

## Using strategic intuition to change the world

By Christine Leonardi

Many people believe that entrepreneurial success starts with an invention. That's why wannabe entrepreneurs spend countless hours daydreaming about 'the' moment when a commercially viable invention will pop into their heads.



The truth is, very few successful businesses are founded (and sustained) by inventions. Companies like Microsoft, Google, Apple and IBM owe their existence to the innovative practice of strategic intuition, not invention.

Bill Gates and Paul Allen did not invent anything to create Microsoft, the greatest monopoly in the history of free enterprise. Instead, they used strategic intuition, ignored conventional wisdom and put existing technologies together in a new way.

According to the author of *Strategic Intuition: The Creative Spark in Human Achievement* and Columbia Business School's associate professor of management Dr William Duggan, good ideas come to you as flashes of insight, often when you least expect them; whilst taking a shower, stepping onto a train, stuck in traffic, falling asleep, swimming or brushing your teeth.

"It suddenly hits you. Everything comes together in your mind. You connect the dots. It can be one big "Aha!" moment or a series of smaller ones that together show you the way ahead. The fog clears. What to do seems so obvious, when a moment before you had no idea," he says.

If you have never had this kind of flash of insight, you're in good company, says Duggan. It is the key element in the greatest achievements in history.

"It is how innovators get their innovations, how artists get their creative ideas, how visionaries get their vision, how scientists make their discoveries and how good ideas of every kind arise in the human mind. It is how Bill Gates founded Microsoft, how Picasso found his style, how the Google guys conquered the Internet, and how Napoleon conquered Europe," he explains.

Gates' or Napoleon's ideas for action were not the inevitable results of historical forces, innate character or talent. "The flash of insight fits your time and who you are - that's part of why it's a good idea, not a bad one," says Duggan. "But, no one can predict what that flash of insight will be. The individual human mind always stands at the centre of how great achievements happen."

In sharing his views on 'creativity' with *Wired Magazine*, the co-founder of Apple Steve Jobs adds this: "Creativity is just connecting things. When you ask creative people how they did something, they feel a little guilty, because they didn't really do it; they just saw something. It seemed obvious to them after a while. That's because they were able to connect experiences they've had to synthesise new things."

Duggan says creative ideas in a professional field - even the arts - arise the same way they do in science. This contrasts sharply with brainstorming, where you rely on pure imagination.

The scientific method depends not on imagination, but on discovery through strategic intuition. "You do not imagine the unknown. You discover it and make it known. And it turns out to be different from what you imagined," he says.

### **The trick is to plod, plot and play, at the same time**

Everyone knows you need creative, entrepreneurial, innovative or strategic thinking to compete in the modern world. These kinds of thinking, which Duggan calls "plod, plot, and play," amount to the same thing: figuring out what to do in new situations.

Plod means going beyond your usual routines to analyse a much wider range and depth of information. Thanks to advanced technology there is essentially no limit to the amount of data you can and should plod through.

Plot means spending a lot of time defining your mission, goals, objectives and sub-objectives.

Play means giving up your usual ways of thinking to, for example, build a race-car out of duct tape, toss Frisbees around in the office, or throw random words onto a Velcro-board.

"The trick is to plod and plot and play at the same time. This is what a flash of insight does. This is how the brain makes something new out of real information and projects it as a strategy. You don't get there through plodding or plotting or playing, but by understanding how strategic intuition works and how to do it better," says Duggan.

### **Using your left or right brain? Try using your whole brain**

1981's Nobel Prize winner Roger Sperry said the left brain is the centre of logic and analytical thought, while the right brain is that of intuitive or creative thought. The only thing that brought the two sides together was through teamwork where you're rational and I'm creative, and together we can be both.

Unfortunately, the myth of exclusively right brained or left brained people still pervades. That's why technical people are often considered left brained and artists right brained.

However, Eric Kandel, who won a Nobel Prize in 2000, overturned Sperry's model in favour of a 'whole brain' model that combines analysis and intuition in all modes of thought. Neuroscientists call it intelligent memory, where flashes of insight large and small take past elements from memory anywhere in the brain and combine them in new ways.

"Strategic intuition combines both abilities in the same mind through flashes of insight large and small. Understanding this can to some degree change how you plan and organise actions of every kind," says Duggan.

**“A flash of insight, as experienced in the practice of strategic intuition combines both sides of the brain. A creative flash yields a rational insight.”**

“Many entrepreneurs exhibit highly developed talents in both the rational mind and the creative arts. That magical, yet natural, combination of abilities has and will continue to be the source for the advancement of mankind,” says Duggan.

**Strategic intuition is firmly rooted in the field of strategy**

According to Duggan, the European version of strategy spread from the military to business in the late nineteenth century, and in the twentieth century to governments, non-profit agencies and professions at large. “Wal-Mart has a strategy, your state department of health has a strategy, the Girl Scouts have a strategy, and so do doctors and lawyers and every other modern profession.”

But, as strategic ideas spread, flashes of insight were lost in translation. “The leading ideas in strategy today leave them out completely,” says Duggan.

For example, in the 1980s Michael Porter’s competitive strategy became the reigning paradigm in business. “It tells you how to analyse your own strategy in light of your industry and your competitors. But, it does not tell you how to come up with a strategic idea: that’s a creative step Porter leaves out,” he adds.

“Strategic intuition, in contrast, puts the strategic idea itself at the centre of strategy, making it the first major breakthrough in the field of strategy in over twenty years.”

**The three kinds of intuition**

According to Duggan, intuition exists in three forms:

<b>Ordinary Intuition</b>	<b>Expert Intuition</b>	<b>Strategic Intuition</b>
<p>The most widely known type of intuition, ordinary intuition, is just a feeling; a gut instinct.</p> <p>It is a form of emotion or feeling that is not rooted in anything tangible.</p> <p>We all have gut feelings, and in some cases they seem accurate. However, businesses are not built on gut feelings.</p>	<p>Expert intuition is a trained response to a specific stimulus.</p> <p>It is based on snap judgements; when you instantly recognise something familiar.</p> <p>Snap judgements combine past elements in the expert’s mind without any conscious thought. They just happen, from practice.</p> <p>Expert intuition is always fast, and it only works in familiar situations.</p> <p>Expert intuition works for familiar situations – for example when you get better and faster at your job.</p>	<p>Strategic intuition, which is very different from ordinary intuition, vague hunches and gut instinct, is about clear thinking, not feeling.</p> <p>Strategic intuition is a clear thought that comes together in what is best described as a flash of insight.</p> <p>Strategic intuition is different from snap judgement or technically expert intuition; a form of rapid thinking where you jump to a conclusion when you recognise something familiar.</p> <p>Strategic intuition is not fast, like expert intuition, but slow. For example, the flash of insight someone had last night might solve a problem that’s been on</p>

		<p>their mind for a month.</p> <p>It also doesn't happen in familiar situations, but works for the unfamiliar, where every strategic situation is different to some degree – that's when you need it the most.</p> <p>Strategic intuition gives you an idea for action – a strategy.</p> <p>A flash of insight cuts through the fog of your mind with a clear, shining thought. You might feel elated right after, but the thought itself is sharp in your mind. That's why it excites you: at last you see clearly what to do.</p> <p>By living a lifestyle characterised by acute awareness of one's surroundings and acquiring a broad knowledge of existing solutions, the probability for having these 'eureka' moments is greatly improved.</p>
--	--	---

**Expert intuition is the enemy of strategic intuition**

For example, as you get better at your job, you recognise patterns that let you solve similar problems faster and faster. In new situations your brain takes much longer to make enough new connections to find a good answer.

A flash of insight happens in only a moment, but it may take weeks for that moment to come. You can't rush it. However, your expert intuition might see something familiar and make a snap judgement too soon. The discipline of strategic intuition requires you to recognise when a situation is new and turn off your expert intuition. "You must disconnect the old dots, to let new ones connect on their own," says Duggan

"The flash of insight tells you what you can and cannot achieve."

**Can strategic intuition be taught?**

Commenting on whether strategic intuition can be taught, Duggan says, "Like all other complex human actions, people are born without it and, over time, learn it."

Strategic intuition's tools of the trade are:

- Recognising trends
- Presence of mind
- Freeing oneself from attachment to a predetermined conclusion

"These days, the hardest part to learn is presence of mind," says Duggan. "When you need a creative idea for a strategy, methods of 'Plod' or 'Plot' or 'Play' immediately spring to mind. Presence of mind means clearing your mind of these false paths and letting your strategic intuition go to work."

While parents and educators teach us from a young age that we can achieve anything we want if you believe in yourselves, set clear goals, and work hard, Duggan offers a pragmatic and strategically intuitive alternative: that we can achieve many things, if we prepare for opportunity, recognise it, and act on it.