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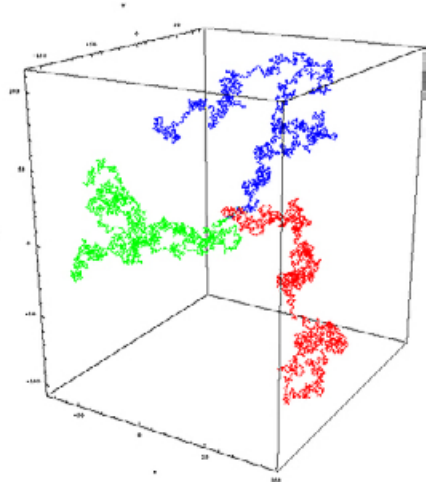
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## A RANDOM WALK “Yes-AND”, not “Either-Or”

by Jay L. Brand, PhD



In her intriguing book, “The Capitalist Philosophers – Geniuses of American Business: Their Lives, Times & Ideas”, Andrea Gabor outlines a fascinating behind-the-scenes portrait of the uneasy truce between the “Human Side of Enterprise” (Douglas McGregor) and the myopic focus on P&L (profit & loss statement) so prized by investors.

This struggle between the quality



Jay L. Brand, PhD

of human experience and financial growth as competing definitions for success (in business as well as in life) has much in common with other conceptual dichotomies, all of which oversimplify the world, yet also strangely enlighten at the same time: Daniel Pink’s “Right Brain” as opposed to “Left Brain” thinking; Margaret Wheatley’s “New Science” compared to some presumed “Old Science”; Peter Senge’s “Fifth Discipline” (or the “Learning Organization”) updating four well-accepted disciplines characterizing more typical (non-learning?) organizations; Peter Drucker’s “Knowledge Worker” defining a unique distinction within the office work force; Jim Collins’ “Built to Last” implying that some companies are not; Stephen Covey’s “Seven Habits” that suggest there must be some highly ineffective people with other habits than these; Marshall Goldsmith’s “What Got You Here Won’t Get You There,” a title that divides business acumen and competence from the interpersonal skills mandatory for leaving a lasting legacy; and Malcolm Gladwell’s “Blink” arguing that although expertise rests on a great deal of experience over time, it can be quick and gut-oriented.

Lest you surmise that I’m parodying any of these thinkers or their publications, I actually highly recommend them all and have learned much from their ideas. I merely wish to highlight the usefulness of dichotomies, if only as tools to define a good argument. In the end, none of these luminaries presents their case in “either-or” terms; their contentions involve more “yes-and.” They’re not so much saying, “Don’t do that; do this instead” as “In addition to that, also do this.”

Returning to Andrea Gabor’s delightful journey with American business as it bounces back and forth between financial imperatives and human aspirations, she similarly concludes that to be sustainably successful, businesses must appeal both to people (including customers and employees) and to investors. They must understand both psychology and accounting, both motivation and spreadsheets.

By now, you must be wondering what this wandering through the executive self-help aisle in Barnes & Noble has to do with good design. Simply this: most of the skills you mastered while in school and employed in your first several firms as a practicing designer are and will remain important.

But what will truly differentiate you as a value-add to your customers involves the quality of human experience provided by the places you create. Yes, you’ll have to show the “bean counters” how you’ve managed to squeeze a few more people into slightly less space. You’ll have to produce some sealed drawings for the architect and/or contractor, you may have to coordinate with subcontractors or negotiate a lease or two, and you’ll need a bit of “Wow!” in your design presentation.

But all that is mere marketing and financial wizardry, skills that any middle manager needs in order to stay abreast of the competition and remain relevant in his or her company. To understand, consistently, how to delight the people who experience your designs – such insight cannot fail to distinguish you and your craft – if you can demonstrate such an ability by also measuring human-centered outcomes in organizationally relevant ways, so much the better.

Think of all the traditional designer-abilities that come second nature to you as the “world-as-is” side in each of those business dichotomies from well-known authors. Then think of their suggestion(s) for improving the future (the higher-priority ‘side’ of their dichotomy) as your ability to inspire delightful human experience through creative design. No one else in the boardroom can duplicate that feat.

Whether you’re a fan or not, the late Steve Jobs’ obsession with BOTH science/engineering AND the arts & humanities strikes a great balance in this regard, replacing a useless, “either-or” contrast with a “yes-and” that inspires. Gadgets must work, they must be reliable & dependable. But they must also

delight their users and be easy to use. We want to enjoy touching, holding, seeing, and being seen with our gadgets. Do your clients, their employees and their customers love being in the places you create for them?

Ironically, Apple’s new “Jetson doughnut” headquarters emphasizes very traditional CRE frameworks over the quality of employees’ experiences – unfortunately, in my opinion. The financial metrics may turn out just fine, but if there’s no “Joy!” in Mudville, the mighty Casey (of design) will strike out. ■

**Jay L Brand, PhD**, is currently Professor of Leadership & Higher Education at Andrews University where he teaches academic writing. Mr. Brand previously served in Haworth’s Ideation

Group as a Cognitive Psychologist, Organizational Behavior Specialist and Corporate Ergonomist, investigating and applying workplace knowledge and strategy for internal & external clients. A Richard Upjohn Fellow of the American Institute of Architects, educator, and frequent national and international speaker, Mr. Brand has published more than 100 articles on psychology, creativity & innovation, human factors & ergonomics, interior architecture, workplace design & strategy, organizational design & strategy, and science & faith. He holds PhD and MA degrees in Experimental Psychology from the University of Louisville and a BA degree from Southern Adventist University.

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