

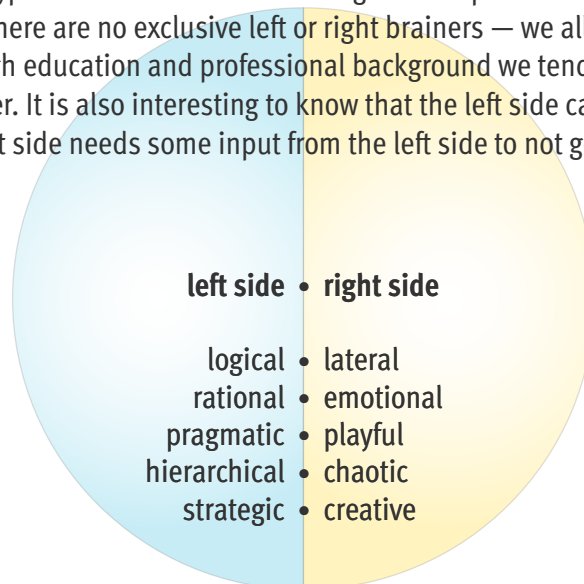


2. Design Management Symposium, KISD, Cologne, November 2003

An advanced approach to create sustainable value utilizing both sides of the brain in a unique mindset.

Why would two men, coming from the opposite sides of the brain's sphere join forces in the arena of innovation? — The insight that one needs strategy as well as creativity to fully leverage the potential in true innovation. Bernard Kümmerli, former partner at Bain & Company and Thomas Bley, former president of Zebra Design and general manager at Frogdesign have founded Spider, the 'organization' for strategic creativity, just for that simple reason.

Looking at the stereotypes on how the left and the right hemispheres of the brain are divided up, it has to be noted that there are no exclusive left or right brainers — we all live and tick on and off both sides, however through education and professional background we tend to have one side developed stronger than the other. It is also interesting to know that the left side can survive without the right side, but that the right side needs some input from the left side to not get lost.



While the strategic oriented mind is based on thought-processes, working analytical and focusing on goals, creativity relies on intuition as it's predominate source of input. The essential difference is that our conscious mind is about thinking, searching for solutions with reasoning, while our sub-consciousness comes up with ideas without reasoning. Interesting to know that even mathematicians, who one would consider more logical and calculating people, have stated in an inquiry - including Einstein - that their major breakthroughs are not achieved through certain working methods, but that thinking "plays only a subordinate part in the brief, decisive phase of the creative act itself."

It is probably no news that there are two fundamentally different sources of input, which are essential for any true innovation. These sources are present in everyone's mind — to various degrees. However, they are of different

»Imagination is more important
than knowledge« - Albert Einstein

»You can't see, if your imagination
is out of focus« - Mark Twain



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qualities. While our strategic mind is about systematic methods and achieving results, our imagination is about exploring, so to speak: in a discovery mood. One side is about finding an end to it, while the other side will avoid any end unless it is faced with a deadline. They are by their very nature not easily compatible. Nonetheless, we need them both. And, ideally we need them both at their full potential.

So, why is it so difficult to take advantage of both sides at the same time, facing, working on and trying to find the best possible solution for any challenge or problem there may be? It certainly has to do with prejudice and ignorance. People, who consider themselves creative, tend to regard strategists as unimaginative, boring or predictable. And, people, who stress their rationality, regard creative people as unorganized, unreliable and dreamers. There are enough CEO's in the industry who consider creativity an accident – 'it may happen or it may not' – as something they are reluctant to rely upon.

To bring those two worlds of intelligence and intuition, of strategy and creativity, together for the benefit of both, and the greater good of innovation, a few things have to happen.

Hierarchical structures are certainly no way to tackle any challenge in an innovative way, particularly since the strategic side tend to dominate the creative side. To take advantage of any possible idea, lead or input, a company needs a horizontal layout with areas of expertise and creativity rather than a vertical structure of pre-assigned responsibilities.

These pre-assigned responsibilities lead to compartmentalization. Meaning that a challenge is not understood as a whole, but chopped into smaller pieces and delegated to the 'experts' in form of a relay race.

Now, those experts are the least one can expect to come up with any innovative solution or product. To be clear here, there is nothing wrong with any specific and in depth knowledge in any subject area, however, if it isn't questioned and simply taken for granted, it will only produce already familiar results. Any team-member, and innovation in today's industry will always be a team-effort, will have to overcome the false security of her or his particular expertise and think 'outside the box' to be able to function in concert with other contributors.

And, to take advantage of any possible contribution and to not let anything fall under the table, a collaborative environment has to be established in an atmosphere of mutual respect and the recognition of value contributed from every possible source. The key issues are not integration or synchronization, but discourse and cooperation. One does not create a revolution or most innovative results through harmonization. However, to be able to participate in such an environment, one must be able to communicate in a diversity of languages.

»Design is hugely underrated as
'strategic tool'
. . . design mindfulness is strategy«
- Tom Peters



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There are three essential languages: the verbal, the numeric and the visual language. While everyone is expected to be articulate about what they think and why they are doing things in a certain way, number crunching is an ‘art’ by itself, and creative people will sketch out their imagination in order to reflect upon their intuition. Nobody, independently on which side of the brain they may have their roots, will necessarily be fluent in all of them, but a basic knowledge and most importantly an appreciation for the diversity of communication methods is the key. The French would say: “Vive la différence!”

To come to a conclusion of the above, there is no recipe or award winning method to achieve true innovation, but there are enough insights and clues, which teach us to be open-minded, willing to take risks, not to worry about to be misunderstood and capable of listening to others as well as of seeing what our intuition has to offer and re-viewing anything that comes to mind. With this kind of a mindset, one will be prepared to tackle any challenge and be able to create sustainable value through leveraging the utmost potential in a most effective innovation process.

In more pragmatic terms, process oriented development is needed, tools and systems have to be in place brokering in between languages, and overall, a corporate culture not leveling diversity, but able to leverage multidisciplinary expertise and abundant creativity.

We have to overcome the dilemma that the strategic mind is able to figure out what to do, but doesn’t know how to do it, while creative people have ample ideas on how to do things, but often enough have no clue, why.

In the long run, universities will have to change their approach to education. Instead of solely training people in certain subject areas, they will have to offer more universal and interdisciplinary opportunities, to not leave this essential experience to real live or the work place.

Innovation is a rudimentary human desire. We will never be satisfied with what we have or have achieved. By our very nature we will always search for new solutions. And, to not just ‘coming up’ with something new, but better and of sustainable value —at least for a certain period of time, we will have to utilize both sides of the brain in concert.

Thomas S. Bley & Bernard C. Kümmerli