



Business Beyond the Box

Applying Your Mind for Breakthrough Results

by John O'Keeffe
Nicholas Brealey © 1999
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Take-Aways

- An incrementalist mindset creates self-imposed limitations on performance.
- Overcome these limitations by seeking breakthrough performance instead of incremental improvement.
- Set big goals that you will achieve through step-changes that bypass gradual change.
- Gather the know-how that you need to achieve these step-changes.
- Use creative thinking to apply this know-how and generate solutions.
- Don't try creative thinking without first acquiring know-how, which grounds you in reality.
- Act in the action zone: Don't spend too much time analyzing, but don't jump the gun.
- Merge the pull of your desired vision with the push to escape current dissatisfactions.
- Your head will provide the plan; your heart will provide the passion that brings action.
- Use beyond-the-box thinking to spark imagination and generate energy.

Rating (10 is best)

Overall	Applicability	Innovation	Style
6	6	5	7

Relevance

What You Will Learn

In this Abstract you will learn: 1) How a devotion to incremental improvement creates self-imposed barriers that limit performance; 2) How to overcome these obstacles by forsaking gradual improvement for breakthrough performance, and 3) Techniques for creative thinking and problem-solving.

Recommendation

John O’Keeffe’s book is worth a read for the simple but powerful message that it conveys: Too many people in business today are devoted to incremental improvement when they should be striving for big goals and breakthrough performance. Also of note are the techniques that he describes for cultivating creative thinking within a business. While much of the remainder will seem like a re-hash of basic problem-solving and common-sense creative thinking methodology, *getAbstract.com* nevertheless recommends this book for its motivational message: Think big.

Abstract

Beyond Incrementalism

In today’s fast-paced and competitive world, incrementalism — making gradual and minor improvements to your performance — is not enough. An incremental approach creates self-imposed limits and holds you back. These limits could well bring about your failure, so it’s time to get past incrementalism and move beyond the box. Improvements to the status quo are no longer enough; you need to change your habits and thinking strategies to produce breakthrough results.

In the past 25 years at Procter & Gamble, this type of beyond-the-box mindset has turned around losing businesses, sparked huge jumps in market share and improved the performance of many business lines. In order to mirror this success, spend 50% of your time applying these new breakthrough methods and the remainder of your time on your usual, day-to-day activities.

Eight Thinking Strategies

In order to achieve the breakthrough mentality, you must develop eight thinking strategies in yourself and your employees. Start with yourself and spread the strategies in the same way you’d spread a product in pyramid sales — let your teammates and subordinates in on the new thinking, encourage them to pass it along to their own peers and subordinates, and soon the strategies will permeate through your entire organization. The eight thinking strategies are:

1. Stretch targets by picturing step-change instead of incremental change.
2. Build know-how instead of drowning in information.
3. Use creative thinking rather than depending on logic alone.
4. Act in the action zone, but don’t act without thinking.
5. Combine both right- and left-brained thinking; stop being a half-brained organization.
6. Choose powerful mindsets rather than limited mindsets.
7. Use hats, maps and thinking pads instead of meetings and memos.
8. Recharge yourself instead of working harder and longer hours.

“Staying comfortably in the box of incrementalism will lead to failure.”

“Being able to get fresh mindsets in people who already have expertise and knowledge is likely to yield the potential for breakthrough results.”

“It is as important to get hugely dissatisfied with the status quo and the box of incrementalism as it is to get motivated by the attraction of breakthrough results.”

“Our memory tells how the world was, our senses tell us how the world is, our imagination tells us how the world might be.”

“The key trick is to generate before-the-fact changes in habits and thinking strategies that will lead to breakthrough results.”

Strategy One: Picturing a Step-Change

In order to achieve breakthrough results, it is essential to start by picturing a step-change, breakthrough objective. This step-change vision will lead to different action steps than you would arrive at through incremental thinking. For instance, rather than trying to increase your product share by a few points, think of what you need to do to double that share. In other words, set stretch targets that will force you to work more efficiently and find out of the box approaches to meet them.

Truly commit yourself to working toward step changes and feel dissatisfied if you are only working towards incrementalism. Think of incremental changes as trivial and not worthy of your time. Become addicted to step-change. You will come to feel that only such goals are worth the effort. Use these tips to trigger step-change thinking:

- Reach for the stars.
- Draw word pictures to illustrate the step-change results you want, in order to capture the interests of your right brain, as well as your left.
- Create a precise vision of the step-change goal and strategies for achieving it; don't dream vaguely.
- Accept risk, since you must take chances to succeed. You want a, “Nothing ventured, nothing gained,” mindset, rather than, “Better safe than sorry.”
- Share the concept of a “miss” rather than a “mistake,” to encourage people to try and fail and try again.

Strategy Two: Building Know-how

Once you've envisioned a step-change, seek the knowledge to help you achieve it. Build know-how, which is not just knowledge, but applicable knowledge that you can use to achieve the desired step-change goal. You must attain this know-how before you attempt creative thinking, in order to ground your creativity in reality. Know-how will keep your thinking and action practical, leading to breakthrough results.

Combine a passion for building knowledge with an anger at information pollution. Today's knowledge explosion has resulted in an outpouring of information. But collecting and passing on useless information will only slow you down. You want real knowledge, which is created in individual minds, drawing on individual experience and separating the significant from the irrelevant. In short, know-how is targeted information that can help achieve your goal.

Know-how includes a true understanding of how things really work in your organization, as opposed to how they are meant to work. It also encompasses both tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge. Tacit knowledge is contained in an individual's expertise and experiences, while explicit knowledge is the overt expression of knowledge — a formal way of explaining how things work, as found in instructional manuals. Encourage peers to share tacit information.

Strategy Three: Using Creative Thinking

Creative thinking supplements logic with imagination. To use your imagination, you break through the barriers that limit you to left-brain thinking in order to access the right half. Imagination enables you to conceive of new ways with which to use knowledge to achieve a step-change.

Imagination helps you ask new questions. While your logical mind can spot wrong answers and provide good answers to questions, your imagination can help you spot the wrong

“The concept of know-how goes beyond knowledge. It is applicable knowledge, knowledge that will help you achieve the step-change goal you have set.”

“The secret is to focus on these three elements together: picturing step-change goals; searching for and building the specific knowledge that will help; and using creative thinking to generate action steps to hit those goals.”

“The type of goal you put in your mind determines the sort of action steps you develop.”

questions and come up with the good questions. Often when people think of creative thinking, they think of brainstorming. But brainstorming is only one technique, and it is important not to start brainstorming without first grounding yourself in knowledge.

To think creatively, break through the three barriers that stop people from thinking creatively. One is the notion that out-of-the-box thinking is associated with wild and unhelpful ideas. The second is that such thinking will get in the way of action. The third is that the balance of risk and reward in your organization may discourage out-of-the-box thinking. If you ground creative thinking in reality, you will come up with practical, usable ideas that will help to guide action. Maximize the results of out-of-the-box thinking by using it proactively to guide your future, and not just reactively to solve problems. Encourage the tacit knowledge holders in your organization to engage in creative thinking and find ways to build on partial ideas.

Strategy Four: Acting in the Action Zone

Now that you have your goal, some acquired knowledge and a dose of creative thinking, it's time to act. To do so effectively, act in the action zone, which means finding that optimum window between spending too much time thinking up alternatives and not taking enough time to come up with solutions. In other words, the action zone lies at the center point between two extremes. If you miss the action point to one side or the other, you will run into four types of problems:

1. Burning bridges ahead of you by choosing options too quickly.
2. Becoming paralyzed by analysis or paranalysis, by taking too much time to choose between options.
3. Panicking prematurely, by not devoting enough time to generating options.
4. R.I.P, by failing to create enough good options and failing to act at all.

Strategy Five: Becoming Whole Brained

Research has found that the mental abilities of imagination, or divergent thing, and logic, or convergent thinking, are located in separate sections of the brain, in the right half, and left half, respectively. Too many people in business rely primarily on the convergent. As a result, too many companies are strictly left-brained organizations. Success comes from being whole-brained. Engage your company's right brain by using pictures, metaphors and analogies, appealing to the emotions and using stories as well as data.

Strategies Six Through Eight

The last three steps can be briefly stated, since they are part of creative, intuitive, whole-brained thinking. They are:

6. Choosing Powerful Mindsets: Get rid of a limiting mindset and embrace innovation and change. Don't worry, your brain will find supporting data to back up your new mindset. If you commit to a specific goal, your brain will seek out and spot anything that helps. Create a “Can do” approach.
7. Using Hats, Maps and Thinking Pads: Cut back on meetings. Cut back on the number of people attending your meetings. Focus the meetings that you keep. Cut out junk memos. Replace meaningless meetings and memos with new tools like joint thinking sessions that use six-hat thinking. In these sessions, participants use different hats to represent six types of thinking: white for seeking facts, figures and information; red for giving comments based in the emotions and intuition; black to share cautions and

“There’s nothing shameful in aiming high and missing. Going for the gold and getting bronze is not failure — it’s a different degree of success.”

“Knowledge is created in individual minds, drawing on individual experience, separating the significant from the irrelevant.”

judgments; yellow to identify advantages and benefits; green to suggest alternatives and new ideas, and blue to control the process of who puts on which hat.

8. Getting on Fire: Raise and apply your energy level. Find ways to keep yourself charged up and recharge yourself, taking breaks, gaining fulfillment outside work and finding a balance in all areas of your life. See success as an energy source and start the day with some positive action to create that fire. Stay ablaze during the workday by doing only the most important things and managing your moods to keep positive, even in the face of something negative.

Starting the Breakthrough Process

The breakthrough process starts with a new mindset, which must be melded with expertise and knowledge. Consider a high jumper: If he sets the bar a little higher than he just jumped, he can try to make incremental changes to his performance in order to get that extra height. But if he doubles the height of the bar, all the tweaking in the world won’t help him to get over it using his old form. If he really wants to clear the bar, he’ll have to come up with completely new strategies — like a jetpack.

Combine this type of revolutionary thinking with two operating principles that provide implementation power:

1. Use push as well as pull. Push gives you the vision to move towards something. It is like the carrot, the attraction of pleasure. Pull provides dissatisfaction with the status quo. It is something to avoid, like a stick that produces pain.
2. Use the heart as well as the head. Utilizing both with provide the most energy for forward movement. While your head offers logic, analysis and facts, your heart provides passion, emotion and imagination.

About The Author

John O’Keeffe is a Group Vice President for the Procter & Gamble Company, and has had a fast-track career through marketing and general management, with worldwide experience. He has used the thinking techniques described in this book to get breakthrough results in a wide range of business.

Buzz-Words

Action zone / Breakthrough results / Incrementalism / Step-change / Whole-brained