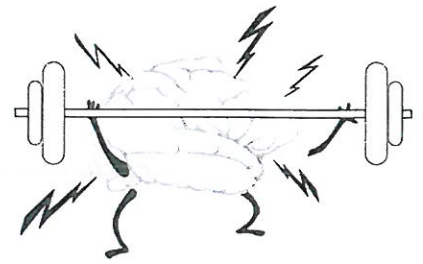


Create New Patterns of Thinking

Rewire Your Head

To navigate successfully into the future we need to think differently, because it is a place that none of us have been to. Each of us has a set of patterns in our head that help us to make sense of the world in which we live. These patterns are a combination of the things we have been taught, the experiences that we have had and the values that we believe in. All of these make up what could be termed a *mental model*. The more successful we have been the stronger is our current mental model.



If the rules for success are truly changing, then what we need to do is to **disrupt our current patterns and create new mental models**. One way to do this is by undertaking a series of exercises where we try to imagine what the future might be like by trying to 'stand in that future'. This process is called *foresight*. This is different from what we normally do which is called forecasting. Forecasting is the process of standing in today and projecting what we know into the future.

Every foresight exercise needs to start with some kind of focusing question such as the future of food or the future of health [or should it be wellness?]. Once we have this question with foresight we can mentally stand in the future by asking a question like; "If I was actually living in [say 2022] what would the world look like? How might people be living? What would customers want? What key trends have developed and what things would have discontinued?" Scenarios can be a useful device for painting a picture of this foresightful position. **Foresight is a powerful tool but sometimes it's a little scary as we start to see more clearly the impacts of the new rhythms.** In contrast when we just use forecasting we imprison the future in yesterday's patterns.

The technique of foresight has a number of immediate benefits:

- It allows us to see more easily the weak signs of the future that are already present.
- It enables us to engage in different kinds of conversations than those we would have simply through forecasting.
- It allows us to gain quite exciting perspectives on today's realities.

By asking 'what if' questions that project us into the future space, foresight allows us to see more clearly those things that we need to think differently about.

One of the most interesting **outcomes of foresight is the understanding we gain about how many different trends and paradigm shifts will shape our future.** We quickly realise that the future will not be a linear extension of today, but will be a product of many facets and ideas.

Rewiring requires us to find new techniques and tools like foresight to navigate in a very different world. Such techniques help create a virtuous circle of better questions, which allows us to see more clearly the future impacts which in turn helps us see the weak signals and the imperative to change what we are today. As we rewire our thinking we start to see change everywhere. Often it will be in the small things that the most surprising changes are made.

It is for the everyday things that you often need to rewire your head.

In the Industrial revolution we changed from seeing time as part of the natural rhythms to thinking of it as hours and minutes. In the digital age we now include real time. And other things are changing as well.

For example, Baby Boomers have a set of hard wired assumptions about most things including romance. In that first step of romance, the dating ritual, the paradigm seems to be shifting. A recent New York Times article [23 November 2003] reported that almost 40 million Americans visited at least one on line dating site in the month of August alone. That's 27% of all internet users. On line dating services are now the most lucrative form of legal paid on line content.

When you think about it this shift is obvious. When and how we might search for a mate has changed. As Gen X and probably Gen Y decide to marry later, if at all it is unlikely they will marry someone who was at school or university or, in a world of sexual harassment litigation, at work. New generations have been brought up to see the net and texting as natural and pervasive as water coming out of a tap. Its not surprising then that aided and abetted by technologies like cheap digital cameras they are turning to the net to find potential partners. After all if you can get jobs, apartments and travel on line why not dates?

Source: New York Times 23 November 2003

As part of the process of rewiring we need to think differently about many of the building blocks of our current society. Many everyday terms, such as transport, health, education and government, carry with them hidden but strong coded messages of yesterday's success. Using foresight we can see new possibilities by changing the conversation. For example:

- The future of **transport** might become *the future of mobility and logistics*
- The future of **health** might be *the future of wellness*
- The future of **education** might be *the future of learning*
- The future of **government** might be *the future of collective social action*

This material has been extracted from an essay Rewire Your Head by Mike McAllum and published by AIM in a book entitled Innovation and Imagination at Work (McGraw Hill 2004).