

Innovations in Thinking and Learning

Roger Martin – Introduction to Integrative Thinking

NARRATOR: Think about the toughest choices you make. Often they are tough because you feel like you are caught in a tug-of-war between two competing answers. Like you are standing at a crossroad, not knowing which path to travel. It can seem like choosing one path means giving up the chance to follow the other. Or that neither road gets you where you want to go. Solving these "either/or" problems often leads to comparing the two choices using a pro/con list, eventually picking the choice with the most pros, or the least cons. This kind of problem solving can leave you feeling deflated, uninspired, and even angry. You are simply choosing the least bad option. It doesn't afford any space to create new and better answers. With integrative thinking, the goal isn't to choose one of those unsatisfying paths, but to create new and better possibilities. And we've seen students in all grades, teachers, leaders, and executives do just that. These "either/or" situations can actually serve as an opportunity for creativity, turning on a little lightbulb in your brain as you transform tension into innovation. That feeling of opportunity is exactly what integrative thinking is all about.

Roger Martin, former dean at the Rotman School of Management, in his book "The Opposable Mind," defined integrative thinking as the ability to face constructively the tension of opposing models. And instead of choosing one at the expense of the other, to generate a creative resolution of the tension in the form of a new model that contains elements of the individual models, but it superior to each.

Integrative thinking is useful, but it isn't intuitive. So we need tools to organise our thinking and spur creativity. The integrative thinking toolbox includes the Ladder of Influence, to help us understand our own thinking and share our thinking with others. The Pro-Pro Chart helps us to explore opposing models and understand them more deeply. And Prototype, to help us be creative, collaborate, make connections, and use constraints to build new possibilities. These tools help us become better problem-solvers. With them, we can shift our mindset and transform how we see and experience the world. We can move away from a mindset that seeks one right answer, and towards a learning mindset that allows for many possibilities. We can cultivate a mindset that is curious when others see the world differently than we do. A mindset that is excited by the complexity of a problem, and wants to explore the tensions that arise. A mindset that sees possibility, rather than barriers, and seeks new ways of solving problems that lead to better answers.