

A particularly dramatic example of the failure of vertical thinking occurred in Northern Ireland and was mentioned in the case study. In 1969 the British Army was sent to Northern Ireland to contain the sectarian violence and to protect the Catholic population. In August, Protestant mobs attacked Catholic areas, burning 150 houses. More soldiers were sent in; at first the Catholics welcomed the arrival of the British troops as protectors against Protestant violence. In September 1969 the army met with local residents and secured agreement to remove barricades. A constructive relationship continued into early 1970, although friction began to increase. In late June 1970 there were Protestant parades, and Protestant mobs again attacked a Catholic area. Local people were afraid they were going to be burned out of their homes. The army was too overstretched to provide protection and this time the IRA shot back at Protestant gunmen – and at the army.

The army commander decided a show of force was needed to crack down on the IRA snipers, and he imposed a two-day curfew on the Falls Road area where the main Catholic population lived. Movement of local people was severely restricted and house-to-house searches were carried out. Weapons were found, including 28 rifles, 24 shotguns and 20,750 rounds of ammunition. But the method of the search, with doors knocked down and substantial damage to homes, alienated the Catholic population (Dewar, 1985). In his book *The British Army in Northern Ireland*, Michael Dewar writes:

It can be argued that the failure to ban the 1970 Orange [Protestant] parades, and the massive arms searches and curfew in the Lower Falls areas which followed, was the last chance to avoid the catastrophe that has since engulfed Ulster. ... Until the spring of 1970, most Catholics regarded the troops as their protectors. The Lower Falls operation changed everything ... The events of 3–5 July changed a sullen Catholic Community into a downright hostile one.

Dewar (1985; pp. 39–47)

Hundreds of young Catholic men joined the IRA and the British Army was seen as the enemy.

What went wrong? How did a welcoming civilian population turn into a hostile one? The British force faced several problems:

- Neither soldiers nor commanders had any experience of, or training for, what is now called peacekeeping. Their experience was of colonial wars in Africa or Aden (now South Yemen), and they acted as a colonial occupying force.

- The soldiers had no training for fighting in urban areas.
- Police, who were nearly all Protestant, gave advice to the army which was prejudiced against the Catholics.
- British troops were from a Scottish regiment and were largely Protestant, and may also have been biased against the Catholics.
- Troops were being fired on and stoned by both sides.

Unfortunately, the commander of the British troops was not able to overcome these problems and do a new and detailed analysis or draw on broader thinking. So he misunderstood the situation and thus chose a highly damaging response. He based his strategy on previous experiences combined with a traditional view of his role. He saw his troops as an occupying force rather than a protecting force and concluded that large-scale arms searches were the only way to stop the snipers. He failed to recognise the importance of keeping the civilian population on the side of the troops, failed to look at ways to gain support from the people to curb the snipers, and failed to consider the impact of his decision on local people.

This is a classic problem repeated in many peacekeeping operations since Northern Ireland. Some people will welcome the peacekeepers and some will want the war to continue. What is the balance? What portion of the people supported the IRA snipers? One goal of the snipers may have been to provoke a heavy response precisely to turn the population against the British forces. This is exactly where an understanding of local conditions combined with lateral thinking are needed to redefine the question. It also brings out the importance of having a broad range of advisers and information and of making sure that something is done about preconceptions of the foot soldiers. Finally, it underlines one of the key elements of peacebuilding, which is to support and build local capacity; outside interveners can maintain the peace, but it is inside interveners who will build it.

Vertical thinking meant that snipers were always the question; lateral thinking would have redefined the question to finding out how to help the population to feel secure enough that they didn't feel the need to support the IRA. In going directly for the snipers, the commander lost track of the overriding goals of peacekeeping and peacebuilding. Vertical thinking also meant that he only saw the need to act quickly with a show of force; acting more slowly and instead using his show of force to defend the Catholics against the Protestants could have meant that the army, and not the IRA, was seen as the defenders of the Catholic community.

British military doctrine has changed significantly since 1970, reflecting the lessons of Northern Ireland and subsequent peace support operations. The guiding concept in peace support operations is now 'campaign authority', which is in large measure about 'perceived legitimacy'; local people and other key actors should give their consent to the presence and actions of the military force. The British military handbook on peace-support operations says that the conduct of a peace-support force

should be designed to enhance consent and promote the co-operation of the local people, in order to create more operational space and greater freedom of action. ... When force is used, it will be necessary to have a sound appreciation of the full range of effects that actions may trigger. The need to promote Campaign Authority may, at times, constrain the use of force and some combat techniques.

MoD (2004; pp. 5–3)

It also warns against rushing into ‘ill-considered and narrowly conceived’ actions, stressing that:

whenever operational tempo permits, decisions should be biased towards the long-term effects that must be achieved. This will be particularly important in considering the nature and scope of both deterrent and coercive use of force.

MoD (2004; pp. 4–18)

The British military learnt its lesson the hard way, and has adapted its doctrine to try to take those lessons into account. But it is a problem that occurs in all peace support operations, in which larger or smaller pockets of insecurity and resistance remain. The temptation is always there to go after armed insurgents militarily, as a show of strength, rather than to remember the long-term aims and try to isolate pockets of resistance politically.

Choices like this are always difficult; we saw in the Sierra Leone case study just how important the show of military force was. In Ireland, lives were lost by a decision and in Sierra Leone, lives were saved by a decision. In the rest of this chapter, we look at more ways to make decisions.

10.2.3 Perception, multiple realities, and our ‘logic bubble’

What is perception? Edward de Bono (1996) describes it as the way the mind organises all the information that it receives from the outside world. Perception pulls together all the different images, behaviours, attitudes and so on that we experience and uses them both consciously and unconsciously to process and understand this information. To illuminate the concept of ‘perception’ de Bono draws on the example of a person born with thick corneal opacities, who is unable to see the world. If they are then operated upon and sight is physically given, then they are still unable to see. For them the world is a blur of light, colour and random shapes. In order to see the world they have to learn to see and this means organising afresh the information in their brain. Perception, de Bono states, is not only about what we actually experience with our senses but it about how the brain deals with this information. Each of us will have our own unique processing system, and thus we each see the world around us in different ways. This leads to the notion of ‘multiple realities’.

We now return to the Northern Ireland case study, and look at multiple realities there.

ACTIVITY



Parades and perceptions in Northern Ireland

Parades have been an important feature of life in Northern Ireland for over 300 years. They serve to commemorate and celebrate key historical events and are often great social occasions. Unfortunately, they often lead to violence and outbreaks of hostility between different communities. So how are they perceived by different sections of society in Northern Ireland?

One significant event which is celebrated with parades is the Battle of the Boyne. This was the battle in 1690 in which the Protestant William of Orange defeated the Catholic forces of James II.

Spend a few minutes and consider how a parade in celebration of this event is perceived by:

- a Protestant standard bearer in the parade
- a Catholic householder who lives on part of the route of the parade
- a Protestant policeman on parade duty
- a university researcher studying the parades of Northern Ireland
- the Finance Director of the Royal Ulster Constabulary.



It takes only a few minutes to realise how widely different these perceptions will be.

- The Protestant standard bearer may well be looking forward to the parade with eager anticipation and pleasure. He will probably be feeling very proud at participating in such an important event in his community's social calendar. To him it is a wonderful occasion.
- The Catholic householder will have very different feelings. She may well perceive the event as a threat. She may be very uneasy and unhappy that such an event is coming down her street. She may consider the parade an insult and a threat to her and her children and a sign of Protestant insensitivity and arrogance.
- The Protestant policeman may have mixed feelings. The parade may go off smoothly or it may lead to violence and he may be called on to keep order. There may be physical danger if things get out of hand. Perhaps in the past he was hit by a brick aimed at a Catholic window. He may well have to protect Catholic property again. He is dreading the event.
- The university researcher sees this as a golden opportunity to study a piece of living history. Whatever happens will be of interest and value to her research. She is looking forward to the big day.
- The Finance Director of the Royal Ulster Constabulary is thinking about the state of the force's finances and the huge cost of policing these events. If only these events did not need such heavy policing and all the attendant costs that this required. If only a light police presence were required then all would be well and he could relax.

One way to look at multiple realities is through what de Bono calls 'logic bubbles'. He suggests you should assume that everyone is acting logically within their own 'bubble'.

So, instead of mentally accusing that person of being stupid or malicious, one acknowledges that person's logical behaviour and seeks to understand the perceptual 'bubble' within which it is so logical.

de Bono (1996; pp. 34–5)

Recognising and using the notion of the logic bubble can help you understand and work with people with differing perceptions. It will help you see where they are coming from. If you consider the example of the Northern Ireland parades, it is clear that everyone is thinking and acting logically within their own bubble.

Perception over time weaves our own personal view of the world, which may be fixed or liable to change. We have only a limited view of a situation and our perception may be further restricted by too narrow a frame of reference or a tendency to select information using emotion only. It is how we see the world in which we live and act – our personal reality. But that raises two points. First, de Bono observes that we can sensitise our brain to certain inputs; we can train it to notice more things. Thus we need to be aware of the shortcomings in our own perceptions. Second, understanding perception and logic bubbles can help us better understand the viewpoints of others and how they may differ from our own.

Sometimes a person's perceptions can provide a trap for them. In some circumstances they may even lead to the creation of a fearful and inaccurate view of the world. Further, the reality that is created may be an illusory one far removed from other realities. This is perfectly illustrated by the allegory of the prisoners in the cave, which Plato describes in *The Republic*.

10.2.4 Plato's cave

In a deep underground cave is a group of men who have been prisoners since they were children. The prisoners are chained and unable to move. Behind them is a fire which throws the shadows of people and objects onto the wall in front of them. The prisoners believe that the shadows are real and associate any sounds from the world outside with the shadows.

If one of the prisoners were to be unchained and taken outside he would at first be totally unable to accept that what he saw outside the cave was real. It would be beyond his experience. Eventually he would acclimatise himself to his new world and begin to see and understand this new reality. He would never want to return to the life in the cave and he would realise that the perceptions of the prisoners were distorted and flawed, and that they lived with a false reality.

But if he did return to the cave what would happen? If he did return, he would no longer be able to accept the 'old' reality. His difficulty in adapting to the darkness would be interpreted by the cave dwellers as a weakness.

They would believe that his time in the world outside the cave had ruined his sight. They would refuse any offers of release and would even fight to stay down in the cave, as they believed it to be infinitely preferable to the world outside.

The prisoners are unable to imagine any other reality than the one they know and the returning prisoner would, because of his new knowledge, no longer think like them. He would perceive the world differently.

10.2.5 Two caves

It has been suggested that the staff members of NGOs, aid agencies and peacekeeping forces could be likened to dwellers in two different caves. One cave is the national headquarters, the other cave is the field. These two caves are linked by a narrow passageway – emails and visits. Yet the inhabitants of each cave have their own strong perceptions of what the world is like and find it difficult to understand any alternative visions.

The people in the headquarters cave have a very different set of priorities to those in the other cave. Perhaps a government minister has just advised headquarters that aid priorities for this year are to focus on gender. Headquarters then passes this message on to the fieldworkers who rail against this directive because they see food aid to be the continuing top priority. The fieldworkers do not appreciate the political imperatives that drive the head office agenda. And the staff at head office cannot understand the truculence of the field staff who seem to have other concerns.

Although people may occasionally move along the narrow passageway to the other cave and be exposed to the alternative reality, when they return to the 'home' cave they soon return to the dominant way of thinking. There are strong social and political pressures for conformity in each cave – it would be foolhardy to stand out from the crowd.

People in the HQ cave refer to those who have been out on extended field trips as having 'gone native'. They deliberately use this pejorative term to describe anyone who has a vision drawn from the realities offered by the dwellers in the other cave.

So where does reality lie? What is the true picture? Cave visions of reality are trapped in geographical, political and social logic bubbles. Neither group sees the whole reality.

Only by journeying outside their caves can the cave dwellers achieve an enlightened and well-rounded vision of reality.

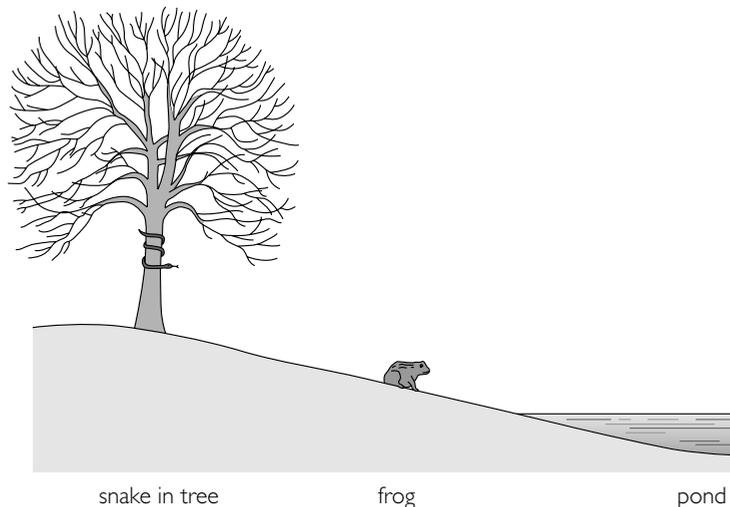
The cave stands for the world of appearances and the journey outside stands for the ascent to knowledge. People in everyday life are trapped by illusions, hence the way they understand reality is limited and flawed. By appreciating this, and by making a determined effort to see beyond the superficial, people have an ability to free themselves from imperfect ways of seeing. However, as the allegory suggests, many of us often resist or ridicule efforts at enlightenment,

preferring to remain in the dark rather than risk exposure to a new world and its threat to old ways.

Morgan (1986; p. 200)

One of the key points about perceptions and logic bubbles is that there are many ways of viewing the world around us and many interpretations of what we see and experience. They may be very different and even contradictory, but they may also all be valid. Logic bubbles are based on perceptions and experience and about how we frame questions. In the world of science and even within the same discipline there may be very different points of view – *all of them valid*.

Box 10.1 The story of the frog, the snake and the five biologists



This point is illustrated in the following extract from McMillan (2004), based on a story that Steven Rose (1998) tells in his book, *Lifelines*.

Five biologists are sitting by a pool enjoying a picnic when a frog that was sitting close by makes a sudden leap into the water. This prompts a discussion between the biologists on why the frog jumped. One of them, a physiologist, states that the creature jumped because the muscles in the frog's leg are responding to signals from the brain, which is itself responding to a message from the frog's retina when the snake was spotted ... But this explanation is challenged by another of the biologists, an ethnologist. The physiologist has explained how the frog jumped but not the reason why. The animal behaviourist explains that the creature jumped in order to avoid being eaten by the snake. It was a goal-directed action and can only be understood within its environmental and social contexts.

The third biologist is a developmentalist and finds the other two explanations inadequate. From a developmental point of view the only



reason why the frog can jump is because during its development from fertilised egg to adult frog its brain, nerves and muscles were wired up in such a way that such a sequence of activity was highly probable in the circumstances.

The fourth biologist, an evolutionist, however, is not satisfied by any of the explanations to date. The evolutionary explanation is that the frog jumped because 'during its evolutionary history it was adaptive for its ancestors to do so at the sight of a snake; those ancestors that failed to do so were eaten, and hence their progeny failed to be selected' (Rose, 1998; p. 12).

Finally, the fifth biologist, a molecular biologist, speaks up and claims that they have all missed the point. The reason why the frog jumped was due to the biochemical properties of its muscles.

So why did the frog jump? Whom do we believe? Which is the right answer? They are all valid and we have to consider all of the explanations and possibly others, too. In part, you need to choose your explanations to fit the intervention. But also, as the next scenario shows, you will need to accept multiple explanations.