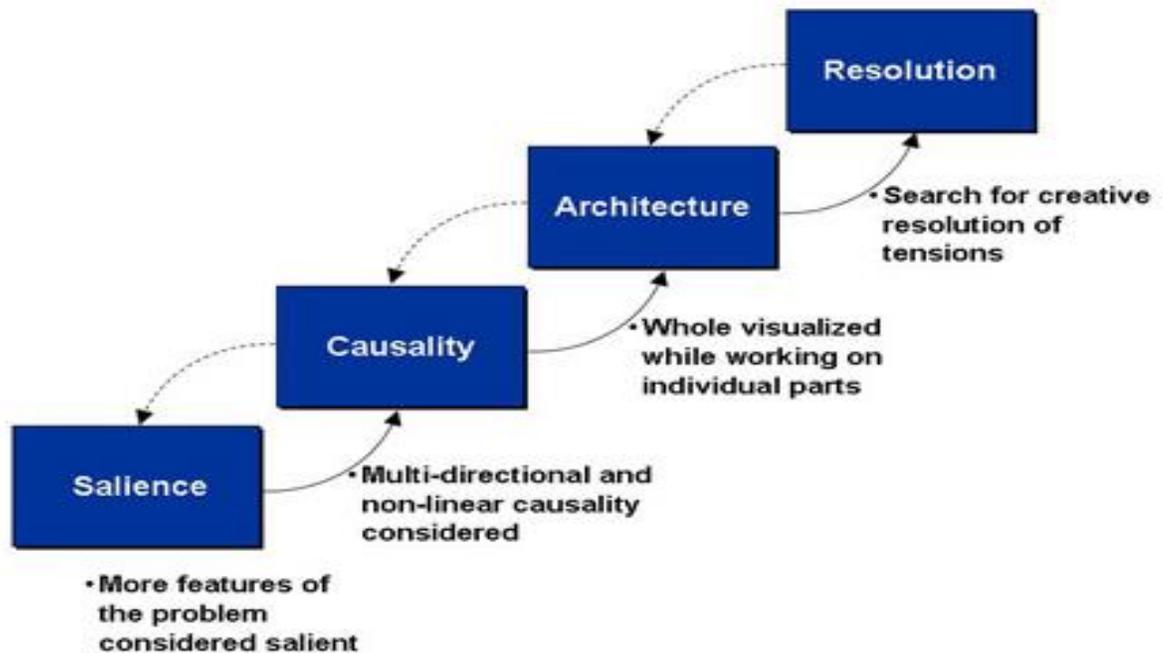


The Opposable Mind  
Roger Martin

Integrative thinking: The ability to face constructively the tension of opposing ideas and, instead of choosing one at the expense of the other, generate a creative resolution of the tension in the form of a new idea that contains elements of the opposing ideas but is superior to each

**Integrative versus conventional thinking**

**The Practices of Integrative Thinkers**



## Embracing the Mess

The **first** difference between integrative thinkers and conventional thinkers is that integrative thinkers take a broader view of what is salient. More salient features make for messier problems. But integrative thinkers don't mind the mess because they know the best answers arise from complexity.

**Second**, integrative thinkers don't flinch from considering multidimensional and nonlinear causal relationships. System dynamics tools help integrative thinkers consider complex causal loops in creating models and help them build models in which the whole is viewed rather than split into discrete components.

The **third** difference between integrative and conventional thinkers is in the architecture of their decisions. Using the same systems perspective, integrative thinkers keep the entire problem firmly in mind while working on its individual parts. As they do with salience and causality, integrative thinkers allow complexity to compound as they design their decisions.

**Fourth** and finally, integrative thinkers will always search for creative resolution of tensions, rather than accept unpleasant trade-offs.

## Mapping the Mind

### Your Personal Knowledge System

1. **Stance:** How you see the world around you and how you see yourself in the world
2. **Tools:** With what tools do you organize your thinking and understand the world? Your stance guides what tools you accumulate.
3. **Experience:** With what experiences can you build your repertoire of sensitivities and skills? The experiences you accumulate are the product of your stance and tools, which guide you toward some experiences and away from others

These have a mutual effect on one another. As experience leads us to acquire new tools, we add depth and clarity to our stance.

### The Integrative Thinker's Stance

Stance about the world:

1. Existing models do not represent reality; they are our constructions.
2. Opposing models are to be leveraged, not feared.
3. Existing models are not perfect; better models exist that are not yet seen.

Stance about self:

4. I am capable of finding a better model.
5. I can wade into and get through the necessary complexity.
6. I give myself the time to create a better model

### Integrative tools

1. **Generative reasoning:** A form of reasoning that inquires into what might be, rather than what is.
  - Seek new insights
  - Visualize new models
  - Prototype and refine mental models
  - Gather additional data with each iteration

2. **Causal modeling:** Sophisticated causal modeling is a crucial underpinning for causality and architecture. The thinker must consider nonlinear and multidirectional causal links between salient variables. In the architecture step, the thinker must keep the whole interlocking structure of causal relationships in mind while working on the individual parts of a solution. Integrative thinkers are more conscious about the tools they choose to use to model.
3. **Assertive inquiry:** Inquiry that is used to explore opposing models, and in particular, models that oppose your own. Assertive inquiry isn't a form of challenge, but it is pointed. It explicitly seeks to explore the underpinnings of your own model and those of another person. Assertive inquiry promotes generative reasoning and causal modeling.

### **Integrative Experience**

Using experiences to drive a combination of mastery and originality is a characteristic of integrative thinkers. Mastery without originality becomes rote. By the same token, originality without mastery is flaky if not entirely random. Mastery is required to distinguish between salient and unrelated features, to understand what causal relationships are in play, and how to analyze a complex problem. Mastery is an enabling condition for originality, which in turn, enhances mastery.

With a combination of stance, tools, and experiences, integrative thinkers grow continually more proficient at generating creative resolutions. This requires patience and reflection as you learn. To be a truly inspired integrative thinker, you need a wealth of experiences to hone your sensitivities and skills.

“You can't make a renaissance person anymore, because the range of what you would need to do is just impossible. But you could assemble a renaissance team. The integrative thinkers rely on their “renaissance teams” to broaden salience, maintain sophisticated causality, and create a holistic architecture in their drive for creative resolution.”

Bruce Mau, renowned designer.