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# UNIT 39 INTERVIEWS

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## 39.0 OBJECTIVES

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A careful study of this unit will help you to

- prepare yourself and your guest for a scheduled interview in a definite, step-by-step manner;
- ask 'productive' questions;
- steer clear of pitfalls in your conduct of the interview;
- appreciate the 'management' problems of an interview and tackle them, and
- approach the task of giving an interview with some competence and confidence.

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## 39.1 INTRODUCTION

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In the foregoing units (31-38) we have been discussing things we have to write. Talks, plays, documentaries, features, all these could be *written*. But an interview is something we don't write. Or, we could say, we write it after the event. Talks, plays, features, documentaries and so on are first written and then spoken. But an interview is written, if it is for print, after the guest has spoken his answers to your questions. If it is a radio or TV interview, it may not be written at all. So, why should we talk about it in these units on writing? The answer was given long ago in some other context. Writing is not what we do with our pens, or on our typewriters. Writing is what we do with our heads. In that sense, we do *write* interviews, because they are not casual affairs like conversations. They are often carefully prepared transactions, unless they are given and taken more or less irresponsibly, which can be very risky.

Interviews are substantially the same, whether they are for prints, radio, or television. Their message can get across with equal efficiency, —the media are not crucial to comprehension as J.M. Transman says. But print interviews are easier for your guest. He or she can take their time giving their answers. But hesitation will be heard on the audio tape, and heard and seen on the video, which makes the guest all the more nervous. Then, listeners can get closer to the personality of the guest through his or her voice, and feel even closer still when the guest is 'in the room' across the window of his 'box' (TV).

Preparation for the interview is also the same, intellectually, academically, and professionally. There will be differences only in the technical, cosmetic, and

'The aim of an interview is to provide, in the interviewee's own words, facts, reasons, or opinions on a particular topic, so that the listener (viewer, or reader) can form a conclusion as to the validity of what he is saying'. That is how Robert McLeish defines the aim.

So the audience or the reader is waiting to find out what the *guest* thinks, or feels. They are not interested in *our* views, unless we are the guests. But when we sit with the guest at the same desk or table in the same kind of chairs, we are very much in danger of feeling that the audience is interested in us as well. And what happens when we start feeling that way? We turn the interview into a discussion! And when we do so, we may soon find ourselves out of our depths. We may not have the expert knowledge, the experience, the involvement that our guest has, and the discussion will not sustain itself. We may lose our credibility by the middle of the programme, and you can imagine the rest.

A discussion is an exploratory endeavour. You can explore an area together with someone else who knows as much as you do. If he knows more, you will have to learn from him first before you can explore anything with him.

This is what the audience wishes to do, to learn a little more, to find out something more, to understand a little better. And you, the interviewer, are the representative of the audience. So your business is to ask the questions which are exercising the audience's minds, questions which were in their minds when they decided to view the programme, as well as the questions that arise while an earlier question is getting answered. These are usually called supplementary questions. Apart from these there is another type of question. This is the kind of question the viewer *would have* asked if he had had the time and the opportunity to study the area better, which is what you are supposed to do, before you go out for the interview. Study the topic as well as you can, if you are interviewing an expert. Or find out more about the background, etc, so that you can ask questions which will 'draw out' your guest. What you study will depend on the type of interview. We could divide them into three types, following McLeish.

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## 39.2 TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

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**1) Informational interviews:** These are arranged to give the viewer definite information, which he may not find elsewhere. It goes without saying that such interviews have to be carefully prepared. The difference between clarity and confusion depends on the way you ask your questions and the order in which items of information are presented. But at the same time, the interview should not sound 'rehearsed'. An interview is a personal conversation, and spontaneous. It is no 'put on show', which will turn the viewer off.

Details of a scientific discovery, new methods of diagnosis for a major disease, how a recent military action was carried out, the terms negotiated at a recent meeting of parties in a dispute,—these are some examples of topics for informational interviews.

**2) Interpretative interviews:** These could be on such topics as how the judgement on the Bhopal Gas Victims' compensation was arrived at, why the policy on Centre-States relationship cannot be changed as recently recommended by an independent body, why broadcasting has not yet been made entirely autonomous in the country, and so on.

In such interviews, the guest will inevitably interpret the issues his own way and give justifications for his position. And the interviewer, equally inevitably, has to question the justifications on behalf of his audience. We have to get ourselves briefed well before we go to the studio for such interviews, and in the studio, we will have to stay alive and alert, ready to challenge any opinions expressed. Facts are not sought at these interviews. They are arranged because the facts are *known*, while the reasons for them are not.

These are the kinds of interviews which can quickly turn into confrontations. The interviewer should spare no pains to prevent this happening. The audience will lose confidence in you the moment you turn an interview into a debate.

At a debate, you are out to score points and convert the audience to your point of view. But as the interviewer, your business is to let your guest clarify his views to the

3) **Emotional interviews:** There were very many of these after the tragic death of the late Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi. They are sought, to reveal the 'state of mind' of any of the persons involved in tragedies, as well as triumphs, or persons who have found some kind of enlightenment or whatever. These interviews are essentially broadcast so that people can share joys and sorrows, angers, or satisfactions. The interviewer has to handle such occasions with sensitivity and understanding.

The position of the interviewer is very 'tricky' in such situations. He has to be an impartial observer, but at the same time, he should not be judged insensitive. The manner of his questions becomes much more important than the matter.

**Check Your Progress 1**

1) Why are interviews arranged?

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2) What are interviews in danger of turning into?

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3) How do we distinguish the three types of interviews?

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### 39.3 THE PROCESS OF INTERVIEWING

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An interview is an event that is *arranged*, which means, it is prepared for. The interviewer has no excuse to make any silly mistakes, such as getting names, dates, figures etc, muddled. Even if these mistakes have no bearing on the substance of his questions, the audience will not forgive such clumsiness in a professional interviewer. The guest might also feel embarrassed having to correct such 'elementary' errors. If he is an expert, he will wonder what the viewer is thinking of him for having agreed to give an interview to such clumsy characters.

So the interviewer must prepare for his task, study the topic, find out all the established facts and views about it, get enough information about the interviewee (the guest), and prepare his key questions, with the aim of the interview in mind. The four items to think of are, in four words, a) the interviewee, b) the topic, c) the (key) questions, and d) the aim. The aim, of course, is the *first* thing to decide. The second step is to discuss the topic with your guest before the interview, either on the day of the interview or earlier. This discussion should help you to establish a 'report' with the guest. And it will help him to make things clear to himself, and to find out if he has anything to get checked before he turns up for the interview. As we said earlier, if the interview is for radio or TV, the guest is likely to feel a little nervous. Many professional communicators have declared that such nervousness is good for the success of the work. But all the same, the guest should not look or sound nervous. The discussion will help him to find out how not to. Therefore, during the discussion, the interviewee should do most of the talking. You should only indicate the area to be covered and let him talk and warm up, and feel confident.

At the end of the discussion, you can tell him what your *first* question is going to be. He can come prepared with an answer to that and start the interview on time, without fumbling. Fumbling during the interview will be much more forgivable if there is none at the beginning.

**The interview technique**

This is of course the technique of asking questions. Six types of questions are recommended; they are marked by the words, *who, what, where, when, how, and why*. Of these questions, the most *productive* and the most *dramatic* one is *why*. That is the question which might draw the guest out to throw maximum light on the topic.

'Why' often means 'how' as well as 'what for'. 'How' unravel the circumstances that brought something about, such as decision to accept something or reject it. 'Why' reveals the purpose and the reason as the guest perceives it. Here are some ways in which these questions can be heard.

- To what extent did you concur with that view at that time?
- Who were the persons who actually wanted to stick to their guns?
- How often used the meetings to take place?
- How did the final rift come about, so far as you can say?
- Why was that? What were the compelling reasons?

You remember the 'Yes-or-no' questions, which bring out the smallest piece of information in answer,—the bit. Well, exactly for that reason, 'yes-or-no' questions are not usually recommended for interviews, and that is understandable. Imagine an interviewer asking long, long questions and getting monosyllables for answers, from an interviewee, who may be an expert in the subject. For instance, 'Is that the reason why Mr. Higgledee Piggleddee did not join in? Yes'. 'Was that how all those people objected to the publication?' 'Yes!' That is not the way to get a programme's worth from an expert. Such questions guarantee your hearing your own voice ten times as long as your guests. And it is not fair, to the guest, to you, or to the viewer, who will feel you have lost control of the interview, and lost out altogether.

But if the answer you are seeking is a straightforward 'yes' or 'no', without any evasion, for instance, then you ought to ask a 'yes-or-no' question.

A 'yes-or-no' question is a *narrow* question. It gives the guest no room to qualify or modify his answers. That means it gives the guest no chance to give much to the viewer.

That is one end of the scale. At the other end is the question that is *too wide*, for instance. 'You have recently been on a round-the-world tour. Could you please give us your impressions?' An interviewer who asks such a question might just as well not take the trouble to go to the studio. The announcer could have announced instead that the guest would talk about her impressions. But then, the guest may not know where to start and how to go on. That is why an interview was scheduled.

Your question should be broad enough, but only broad *enough*, it should not be as wide as the world or as narrow as a single wire bridge. The question of *question width* is quite tricky, but the width of your question is crucial to the flow of your interview. Don't ask questions which have to be explained, such as, 'Why did you decide on such a career, I mean, it isn't something that looks obvious, is it, that is to say...? If you don't know what you are asking, what is the guest supposed to say in answer, and that too, after you have wasted so much of everybody's time? Take time before the interview, to get your questions clear to yourself.

But don't write your questions down. That will compel you to stick to them. And then you will miss out on the supplementary questions, which may be what the viewers are waiting for.

**Check Your Progress 2**

1) What does the interviewee (guest) gain from the discussion 'before?'

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2) What are the four things to bear in mind during 'preparation'?

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3) What is meant by 'question width'? What is the question with the least width?

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## 39.4 PITFALLS

### 39.4.1 Other People's Questions

As the interviewer, you are supposed to be asking the listener's (viewers) questions. But since you could be a viewer as well, you can ask your own questions. Apart from viewers as such, there are those who hold views which may be definitely opposed to those of your guest. If you ask *their* questions, your guest is likely to welcome them very gladly. They give him an opportunity to demolish those opposing views. But such questions are often 'written on top of pitfalls' for the interviewer. If you take sides against your guest, or seem to do so, you lose your credibility with the viewer as well as turn the interview into a debate. So you have to frame your questions carefully when you play the role of the 'devil's advocate' and pose opposing views which are not your own. Your wording should make it clear that you are only stating views which are generally known to be held in some quarters. For instance,

'What is your reaction to the view that.....?'

'How would you react to this criticism which we often hear.....?'

But if you start your question with a statement like, 'Some people say that.....', you step on a pitfall. Your guest may interrupt you to counter the opposing view, and you are seen as starting a debate. If you start with a question, and tag the others' view to that question, you will keep the interview going without any misunderstanding among viewers.

### 39.4.2 Multiple Questions

If you ask a 'two-pronged' question, your guest may answer one of the 'prongs' and forget the other, either naturally or for 'expediency'. For instance, 'how did this accident happen, and how can such accidents be prevented in future?' The answer can be either how it happened or how it can be prevented. And the guest can give you a lecture on accident prevention, conveniently forgetting how it happened in his factory. Then there is the 'either/or' question, such as,

'Did you get the idea while you were working on the problem, or did you start working because you got an idea?'

But the answer may be neither. He may not have started working on the problem as yet! Instead of such questions that may 'catch you on the wrong foot', you could ask too 'productive' questions, 'What led you to the idea? 'And later, How far has it developed, what work has been done on it, if any?' An *either or* question is in fact an answer, not a question. You are suggesting that it has to be one of two. Your business is to ask questions.

### 39.4.3 Leading Questions

These are questions by which you try to force your guest to agree with your answer, instead of answering your question., for instance, 'What made you enter into such an unwise agreement?'. Or, 'Why was it handled in such a ham-handed fashion?' If your guest does not agree with you, then you will have to argue with him, start a debate, or enter into a straightforward quarrel! Such 'leading questions' betray your secret,—that you have a point to make. If that is the case, you shouldn't be interviewing but debating, for which an interview is not the occasion. You should constantly tell yourself you are speaking for your viewers, and they may not all think it as you do!

### 39.4.4 'Non-questions'

An interviewer is not supposed to state his own reactions and views. If you say something like, 'Wasn't it a strange thing to do 'or,' That seems to have, been ignored, doesn't it, you are sure to convert your interview into a discussion or a debate. With a little imagination, you could instead, convert your reactions into genuine questions; for instance, you could ask, 'What prompted them to do that?' or, 'Why did they not take that into account?'

There is a belief that it is more polite to ask your questions with a preface of modesty, as in, 'Could I ask you how.... or Could you tell me why...' But of course you *could* ask how, and he certainly *could* tell you why. That is why he agreed to give you an interview. So, ask your question straight. Your respect and consideration can be put in your tone. Why twist your grammar?

But if there is something very delicate and sensitive that you have to touch on, because you know the viewer is waiting to hear something about the matter, then you are justified in starting your question with roundabout prefaces, and all the 'would you mind's 'and' could you please's' will be well employed.

### Check Your Progress 3

1) What should we guard against when we ask 'other people's questions?'

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2) Why are multiple questions not recommended?

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3) What makes a question a non-question?

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## 39.5 MANAGING THE INTERVIEW

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Yes, the interview has to be 'managed'. This involves four functions as McLeish divides them,—technical control, direction control, supplementary questions, and timing.

### 39.5.1 Technical control

The technical control of press interviews may involve only shorthand transcription if you have had training in stenography. But in these days of sophisticated recording technology, it is easier to record the interview on cassettes and get it typed out later. This means you have to 'keep an eye on the machine' all the time.

If it is a radio interview, you have to keep a watchful eye on the machine, to make sure that the voice levels do not go down below broadcast quality, the guest's face doesn't go too far off the microphone, the tape doesn't get stuck in the middle, and so on. If you are interviewing for TV, your ENG (Electronic News Gathering) equipment will demand even more attention. You have to take care of the images as well as the sound. There may be your recording crew to assist you, but the responsibility is yours.

### 39.5.2 Direction control

Direction Control involves monitoring the course of the interview with reference to your key questions. There is no rule which says that no one should deviate from the key questions. You make your own rules. But if you decide to give your interview a different direction half way through, you should know what you are doing, and so should your guest. An interview that gets out of control may not be 'transmittable!'

### 39.5.3 Looking and listening

Fresh interviewers are so anxious to get through their key questions that they often let the guest talk into the machine while they are waiting to ask their next question. This will be at once obvious both to the guest and to the viewer or listener, who will, both lose interest in you. You should be *listening* to the guest, and looking at him, throughout the interview. Eye contact is supposed to be the life-line of 'interpersonal communication. The word itself is after all 'inter + view'. You are supposed to be viewing, looking. A great deal of your communication, such as your warmth, empathy, and compassion, is non-verbal.

In short you have to be looking and listening, ready to ask *supplementary questions*, to get jargon explained, abstractions illustrated, objections removed, and so on, all on behalf of your viewer. The interview will not be felt as a spontaneous transaction unless there are supplementary questions. An interviewer who knows his job knows his audience, and the supplementary questions that come up in their minds.

### 39.5.4 Timing

It goes without saying, is what broadcasting is all about. In print, your work is reckoned in words, in radio and TV, it is calculated in minutes and seconds. When you exceed your time, you are wasting an opportunity, because whatever is said after the prescribed transmission time is lost to the viewer. Sometimes, you may have to record longer stretches than you can use, and sometimes, your guest may say something in a better, or more acceptable way. But unless there are good reasons, stick to your time strictly. Your guest will appreciate it, and so will your producer, and viewer.

### 39.5.5 Winding up

It is better not to sum up at the end of an interview. Let the audience do it for themselves. The best ending is an amusing or memorable statement by the guest. When he has said something striking, and when you are nearly at the end of your scheduled duration, just thank him and say goodbye. If he doesn't say anything striking, ask a question on the outlook for the future. And when you begin a question with 'finally,' it should *be* final. Never say that word unless you mean it.

After the interview, if it is a recorded interview to be broadcast later, as it most of the time is at present, you should play the recording back to your guest and let him satisfy himself about what he has said and how he has said it.

### Check Your Progress 4

- 1) What quality do supplementary questions give an interview?  
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- 2) How is the direction of an interview controlled?  
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- 3) What is the problem with fresh interviewers and key questions?  
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## 39.6 GIVING AN INTERVIEW

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In this section we look at the interview from the other end. Suppose you are invited to *give* an interview. How would you prepare for that task? The first question is, 'Why should I expose myself to the media in this way?'

You are invited to the interview because the broadcaster feels the public are interested in your views on an issue. If you think so too, it may be in your interest to talk, and let the public understand what the facts are, what 'the position is', or what the truth is as you see it. If you don't help them to understand, they may take someone else's help to misunderstand. And if you are invited and don't agree to state your views, the broadcaster may make *his* statement, saying you had refused to comment. That would surely give the impression that you had something to hide. So, it is better to accept the invitation as an opportunity and say something on your own behalf.

But if you feel you are the wrong person to be interviewed on the topic given, you can help the broadcaster telling him who the right person is.

Before you can accept the invitation, you should have information on the interview. You should ask for answers to *these* questions.

- 1) What is the interview about? You cannot ask for the exact questions, but the subject 'area' and its limits could be made clear.
- 2) Is it going to be a live broadcast, or a recorded interview?
- 3) How long is it going to be? This determines how much you can or will have to say, and help you to 'tailor the talk' to the occasion. After all there is no point in saying a lot, just to be cut out. Remember, you have to spend time preparing what you are going to say. And that will be time taken off something else.
- 4) What is the context? Is it one in a series of interviews, or is it a single item in a news broadcast, or just a 'one-off' 'topical' programme?
- 5) What is the audience? Are the local people, or the whole country? Or is an international audience going to view the programme?
- 6) Where is it taking place? In the studio, or no location?
- 7) When is it? How long have you got for preparation?

**Preparation.** When you are given an opportunity to say something, you should use it to say what you have to say, whether you are asked a question on it or not. For this purpose, you have to be ready with at least two of your main points, the central message of your communication. If the interviewer asks the two 'right' questions, well and good. If he doesn't, you have to put it in an answer to any other question that might 'accommodate' it. Or you might answer the big question and then invite the question you need, saying 'but don't you think there is another question that goes with it?' or something like that. You need not wait for the interviewer to agree. His business is to ask the questions, and he may be grateful to you for asking it yourself. So, you state the question and give the answer as well!

Get all the facts and figures ready. There is nothing more demoralizing than fumbling with facts and figures. Be sure of them, and also, make sure you can 'illustrate' your facts with instances, anecdotes, and so on.

**The interview.** When you are face to face with the camera and the microphone, you may find yourself nervous. But so long as your 'nerves' don't find you tongue-tied, some nervousness will do the interview good. It sends adrenalin out in your blood stream and keeps you alert, and alive.

When you give an interview, you surely wish to leave an 'image' in the audience's minds. And you would not wish this image to be anything other than *sincere, friendly, human, considerate, helpful, competent* (as McLeish says), if not much else. Even if the image is genuine, (and there should be no reason why it shouldn't be,) it cannot be put across without taking some trouble, at least to remember the following. A *sincere* guest says what he means, and does not put on airs. A *Friendly* guest has a ready smile, visible on TV and audible on radio. (There is such a thing as a smiling voice.)

He does not use formal language or jargon in his talk.

A *human* personality admits faults, and uses no 'gimmicks'.

A *considerate* participant in any transaction understands other points of view even when he disagrees with them.

A *helpful* guest gives the audience useful practical advice.

A *Competent* authority appreciates questions and gives accurate answers directly. He does not beat about the bush.

If you can remember all these 'do's and 'don't's during the interview, you will come out of the studio sure of your image.

But there is one more thing you should remember. Your image is not made of style alone. The matter is as important as the manner, if not more. Therefore, you should give your *host answers*, not evasive words and phrases. If there is a reason why you cannot comment on something, say so in straightforward denials. For instance, 'I cannot say anything about it at this stage. My statements will only confuse the issue. Let us wait until the report is out.'

There are three parties to an interview,—the guest, the host, and the audience. All the three should be able to trust one another. If we cannot be sure of this trust, put the interview off. Without all round trust, an interview will do no good, and a lot of



## Check Your Progress 5

- 1) It is better for someone in a responsible position to accept an invitation for an interview. Why?

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- 2) What should you 'arm yourself with' when you prepare to give an interview?

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- 3) How does an interviewee show his 'competence'?

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### 39.7 STUDY AN INTERVIEW

In this section you will read a portion of an interview. The interview appeared in a newspaper. But it might as well have been given over the radio or on television. The topic of the interview should be of interest to you because it is thinking, which is what writing in fact is, apart from language skills and penmanship. But the topic is not what you should study, in this section. Study the questions the journalist asks, how the guest answers them, what questions *follow* from the answers, and whether the guest answers *more* than the question asks, i.e., does the guest answer unasked questions? Then, what more would you have asked if you had been there?

#### “MANY HIGH IQ PEOPLE ARE, IN FACT, POOR THINKERS”

Lateral thinking is arguably the first new development in the way man thinks since the time of Aristotle. And the father of this revolutionary concept is of course, Dr Edward de Bono.

Lateral thinking is very basically a technique to help people develop completely new ways of looking at (and, therefore, ultimately solving) problems. And the concept behind it is this : conventional logical thinking (or 'vertical' thinking) is a step-by-step process—like systematically digging a hole deeper and deeper. But if the hole is in the wrong place to start with, no amount of deepening will move it to the place where it should have been.

Lateral thinking on the other hand, involves forgetting about the old hole and digging a new one in a new place—where it might just be that you strike oil.

The application of lateral thinking is universal; it's equally relevant to business, science, technology, the arts, and indeed, even one's personal everyday problems. Today as a result it is being increasingly adopted all over the world, from giant corporations like 'BM, Unilever, Shell, ICI and Du Pont, who use it to increase the creativity of their employees... to for instance, Peter Ueberroth, the celebrated organiser of the Los Angeles Olympics, who confesses that it was because of the lateral thinking technique he used that he was able to make the 1984 games such a major success, financially as well as otherwise.

As a result Edward de Bono has himself emerged as some kind of cult figure—a kind of international guru of creative thinking. A man of many parts, he was a Rhodes Scholar, a record-breaking canoeist and a polo player; he has taught at Oxford, Cambridge and Harvard; he is sought after by major corporations in the US, Japan and Europe. And he is a best-selling author with 27 books behind him.

Edward de Bono was in India recently to conduct training courses on 'Lateral Thinking for Management' as part of the Taj Continuing Education Programme.

Q. You once said that the brain was designed to be 'brilliantly uncreative'.

A. Yes, that's right.

It's a rather controversial thing to say, isn't it?

Well, you see, as you grow up the brain has a tough task making sense of the world around it. So it develops a self-organising system. It recognises systems, makes them standard and then reacts to them in a standard way. For example, 'This is a door. I go through it. I don't have to think about it.' That, in fact, is the purpose of the brain. And the way it performs this function is an immense achievement.

Let us say, somebody woke up in the morning and said 'I have 11 piece of clothes to put on. Let me see in how many different ways I can get dressed'. So he programmes his computer to tell him. Now it would take the computer probably 45 hours of continuous working— at the end of which it would say there are 31,000,000 possibilities of different ways to dress.

And then it would probably end up having you dressed in a green shirt and purple trousers. (Laughs) Perhaps. But the point I'm making is that if you had a computer for a brain, for instance, life would be impossible. You couldn't even get out of bed. The brain, however, handles things fantastically well— because it has a system that puts everything into a standard routine pattern. And that's why I say the brain is designed to be brilliantly uncreative— because, after all, that's what's required of it, 98 per cent of the time.

But what about the other two per cent, when what you want is new ideas, not routine processing?

Ah, now the brain isn't designed for that. If we want to change the routine patterns, we are in fact going against the brain's natural behaviour— and that's where the technique of lateral thinking comes in.

Lateral thinking means deliberately moving sideways from the established ways of looking at things. In order to find new ways of looking at them— alternative ways. And a tool that we can use to facilitate this, of course, is what I call 'provocation'— or 'Po': using deliberately outrageous or impossible ideas as stepping stones to ultimately arrive at new ideas that are right.

Let me give you an example. There's this factory that's polluting the river, and as a result people downstream suffer. So to help solve the problem you say, 'Okay, so let's put the factory downstream of itself.' Now, that of course is impossible. It's mad. Because obviously the factory can't be upstream and downstream at the same time. Yet this impossible idea can serve as stepping stone to a simple idea that does make sense.

And it's very simple really: In order to make the factory downstream of itself, all you do is switch around the inlet and outlet pipes that connect with the river and insist that the inlet pipe must be down-stream of the outlet pipe. So the factory is now the first to be affected by any pollution it creates.

Now the thing is that IQ and thinking is not the same thing. IQ is like the potential of a car, while thinking is like the driver's driving skill. And as a matter of fact many high IQ people are, in fact, poor thinkers. By using lateral thinking techniques however they can be trained to think more effectively— and therefore harness all that IQ potential.

Tell me, how did you happen to get involved in this whole area of thinking?

Well, various things came together actually. I had done psychology, and was therefore interested in thinking. Then, in medicine I was working on computers— and I became interested in the kind of thinking computers couldn't do. In addition, from the field of medicine came the idea of self-organising information systems— and that was really the key point.

I wrote about it in my book, "The mechanism of the Mind" in 1969— and in the last two years the ideas in that book, perhaps indirectly, have become the central thinking in the very latest computer systems. They're called neural net machines, and they

look at a different kind of information system— an active system, rather, than a passive one. Meaning, the information actually interacts with the surface it is placed upon.

A simple example is, rain on a landscape. Once the rain has fallen, it forms streams, and that surface is now no longer passive. It channels the rain. Now once we look at the logic of self-organising systems, we're looking at the logic of perception of active systems— and things like—the concept of 'provocation' or 'Po' are a logical necessity in order to get this track across to that track.

So on the one hand I'm looking at the very basis of information, thinking, the mind. And on the other hand I'm interested in creating what must ultimately be very practical and very simple tools for thinking.

How, exactly did you develop the term 'lateral thinking'?

That's interesting really. Because in fact in the first manuscript I wrote I hadn't thought of the term 'lateral thinking', and I called it 'the other sort of thinking'— and the whole manuscript was written using the term 'the other sort of thinking'. Then someone interviewed me and as I was explaining the concept to him, I said. 'Well, instead of going straight ahead, you sort of go laterally. And then it struck me that's the word I want. So I went through the manuscript again and changed the term to 'lateral thinking' all the way through.

Moving into a different area, I believe you had a discussion with Rajiv Gandhi recently on the possibilities of introducing lateral thinking into the Indian educational curriculum.

Yes he's very interested in this, and he immediately set up a meeting with P. V. Narasimha Rao. Mr Rao said, yes it does make a lot of sense— we just teach a lot of information and facts in school and we must now get people thinking. So the next step is I'm going to send some material and he's going to discuss it with the National Council for Educational Research & Training.

As a matter of interest, which country has gone the farthest in incorporating lateral thinking into its educational system?

The one that's using it in every school in the country— and not only schools, but in technical colleges, public services, the army— is Venezuela. Every child by law must learn thinking for two hours a week.

Now the way this happened was there was a professor of philosophy in the University of Caracas. He read one of my books and became inspired. Later he became a politician. And when they asked him what ministry do you want, he said the Ministry for the Development of Intelligence. Now, as you can imagine there were cartoons in all the papers saying what about a Ministry of Stupidity and so on. (Laughs)

Anyway he took one of my programmes and translated it. I trained teachers for them— and eventually in three years they had 105,000 teachers, in every school in the country.

Which are the other countries that have adopted your systems into their educational system?

Well, UK, Canada— it's used in 30 per cent—40 per cent of the schools there. Malaysia, Singapore, now China. It's used in Australia in a big way. In Bulgaria, surprisingly, the government set up a pilot project. They liked the results. And now they're putting it in all their schools...  
In Bulgaria?

Yes.

I find that very interesting because I believe that's a country where they're doing a lot of work on understanding how the mind works and incorporating their findings into the teaching system. Using hypnosis and super learning techniques...

Yes. You're thinking of Professor Lazanov and his techniques. Actually he's not very popular with the government today, but, yes, they are doing some interesting things

How do you react to the concept of using hypnosis in the area of learning?

I think there's two levels to it. On the one level, if you remove the fear of failure, and if you do things in a pleasurable way it helps— and so moving towards a light hypnotic state can be useful. It's particularly good for languages. Now whether it works for other subjects I'm not sure.

There seems to be quite a lot of work being done today in the area of creative thinking— ranging from your own work to, say, the whole left brain-right brain theory. Who are the other people in the field whose work you personally find interesting?

That's a difficult point. If you take the US, say, there are quite a few people working in the field of creativity, yes. But there really is no one that I would regard as working at the kind of fundamental level that I'm working at. In the field of neural nets, yes, there are people at Caltech, Berkeley and Carnegie Mellon who are doing very good work. People like John Hopfield.

But the creative area is still a little loose. There's Alex Osborne, Sid Parnes and so on— but the work being done is a little unstructured. Then there's Ned Herman at the Whole-Brain Institute. And there's Van Kek, who's a complete plagiarist. He has no original ideas.

Now most of the work that's being done in this area is industrial. It gives people self-confidence so they won't be inhibited, and that will take them up to a certain level. But on the whole the notion "if we all take our ties off and sit on the floor we'll all be more creative"— well, the answer is no you won't. You won't be afraid to be creative, that's true. But that's all.

There's this theory that we're at our creative peak at the age of five— and then it's steadily downhill after that.

Well, we need to distinguish between two things; the creativity of innocence and what I call the creativity of 'provocation', or lateral thinking. Now the creativity of innocence means if you don't know the field, you can come up with a new idea. And naturally, the older you get, the better you get to know the field, so it's very difficult to use the creativity of innocence.

But if, on the other hand, you use the creativity of provocation— you use lateral thinking— then your experience is now in your favour. So the paradox is that the older you get the more difficult it is to be creative— but if you succeed, the more creative you'll be.

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## 39.8 LET US SUM UP

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- 1) Interviews are substantially the same whatever the medium communicating them. Only press interviews are physically 'written', but radio and TV interviews involve all the work, short of penmanship.
- 2) The aim of an interview is to get firsthand information, from the original source, 'from the horse's mouth'. They are not discussions.
- 3) They are of three types, informational, interpretative, emotional dealing with facts, reasons, and states of mind, respectively.
- 4) An interview should be prepared, considering the interviewee, the topic, key questions, and the aim, holding a discussion with the guest before the event, telling him the *first* question.
- 5) Recommended questions are of the, 'who, what, where, when, how, why' type. 'Yes-or-no' questions are too narrow for general use. Question-width should be productive, not bewildering. Don't ask questions which have to be annotated. Don't write down questions.
- 6) 'Opposition' questions, multiple questions, leading questions, and non-questions, stand on top of pitfalls for the interviewer.

- supplementary questions, and timing. It also involves non-verbal communication, and decision on the winding-up.
- 8) The interviewee should know the topic, the context, the broadcast, the duration, the context, the audience type, the location, and the time. He should prepare at least two points of *his own*, and welcome a reasonable degree of 'nerve'.
- 9) His style and content should help to project the favourable image he wishes to have.

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## 39.9 KEY WORDS

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**Guest:** Someone who is *invited* to give a talk, or an interview, or to sing, or offer any other kind of performance, is often called a guest. For this unit the guest is the *interviewee*, being interviewed. The interviewer is, who represents the broadcasting or press authorities, is sometimes called the *host*.

**Question-width:** This is in fact the width (or the length) of the *answer* that a question gives room for. For instance, 'What steps can we take to improve the health of the community right now?' Now your guest can say several things in answer. The question has optimum width. But, 'Is this a visible proposition?' is a very narrow question; it allows only 'yes' or 'no' for an answer.

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## 39.10 SOME USEFUL BROADCASTS

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Doordarshan's 'The world this week' has some interviews in it. There are also the interview programmes themselves, in English. The UGC INSAT broadcasts transmit interviews with experts in diverse fields.

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## ANSWERS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Interviews are arranged to give the audience first hand information about an issue, or about facts, views or states of mind, from those directly associated with the matter.
- 2) They are in danger of turning into discussions or debates.
- 3) In informational interviews we look for facts; interpretative interviews seek reasons, justifications, etc; emotional interviews are sought to understand states of mind, and so on.

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The discussion gives the guest a chance to clarify things for himself, to brush up his memory, and to work off any nervousness.
- 2) The topic, the aim, the guest, and the key questions should be borne in mind.
- 3) 'Question-width' is in fact the 'length' of answer it allows. The 'Yes-or-no' question has the least width, it allows only the shortest answer.

### Check Your Progress 3

- 1) When we ask such questions, guard against the impression of taking sides, and turning the interview into a debate.
- 2) Such questions are not advisable because only one of the 'bunch' may get an answer.
- 3) When a question is in fact a suggestion in the form of a question, it is a

**Check Your Progress 4**

- 1) Supplementary questions make an interview 'spontaneous' and 'live.'
- 2) The direction is controlled with reference to the key questions.
- 3) Key questions so preoccupy the fresh interviewer's mind that he or she forgets to listen to the guest, and to ask 'supplementaries'.

**Check Your Progress 5**

- 1) The declining of an invitation for an interview may create an impression in the public mind that there is something to hide.
- 2) We should arm ourselves with at least two points which we have to make, whether there is a question on them or not.
- 3) A competent interviewee listens to questions with understanding and gives clear, accurate answers, without being evasive.