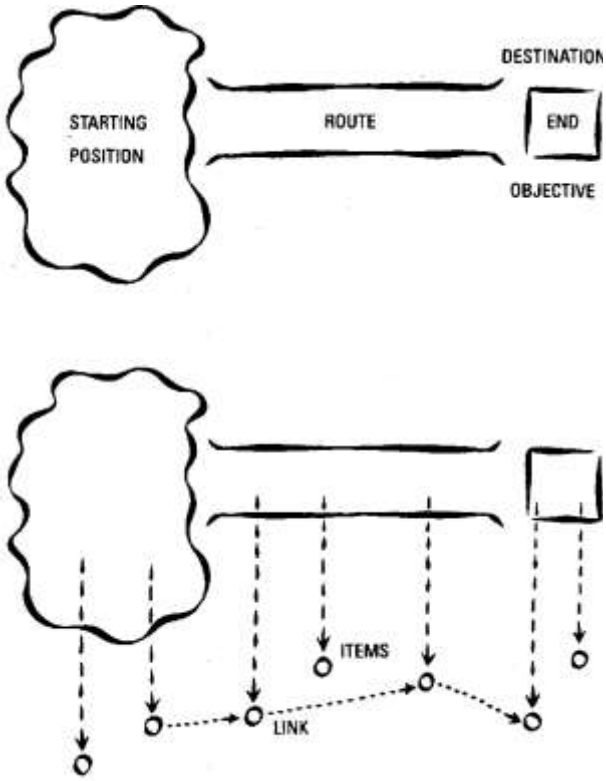
THE PROBLINK® METHOD

This is a problem and task solving method that is helped by a visual structure.
There is the starting position.
There is the route.
There is the destination.



The diagram shows the general starting p6sition, the general route and the general destination. The destination is the objective of our thinking (AGO), the place we want to reach. The first step is to 'drop' ideas down from this destination box. These can be either situations that provide a solution to the problem or sub-objectives that once reached will enable us to move forward to a solution.
As an example let us take the problem of the neighbour who parks his or her car in front of our garage. The obstructing car could also belong to guests visiting the neighbours.
The ideas that we 'drop' down from the objectives box might include:
... the offending cars are parked elsewhere ... obstructing cars can be moved ... no cars are parked in front of the garage ... the neighbour knows not to park there
Any of these situations would be helpful to us in solving the problem.
For the next step we move back to the 'route' part of the second diagram and we proceed to 'drop' broad ideas from the route. These ideas might be very broad or may be almost detailed. They are ways of getting to the destination. For the car-parking problem the broad ideas might include:
... make it impossible to park there

... warn the neighbour
... put up a notice
... talk to the neighbour
... complain to the neighbour
This list is not comprehensive. The list may also include ideas that overlap (put up a notice, warn the neighbour) but this does not matter. Just put down the ideas. They can be sorted out later.
The final step is to move back to the starting situation. Here we do exactly the same thing. We 'drop' down features or elements. This need not be a complete analysis of the situation - though it could be. For the car-parking problem we might 'drop' down the following features.
... the neighbours
... the neighbours' guests
... they might know but forget
... they might think it does not matter
... they might think the garage owners are away
... they might know but not care at all
What we have done here is to pick out or rather 'drop down' aspects, features, elements of the starting position. There is no need to be comprehensive at first. We can go back and do that later. The purpose of the diagram is to stimulate ideas.

'Link':
At the end of the first stage we have a diagram that looks like a small rainstorm.
Our task is now to find a way from the starting position to the end position by linking up some of these items.
We can start at any point and move in any direction (towards other items).
We could start with the destination item, 'cars parked at that spot should be movable'. This can be linked up with the 'notice' item under 'route'. This suggests that we put up a large notice saying that cars left at that place must have the ignition key in place to allow for moving if the garage is needed. This seems a reasonable request. But most people would not like to risk leaving the key in the car, because of theft, so they would choose to park elsewhere. The idea of the car 'being movable' might link up with the ideas of 'warning'. A notice might then warn that cars parked there could be towed away.
The destination item 'parked elsewhere' might also link up with
'notice'. A notice on the garage door might give details of alternative nearby parking (a constructive move).
We could now try to make some links from items under 'route'. If we made parking 'impossible', this would link up with the starting item of neighbours who knew about the difficulty but 'did not care'. It would also link up with the destination item of 'no cars parked there'. At this point we are making general links so we do not see how the broad idea of 'impossible' can be carried out.
We may take the route item 'talk' and link this up with 'neighbours'. We might just talk to the neighbours or talk to them again and again until it became a real nuisance for them.
We could also try and make links from the 'starting-point' items. For example we could take 'forgetting' and see what this might link up to. It could link up with 'notice' or with 'impossible'. The item of 'guests' would also link up with 'notice' or 'warning'.
Route:
Once some links have been formed we see if we can extend these links so that we have a complete route, through the items, from the starting position to the end position. For example the link might

be: guests-notice-park elsewhere. It might be: 'don't care'-impossible-not parked there. We make as many such links as possible.

Detail:
The routes we now have are mostly at the level of 'broad idea'. For example the broad idea of making it 'impossible' to park in front of the garage is a very broad idea. We now need to see how that idea can be carried out in practical detail. We can indicate this on the diagram by putting a triangle under the broad idea (see diagram overleaf). This is an indication that the broad idea must be worked out in detail. So we look around (APC tool) for alternative ways of making parking impossible. This focus could itself become the start of a new thinking session.

... we could put posts which could only be laid flat if you had the key.
... we could put slabs which would allow you to drive into the garage but not park sideways across the entrance.
... we could have an old car of our own which we always kept parked in that place.
For any route that passed through the point 'notice' we would need to say in detail what would be on the notice:
... leave keys in ignition.
... this is where you can park (giving alternatives). ... your car may be towed away.
At the end of the detail stage all broad ideas that are part of a 'route' must be spelled out in detail. We then put together our alternative 'routes' or solutions to the problems. These are the routes by which we can get from where we are to where we want to be.

EXERCISES

Exercises are set at different points in this book. You should use these exercises as they are given. You may also supplement them with items of your own. But be careful not to introduce too many items which are solemn or heavy. Building up thinking skills should be fun. Once the skills are in place, they can indeed be applied to heavy matters.
There are four types of practice items:
Fun items: These are imaginative, crazy, speculative and not meant to be taken seriously. Although the subject matter is not serious the principles, functions and operations are quite real (as with a metaphor). 'What would happen if we all had a third arm in the middle of our chest?' 'Would it be a good idea if all children over the age of ten had to put in ten hours a week of real paid work?' 'If dogs could talk, what would change?'
Remote items: These are sensible and realistic items but fall outside the experience and needs of the youngsters who are doing the thinking exercises. They may be items from the world of business, government or adult life in general. 'What factors would you consider in choosing where to set up a new fast-food place?' 'How would you solve the problem of traffic congestion in cities?' 'What should be done with household garbage?' 'There is a lot of theft from the shop you are running, how would you solve this problem?'
Backyard items: These are items that are directly relevant to the age, peer group, local environment and interests of the youngster who is learning the thinking skills. 'Your best friend seems to be avoiding you and you do not know why - what can you do?' 'Your brother with whom you share a room keeps messing everything up -what can you do?' 'You have a choice of three

things to do during the holidays - how do you make the choice?' 'How would you plan a party for your friends?'
Heavy items: These are serious matters that have a direct relevance to the life of the youngster who is learning thinking. The age, interests and situation of the youngsters will influence the choice of items. New items can be introduced arising from real-life needs and difficulties. These items should be used sparingly. Above all, it is important that these serious items should not be used as an excuse for parents to 'preach' to their children. As with the other types of item, these serious items must be tackled in an objective thinking manner. 'Should young people smoke?' 'You want to have the freedom to come home late but your parents want you home early -what can you do?' 'You know that your friends are experimenting with drugs, how can you persuade them not to?' 'You can never find time to study, how can you solve this problem?' 'How can you make more friends in the neighbourhood?'

EXERCISES ON PROBLINK®

1. Put down three major and three minor problems that you have.
2. A girl moves with her family to a new district. Put down four tasks that she might set herself.
3. A manager cannot find the right staff. Set out a Problink® diagram and drop items for each part.
4. There is a lot of theft from a food store by shoppers. A Problink® diagram gives the following items for each part. What links can you make?
5. Starting position: food displays, thieves have no fear, shoppers not interested, cannot watch everyone.
6. Route: warnings, TV cameras watching, detectives, rewards, occasional publicized arrests.
7. Objective: decreased theft, more fear, shoppers more helpful.
5. In the task of designing a new playground for children the following 'broad ideas' are put forward. Can you find detailed ways of carrying them out? 'something new every day', 'children build their own things', 'parents and children can play together'.
8. The cat has four kittens. They are going to be killed. A girl (or boy) sets out to find homes for the kittens. Do a full task-solving exercise, using the Problink® diagram and ending up with an action plan.
9. The smell from the local garbage dump is increasing. Which of the following solutions might be best?
10. ... complain.
11. ... organize the neighbourhood to complain. ... change houses, move to another area. ... use more scent in your house.
12. Your friend is upset because he has misunderstood what you have told him. Is it a good solution to be upset with him because he misunderstood you?