

I don't just read books, I devour them, with pen in my hand, highlighting and making notes. After reading, I copy down all the notes and type them up, considering each idea all over again. Yet, I have often found that key learnings are too quickly gone from memory. That's why I started compiling these two-page book reviews for personal use. With the encouragement of friends and colleagues, I offer my notes now through the Creative Option C website so that others may gain the insight of these authors and perhaps be inspired to read the entire work.

TITLE:	<u>The Opposable Mind: How Successful Leaders Win Through Integrative Thinking</u>
AUTHOR:	Roger Martin, Professor of Business at the University of Toronto
PUBLICATION:	Harvard Business School Press, 2007

PRIMARY THEME: Many highly successful leaders have an ability to create workable solutions to the problems they face by resisting the urge to choose from between two opposing options. The process of doing this is called “integrative thinking” which can be studied and learned.

SUMMARY DISCUSSION: In the course of a career interviewing and studying successful business leaders and their decision-making style, the author has identified that many have a predilection for integrative thinking. This is to say that successful leaders have an ability to “hold two diametrically opposed ideas in their heads. And then, without panicking or simply settling for one alternative or the other, they’re able to produce a synthesis that is superior to either opposing idea.” He introduces us to a number of these leaders, some of whom are very familiar to Americans, while others are Canadian, and uses their example to demonstrate how anyone can build up their own capacity for integrative thinking.

CHAPTERS:

- Chapter 1: Choices, Conflict, and the Creative Spark: The Problem-Solving Power of Integrative Thinking. Using the example of A.J. Lafley, innovative CEO of Proctor and Gamble, Martin describes the pressure many leaders feel to make tough trade-off decisions. Resisting such either-or propositions is done by those who employ integrative thinking which is defined as “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.”
- Chapter 2: No Stomach for Second Best: How Integrative Thinkers Move Beyond Trade-offs. The growth of Four Seasons Hotels is an example of how a leader avoided choosing between existing models for hotels – small and homelike with excellent personalized services vs. large with many amenities but lacking personal feel – to create a new model with excellent results. The steps are 1) determining which facts are relevant (or salient) to the decision, 2) considering how the facts related to each other, 3) deciding how to build a process for deciding, and 4) deciding. Being open to a broader set of salient facts and causal relations is fundamental to the process.
- Chapter 3: Reality, Resistance, and Resolution: How Integrative Thinkers Keep Their Options Open. Bob Young of Red Hat software found that by recognizing the difference between reality and mental models, he was able to develop a new model for distributing software that became highly profitable. By being clear that neither of the options being presented to him were “real” and by accepting some of the salient facts underpinning each, Young was able to accept the messiness of indecision until the new model he sought occurred to him.

- Chapter 4: Dancing Through Complexity: Shaping Resolutions by Resisting Simplification. Effective leaders understand that creativity springs from complexity... rather than from simplicity. They are therefore able to overcome the anxiety of having too much information before them and allow for a decision's entire context to be part of the thought process. Says Martin, "Complexity doesn't have to be overwhelming, if we can muster our initial panic reaction and look for patterns, connections, and causal relationships."
- Chapter 5: Mapping the Mind: How Thought Circulates. Over the course of a life and work experience, a person develops their "stance," a mental model of "how things are." Our stance shapes not only how we approach problems, but even what facts and considerations we will consider salient. Unchecked and unrecognized, this knowledge system can lead individuals into self-reinforcing narrow positions. This pattern can be consciously broken by those who study and practice the habit of integrative thinking.
- Chapter 6: The Construction Project: Imagining Reality. Victoria Hale created something new - a not-for-profit pharmaceutical company - after cultivating the six stances of an integrative thinker:
 - Existing models do not represent reality; they are our constructions.
 - Opposing models are to be leveraged, not feared.
 - Existing models are not perfect; better models exist that are not yet seen.
 - I am capable of finding a better model.
 - I can wade into and get through the necessary complexity.
 - I give myself the time to create a better model.
- Chapter 7: A Leap of the Mind. In this most scientific of the chapters, the author describes a process he calls "generative reasoning" which inquires into what might be rather than into what is or has been. A firm grasp of causal relationships and system dynamics is necessary for generative reasoning, for creating new options. To explore opposing models, integrative thinkers employ *assertive inquiry*, sincerely seeking to understand other people's views, including the facts they find salient, the causal relationships they see, and how they developed their stance.
- Chapter 8: A Wealth of Experience: Using the Past, Inventing the Future. Given years of experience in a specific field, individuals will develop mastery over the material, including causal relationships and system dynamics. When such mastery is substituted for inquiry into new ideas, or used to shut down original thinking of others, creativity is limited and options are narrowed, even as salient features of the operating system may be evolving on their own. Integrative thinkers embrace both mastery and originality.

TOOLS: The author employs a few graphics and charts to illustrate relationships between various ideas, but otherwise does not provide application tools.

KEY TAKEAWAYS: *"Thinkers who exploit opposing ideas to construct a new solution enjoy a built-in advantage over thinkers who can consider only one model at a time."* (p. 8)

"Integrative thinking produces possibilities, solutions, and new ideas. It creates a sense of limitless possibility. Conventional thinking hides potential solutions in places they can't be found and fosters the illusion that no creative solution is possible... Fundamentally, the conventional thinker prefers to accept the world as it is. The integrative thinker welcomes the challenge of shaping the world for the better!" (p. 48)

"Integrative thinkers recognize that unsatisfactory options aren't reality but only a model of reality built up from conscious and unconscious influences... they don't take the easy way out and pick the least-worst alternatives; they view the creation of a truly attractive option as both their goal and their personal responsibility." (p. 92)

"At its core, integrative thinking requires the integration of mastery and originality. Without mastery there won't be useful salience, causality, or architecture. Without originality, there will be no creative resolution. Without creative resolution, there will be no enhancement of mastery, and when mastery stagnates, so does originality. Mastery is an enabling condition for originality, which in turn, is a generative condition for mastery. The modes are interdependent." (p. 187)