

think funky or be defunked

More than ever before, our success as individuals and as a society is defined by our capacity for dynamic thinking. How are *you* coping?

By Anders Sorman-Nilsson



Things ain't what they used to be. The world has changed and the pace of change is accelerating by the second.

Back in 1999 we all worried about the Y2K bug, and we invested huge amounts preparing for this momentous event. But the big bang never eventuated. Or at least so we thought when we breathed a collective sigh of relief on the first day of the new millennium.

Yet, deeper undercurrents of change were at play around the same time – most of which went unnoticed by the untrained eye. Others were more in-your-face. At the same time that the world went flat, the Western world lost its innocence in the form of terrorist attacks, the Chinese became capitalist, Gaddafi became an ostensibly respected member of the international community, the Tour de France start was relocated to England, John Howard jumped on the green bandwagon and Rugby players became metrosexuals. What is going on in the world?

In the last decade the business bookshelves have seen apocalyptic titles like *The End of History*, *The End of Physics*, *The End of Microeconomics* and *The End of Science* – indicating that we are at a bifurcation or tipping point in history. The more interesting question - what is this the beginning of?

We are entering the age of ideas and it is time to think funky or be defunked. If you are not an early adopter of new ways of seeing this flipped world or tapping into its novel promises, you may find yourself in a Luddite funk.

Moore's law dictates that computer power doubles every 18-24 months. This silicon tidal wave leaves thinking domains previously reserved for human beings annihilated, smashed and orphaned on the sidelines of history.

Now more so than ever it is the quality of your thinking that determines the quality of your results in the 21st Century.

Growing up in Sweden in the mid-90s, the familiar plate of career advice was to become a lawyer or a doctor. Today, when parents give their children career counselling, they do not know whether the jobs they recommend will exist in Australia in five years time.

Five years ago, we used to have to learn one new skill per year, or perhaps per month if you were fairly cutting-edge. Today, you have to learn one new skill per day. When is it going to be one new skill every hour? How is your brain keeping up?

Things have gone topsy-turvy. Teenagers are excelling in Second Life but flunking their first life. Parents are reading one-minute bedtime stories to their children while their Blackberry inboxes are ping-pong. We send our condolences via SMS. Maslow's needs hierarchy has been flipped upside down.

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Personally, I love this age, but then again I am biased. I never knew why people were afraid of new ideas – it was always the old ideas that scared the bejesus out of me. Today, to be competitive and to future-proof your brain you need to stretch your


thinking beyond the quotidian toward the truly funky, creative and innovative.

My prediction for the next 10 years is that the categorisation of developed, under-developed and developing nations will disappear. Our competitive advantages in the West – in place since the days of guns, germs and steel and maintained through tariffs, quotas and anti-competitive behaviours – will be replaced by a global caste system known as thought apartheid, which will differentiate solely based on your willingness to think funky and constantly upgrade your thinking software.

Unlike the South African system of apartheid, thought apartheid is not controlled by any one group repressing another. But it is elitist in the sense that there is a dividing line between those who think funky and those who don't.

While the term may seem divisive, it is in fact the most meritocratic world we will ever have seen, where colour, creed, sexuality, gender or minority status do not play a role, but where your thinking makes all the difference.

Never before has the corporate futurist Alvin Toffler been more spot on in his adage that "the illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn".

To develop beyond being an average literate – to be outstanding in your competitiveness – you need to get brain-ready for tomorrow. So go ahead and position your brain for a thinking upgrade. 

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