Fractionation Technique

When we look at a problem as one solid block, it is hard to see anything new in it. Edward de Bono, the thinker who gave us the term lateral thinking, described a simple tool for this in his book Lateral Thinking, published in 1970. The tool is called fractionation, which means breaking something into fractions, or pieces. We split a problem, a product or a situation into parts, and then use those parts to build new ideas. It is a creative tool for teams who need fresh options instead of the same old answers.

1. What Fractionation Is

Fractionation starts with one simple action: we break the whole into its parts. The parts can be physical pieces, features, steps, people involved, or ideas connected to the situation. De Bono explained that the aim is not to find the true or correct parts. The aim is to create loose pieces that our mind can move around freely. Once the fixed block is broken, new arrangements become possible.

Example: a cup of coffee can be split into the cup, the coffee, the heat, the sugar, the moment of the break and the person we share it with.

At work: Dalia, a manager at a busy hotel, wants to improve check-in. Instead of seeing check-in as one long queue, she lists its parts: arrival, waiting, paperwork, payment, the room key and the welcome.

2. Split, Then Split Again

After the first split, we take each part and split it further. A simple way to do this is to split each item into two, and then split each half into two again. Every new level gives us smaller and more unusual pieces. There is no fixed number of parts and no perfect way to split. The only rule is to keep going until something interesting appears.

Example: a birthday party splits into the guests and the place; then the guests split into family and friends, and the place splits into indoors and outdoors.

At work: Dalia splits the paperwork into the form and the identity check. Then she splits the form into the questions guests answer and the moment they fill it in.

This document is a property of Asaseeyat Academy - © Copy Right Protected.

3. Recombine the Fragments

The real value comes when we put the pieces back together in new ways. We can combine two pieces, move one to a different place or time, remove one, or join it with a piece from another situation. Many combinations will be useless, and that is completely normal. We are looking for the surprising combination that opens a new direction. Good ideas often come from linking pieces that nobody linked before.

Example: for many years, suitcases and wheels existed separately, and joining these two pieces created the rolling suitcase that most travellers use today.

At work: Dalia moves the moment of filling in the form to before the guests arrive, and joins the room key with the guest's phone. Guests now fill in the form online and receive a digital key, so the queue becomes much shorter.

4. Fractionation Is Not Analysis

Fractionation looks like analysis, but its purpose is different. Analysis breaks a problem into its true parts to understand it and find the cause. Fractionation breaks it into any parts that help, even strange or imperfect ones, to create new ideas. Analysis asks which parts are correct, while fractionation asks which new arrangements are possible. Both are useful, and they work well together.

Example: a mechanic takes an engine apart to find the fault, while a designer breaks a car into ideas to imagine a new kind of car.

At work: Dalia's first analysis showed that the long queue came from slow paperwork. Fractionation then gave her new ways to change the whole check-in experience.

Conclusion

In summary, fractionation helps us escape the fixed way we see a problem. We break the whole into parts, split the parts again, and then recombine the pieces into new arrangements. The parts do not need to be correct; they only need to be useful for thinking. Unlike analysis, which looks for the true cause, fractionation looks for new possibilities. The next time a problem feels stuck, it can help to break it into pieces and play with them.

This document is a property of Asaseeyat Academy - © Copy Right Protected.