

The scaffolding and the bricks – the search for the best ideas

Ways to exploit this uniquely stressed time to re-model the ways we do our thinking

Roger Urwin – May 2020



The scaffolding and the bricks

Remodelling the way we do our thinking and coming up with the best ideas

- Using the analogy of scaffolding and bricks to help build a stronger, clearer and professional mind fit to face a complex world in crisis
- The scaffolding
 - The scaffolding is the *framing* of the issues you are dealing with
 - Think of the fundamental importance of how you frame things
 - Think values and beliefs that come from your lifetime experiences
 - Think unlocking brain power to get your mind straight
- The bricks
 - The bricks are the *substance* of the issues
 - Think of the fundamental criticality of content
 - Think of ways to add content through seeing ahead and getting the best ideas
 - Think of the power of good curation. Select sources - using context and judgement - to acquire and assimilate perspectives that are trust-worthy and valuable



This is continuing our [Coronavirus coverage](#) where the human side of the issues has been prominent



1. Looking after yourself – the resilient and meditative mind

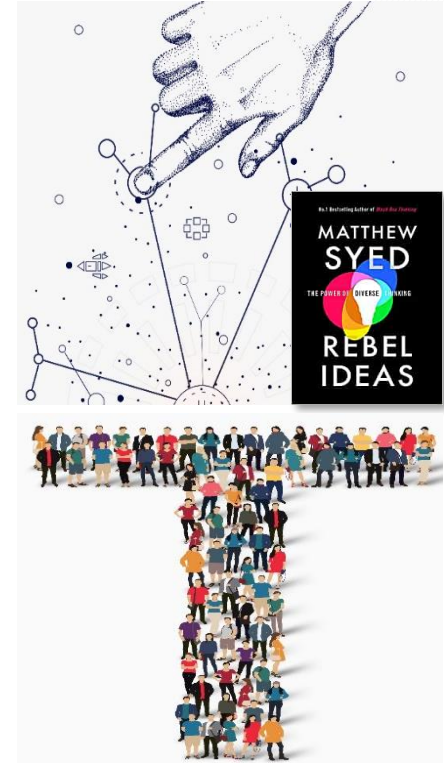
Meditation thesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Meditation is probably the most under-estimated tactic of building resilience and combating stress▪ Meditation is technically a state and a practice with the power to align thinking▪ Mindfulness is one of the forms of meditation (e.g. CNN 30 Seconds of Calm), there are several others▪ The benefits associated with meditation are stress control, clearer thinking, memory improvement, slowing down aging, brain rewiring – more System 2 less System 1
So what?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ 1 in 6 investment people practice meditation (e.g. Ray Dalio)▪ Meditation helps tackle investment biases by reducing the instant reaction.▪ Meditation helps judgement by slowing down thinking to allow more factors in your equation▪ How about now? The Covid-19 disrupted market is an opportunity for cool heads
The story link	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Many personal examples - my meditation state is on the treadmill where my mind hits a higher gear▪ The mind has so many possible skills – examples like anthropology, brain science, complexity science, decision theory and evolutionary biology – the skill is knowing how to combine them using T-shapedness



2. Being T-shaped – the collective and combinatorial mind



Systems thesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Systems theory tells us that if we change one thing in the system we change everything – think butterfly effect – <i>everything connects</i> and <i>behaviours matter</i> – Covid-19 is a perfect example of this▪ In Rebel Ideas we see how systems innovate through creativity and combinations; how combinations come from networks and diversity; and how diversity is mostly about T-shapedness
So what?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ T-shaped people ‘connect dots’ well. They are adept at reconciling deep-level knowledge and understanding in one field, discipline and in one organisation, with a wide perspective across many fields, disciplines and organisations▪ Becoming T-shaped is part talent and part training and development▪ T-shaped teams have broad and deep collective intelligence and harness the power of a one-team culture and the benefits of cognitive diversity
The story link	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The best example of T-shapedness is the evolution of Silicon Valley▪ This worked because of a passion for combination – within and across organisations; within highly connected people; in well-connected organisations set up to collect and combine intelligence



3. Seeing around corners – the prepared and prescient mind



The disruption thesis

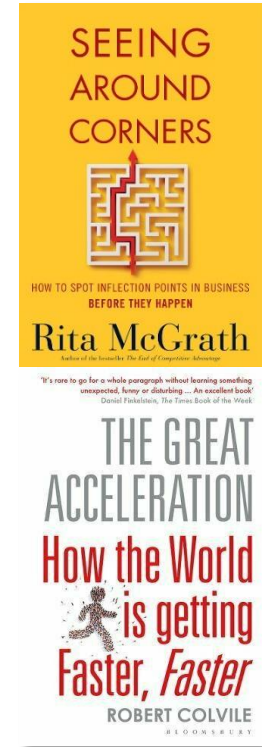
- 'Disruption' is the shock to the system where nothing is the same
- We should understand the disruption of Covid-19 as a 'ten-times' type of disruption that needs to be acted on by measured response not by knee-jerk reaction, a temptation when everything is breakneck
- System impacts create massive disruption leaving organisations and individuals with small control and large amounts of rough justice
- Organisations and individuals are either the disruptors or the disrupted – influenced by creativity and connections
- Makes 'pivoting' important – finding new strategic direction

So what?

- Build an organisational and personal rubric – rules for doing things:
- *People* first, everyone included, respect and empathy, listen
 - Compelling *purpose*, vision, strategy
 - Clear *plan* and relentless communication and resilience to its adherence
 - *Performance* goals that all add up, facts and data used

The story link

- Disruption is the new normal / way of life. Disruption narrative in Thinking Ahead and what we have been doing in the Covid-19 area.
<https://www.thinkingaheadinstitute.org/en>



4. Getting the big picture – the informed and balanced mind



The perspective thesis

- For deeper perspectives go to the edges of your expertise
- It's tempting first to look close up (near-term micro) but you only get it by looking out further (far-term macro)
- Requires T-shapedness, making connections and new moves
- Data provides some help but data in our space is always soft
- *And torture the data and it will confess to anything*
- Life is about choices. The challenge is to make well-balanced trade-offs where most choices have a plus and a minus attached



So what?

- There are many moving parts - people are over-confident that they can see things via invoking only 2 or 3 factors; it isn't that simple. Be fully informed.
- Dealing with complexity starts with simplification. Other examples include the design of practical dashboards that take the complex into simpler forms
- Also there is designing in convexity whenever we can get – actions that have limited downside, decent upside – the anti-fragility of Nicholas Taleb. Our system is vulnerable and calls out a new challenge for sustainability to create a corporate and financial system that is resilient and *just*
- And there are the protections afforded by strong culture and governance in our institutions

The story link

- The 'After Hours' podcast puts you among wise 'friends' who combine exceptionally well
- In a world of 'too much', try to find a world of the 'right amount' through people you trust whose frame of reference (scaffolding) is clear and whose substance (bricks) is world-class

Summary: *The context, content and the curation*

- 1 Think of context and frameworks first derived from increasing the quality and focus of your thinking
- 2 Add the content and landscape by applying your T-shapedness and your team's T-shapedness
- 3 Mix in world class inputs by curating authors that are authentic and insightful

Scaffolding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The resilient and meditative mind▪ Meditation - Looking after yourself▪ Jason Voss and Take 15 Meditation Guide	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The collective and combinatorial mind▪ Systems - Being and doing T-shapedness▪ Matthew Syed and Rebel Ideas
Bricks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The informed and balanced mind▪ Perspective - Getting the big picture▪ Youngme Moon and After Hours▪ The T-shaped person▪ Geoff Mulgan and Big Mind▪ Nick Lovegrove and The Mosaic Principle	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The prepared and prescient mind▪ Disruption - Seeing around corners▪ Rita McGrath and Spotting Inflection Points▪ '80% of success is showing up' (until now)▪ Woody Allen 1989▪ Quote Investigator

'T-shaped' questionnaire*

	Yes	50:50	No
I prefer to know a little about a lot of things rather than a lot about a few			
In my education I liked to study seemingly unrelated subjects and disciplines			
I get energy from things that are new and unfamiliar to me			
I learn quickly when I am dealing with an unfamiliar topic			
I like to read widely on a range of topics			
I think of myself as a natural innovator – both professionally and personally			
I want to work in different walks of life professionally			
I do my best work when I am outside my comfort zone			
I naturally fit into new environments, even when they are unfamiliar			
I like visiting new countries and understanding new cultures			
I like to make significant changes in my life from time to time			
I pursue a lot of personal interests outside of work			

* Adapted from *The Mosaic Principle* by Nick Lovegrove | A rough guide: T-shaped people score at or above 8/12

Some validating data

1

Top Themes in Individuals' Careers	
1	Individuals roles transformed multiple times; adaptability critical
2	Individuals differentiate themselves by tech savvy
3	Thriving is significantly about character and professionalism
4	Diversity contributions, particularly cognitive diversity, valued in teams
Source: CFA Experts survey	

2

Expert view on skills for investment professionals in the next 5-10 years	
T-Shaped skills	46%
Leadership skills	24%
Soft skills	16%
Technical skills	14%
Source: CFA Experts survey	

3

Organisation factors	Important to members
Personal growth	83%
Inclusive culture	61%
Remote working	44%
Performance reviews	36%
Flexibility in work	35%
Wellness	25%
Diversity focus	20%
HR metrics	19%
Agile spaces	12%
Source: CFA Member survey	

4

Edelman Trust Study 2019	Agree
A company can take specific actions that both increase profits and improve the economic and social conditions in the communities where it operates	72%
I must have this type of employer	
Shared Action. My employer has a greater purpose, and my job has a meaningful societal impact	67%
Personal Empowerment. I know what is going on, I am part of the planning process, and I have a voice; the culture is inclusive	74%
Job Opportunity. My employer offers wage growth, training, career growth, work which I find interesting & fulfilling	80%
Source: Edelman Trust Study employee data	

Limitations of reliance and contact details

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