elements changed over time?
- ∞ How can you acknowledge and open up to the fact that all elements in this will continue to change?
- ∞ How is this similar to your life story?

P2: Elaboration of one or more element in their developmental aspects.

- ∞ Is there anything that is missing from what you can see at present, that could be part of, or emerge out of this?
- ∞ How is what you observe currently shifting?
- ∞ How does change come about, and in what different aspects can change be viewed?
- ∞ How is that relevant for this situation/thing/issue?

P3: Integration of changing and interconnected elements in an unceasing movement as a system.

- ∞ How is what you observe re-born in this now? Again and again...
- ∞ What do you sense emerging from the dynamics you observe?
- ∞ How is the ongoing change of involved elements held back or promoted?
- ∞ When promoting certain change, what other change is held back?
- ∞ Consider the polar opposite or antithesis of what you observe. How could this be integrated to let emerge something new?

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Dialectical Thinking – Relations 4(5)

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Dialectical Thinking : Relations - Relational Thinking

“Each and every thing is related in some way to something else. Those relationships give the thing its essence”

R1: Differentiation of relationships between two or more separate elements.

- ∞ To what extent do you see what you observe as unique and unrelated to anything else?
- ∞ How would you describe what you observe thru its relations?
- ∞ How do you see this “situation/thing/issue” stemming from the relations that shape it?

R2: Elaboration of specific relationships between interconnected elements.

- ∞ How is what you observe related to something else that you see or that is happening in your life?
- ∞ How may the relations in this situation be interrelated with other events or aspects?
- ∞ What aspects of “good relations” are forgotten/not applied here?

R3: Integration of interconnected elements and their constructive relationships into an entity as a system.

- ∞ What is common ground between what you observe and other events in your life?
- ∞ Under what conditions would you personally appreciate the relationships shaping this situation/thing/issue?
- ∞ How do you hold back and promote these conditions?

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Dialectical Thinking – Transformation 5(5)

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Dialectical Thinking : Transformational Thinking

“Significant change are occurring via a movement of forms, in which the new form transcends and includes the former.”

T1: Differentiation of conflicting elements leading to transformation or destruction of a system.

- ∞ How might what you describe be developed further?
- ∞ Are there any conflicts that might need to be overcome in order for what you observe to be transformed?
- ∞ What is the potential for what you observe to go the other way, to fall apart or disintegrate?
- ∞ What conflicts arise in you observing what you observe?

T2: Elaboration of the conflicting interaction between two or more elements and their characteristics, potentially involving human agency.

- ∞ How can the elements in conflict be expanded in their own character, and in this individual expansion find mutuality between the two?
- ∞ What crack opens in the conflicting interaction, in which light can pour in, guiding to another future?

T3: Integration of conflicting elements into a new dynamic system, potentially involving human agency.

- ∞ When you think about what you have described, what other thing or system might you integrate it with they would bring about its transformation?
- ∞ Where are we? Where do we need to go? What do we need to sense? What do we need to let go of? What do we need to let come? How do we need to transform structure, flow/process and relations/connections? What wants to emerge?

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