

CAF: CONSIDERING ALL FACTORS

If all our experience were to be instantly available we should be much better thinkers. But it is not, and we have to direct our attention carefully over our experience in order to pick out what we need for the moment. One of the major faults of thinking is what we call 'point-to-point' thinking in which the mind drifts from point to point without any systematic scan. Twenty-four groups of youngsters in the London area were asked to consider the suggestion that 'bread, fish and milk should be free'. The youngsters were aged 11. Twenty-three of the groups decided that it was a bad suggestion even though some of them came from families so poor that they could only afford milk occasionally. A typical example of the point-to-point thinking went as follows: 'If they were free everyone would want them. The shops would be crowded. The buses would be crowded. The drivers would want more money. They would not get more money. They would go on strike. Other people would go on strike. So it's a bad idea.' Each point has a connection with the next point but there is no scan around the suggestion itself.

Since our experience, including the information we have learned, is the major source of information that we bring to bear on a matter, we need to develop general purpose scanning tools. Two such tools are 'CAF (Consider All Factors) and 'C & S' (Consequence and Sequel). These tools were designed to counter the tendency for thinking to be ego-centric and very short-term.

This is an attention-directing tool like the PMI and APC. In other words, a device to make concrete what would otherwise remain a general intention to look broadly around an issue. 'Doing a CAF' means considering all the factors that have to be considered in a situation. There is no attempt to evaluate the factors. For example doing a CAF on buying a secondhand car might result in the following items: price, previous history, previous owners, present owner, mileage, likelihood of mileage having been altered, re-sale value, comparison of price with official listings and other vendors, state of the car, petrol consumption, oil consumption, state of the tyres, rust, state of the road worthiness certificate, suitability of the car, cost of spares, nearness of service agent, and so on.

This is not a complete list, nor are the items in order of priority. Some of them even overlap. For example, the 'state of the car' could include such items as 'rust' and 'state of the tyres'. If anything is to get individual attention it is worth listing separately. Whilst general headings include many factors they do not serve to direct attention to each of these factors - so a separate listing is helpful. In doing a CAF the emphasis is on 'what has been left out?' and 'what ought we to consider as well?'. A young couple who buy a large bed and find that it will not go through the front door have left out a major consideration.

Do a CAF and list all the factors that should be considered when thinking about the following matters:

1. Choosing a career.
2. Planning a birthday party.
3. Designing a better chair.
4. Writing a detective story.
5. Giving a present.
6. Choosing a pet.