

Not The [W]hole Story



IT's world-flattening effect needs a different kind of thinking – outside the box. It is a clarion call to discard the old and usher in the new.

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data, data everywhere, and not a thought to think.—Jesse H. Shera [“The computer is here to stay, therefore it must be kept in its proper place as a tool and a slave, or we will become sorcerer’s apprentices, with data, data everywhere, and not a thought to think.”]

We cannot solve the problems that we have created with the same thinking that created them.—Albert Einstein

The first Law of Holes: If you are in one, stop digging.—Anonymous

Jesse Shera’s quote underscores the way the IT world has come to be, *bit by bit*. Einstein provokes us to change our mindsets, and the final quote hammers the point home. Ironically, we can’t even identify the guy who is hammering. Perhaps it points to each of us who continue to dig the holes we are in.

What did we do to deserve this predicament? How did we get into the ‘box’ without even realising it? Well, actually the box got built around us – and before we knew it, we found ourselves in it! John Lennon encapsulates this beautifully, *“Life is what happens to you while you’re busy making other plans.”*

Imagine if we could step out of our hole—or box, if you please—and think outside of it. Would it then give us the freedom to think of technology as an enabler, rather than an alternative to human beings? Would it allow us to recognise that people are different from machines? Would it not be easier to balance efficiency with effectiveness? I see a vastly expanded horizon of possibilities that lead to highly enriching and sustainable opportunities. I might want to suggest that stepping out of the box could mean stepping into a new age marked by ‘generalisation’.

In the industrial age, things were related to ‘material’ products. Each specialised discipline would

provide value to new products that often came into being either by progression, or by a demand from the markets. The Internet changed all that. Since software only needed a PC and programming skills, it became easy to set up a software shop. Software is typically 'im-material' and is very forgiving, since very little capital gets locked in. While this is a wonderful opportunity, it also floods the market with similar solutions, each of which fulfils only part of the

store, retrieve and distribute the data. Software as a Specialisation was born (not to be confused with the current SaaS wave). With the advent of the Internet and the Web, this evolved into another specialisation called IT. Wait a minute. Did I say that IT is a specialisation? Well, there's our 'box'!! It just grew around us.

Practitioners of 'lateral thinking' show us how to step out of the box and start thinking outside it. Lateral thinking is a term coined by Edward

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My new Age of Generalisation will hopefully be defined by an interdisciplinary breadth that is nicely balanced with a depth of human sensitivity. I am hoping IT professionals will learn not only to recognise the value provided by other disciplines, but will also develop a healthy respect for those professions that bring complementary inputs to their solutions – which includes every single profession, and the various flavours of IT. At the end of the day, everything that is produced *by human beings is meant for human beings* and no one discipline can provide holistic solutions on its own; not even IT.

We are lucky to live in a world that's continuously flattening. The challenges ahead are exciting and promising. Indian IT is the flavour of the day. My clarion call is for stepping out of the box—better still, let's create a new box, instead of having another one grow around us. **LI**

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whole need.

Our generation grew up 'specialising'. The industrial era needed specialists by the dozens. If it made sense to measure a company's growth by the number of additional units produced, we only needed to count the additional number of specialised disciplines created, to measure society's progress. Somehow, the more we got to know, the more there was to know. There was so much data that we needed a specialised discipline to capture,

de Bono, a Maltese psychologist, physician and writer. De Bono defines lateral thinking as methods of thinking concerned with changing concepts and perceptions. Lateral thinking is about reasoning that is *not immediately obvious*, and about ideas that may not be obtainable by using only traditional, step-by-step logic.

Excerpted from Wikipedia, "Thinking outside the box is a cliché or catchphrase used to refer to looking at a problem from a *new perspective* without *preconceptions*.

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