

Think Again: The Power of Knowing What You Don't Know

By Adam Grant

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Summary

This book is an invitation to let go of knowledge and opinions that are no longer serving you well, and to anchor your sense of self in flexibility rather than consistency. If one can master the art of rethinking, it argues, we'll be better positioned for success at work and happiness in life. The first section focuses on opening our own minds. The second section directs attention to how we may productively engage others in changing their minds. The third section is about how we can best create communities of lifelong learners. Kindle location 222

Best illustration

Mike Lazaridis dreamed up the idea for the BlackBerry as a wireless communication device for sending and receiving emails. As of the summer of 2009, it accounted for nearly half of the U.S. smartphone market. By 2014, its market share had plummeted to less than 1 percent. When a company takes a nosedive like that, we can never pinpoint a single cause of its downfall, so we tend to anthropomorphize it: BlackBerry failed to adapt. Although his thinking may have been the spark that ignited the smartphone revolution, his struggles with rethinking ended up sucking the oxygen out of his company and virtually extinguishing his invention.

Best Idea

When we're in scientist mode, we refuse to let our ideas become ideologies. We don't start with answers or solutions; we lead with questions and puzzles. We don't preach from intuition; we teach from evidence. We don't just have healthy skepticism about other people's arguments; we dare to disagree with our own arguments.

Thinking like a scientist involves more than just reacting with an open mind. It means being actively open-minded. It requires searching for reasons why we might be wrong—not for reasons why we must be right—and revising our views based on what we learn. That rarely happens in the other mental modes. In preacher mode, changing our minds is a mark of moral weakness; in scientist mode, it's a sign of intellectual integrity. In prosecutor mode, allowing

ourselves to be persuaded is admitting defeat; in scientist mode, it's a step toward the truth. In politician mode, we flip-flop in response to carrots and sticks; in scientist mode, we shift in the face of sharper logic and stronger data.

Best Take Away

When thinking about conflict, most picture relationship conflict—personal, emotional clashes that are filled not just with friction but also with animosity. But there is another called task conflict—clashes about ideas and opinions. All in all, more than a hundred studies have examined conflict types in over eight thousand teams. A meta-analysis of those studies showed that relationship conflict is generally bad for performance, but some task conflict can be beneficial: it's been linked to higher creativity and smarter choices. As one research team concluded, 'The absence of conflict is not harmony, it's apathy.'

Our Recommendation

This book is recommended for all those who want to take a deeper dive into current research about how convictions develop and how they need to change given rapidly changing circumstances and the advance of knowledge. It also discusses how one may best engage others in debate in an effort to arrive at objective truth. At times it is written in a highly readable "Malcolm Gladwell" style that stimulates curiosity and provides interesting answers.

Best Quotes

"Intelligence is traditionally viewed as the ability to think and learn. Yet in a turbulent world, there's another set of cognitive skills that might matter more: the ability to rethink and unlearn." Kindle location 105

"Part of the problem is cognitive laziness. Some psychologists point out that we're mental misers: we often prefer the ease of hanging on to old views over the difficulty of grappling with new ones. Yet there are also deeper forces behind our resistance to rethinking. Questioning ourselves makes the world more unpredictable. It requires us to admit that the facts may have changed, that what was once right may now be wrong. Reconsidering something we believe deeply can threaten our identities, making it feel as if we're losing a part of ourselves." Kindle location 123

"We listen to views that make us feel good, instead of ideas that make us think hard." Kindle location 131

"This book is about the value of rethinking. It's about adopting mental flexibility..." Kindle location 203

"I'm a psychologist but I'm not a fan of Freud, I don't have a couch in my office, and I don't do therapy. As an organizational psychologist at Wharton, I've spent the past fifteen years researching and teaching evidence-based management." Kindle location 204

"Thinking again can help you generate new solutions to old problems and revisit old solutions to new problems. It's a path to learning more from the people around you and living with fewer regrets." Kindle location 246

"Most of us take pride in our knowledge and expertise, and in staying true to our beliefs and opinions. That makes sense in a stable world, where we get rewarded for having conviction in our ideas. The problem is that we live in a rapidly changing world, where we need to spend as

much time rethinking as we do thinking. The accelerating pace of change means that we need to question our beliefs more readily than ever before." Kindle location 276 – 284

"Vintage records, classic cars, and antique clocks might be valuable collectibles, but outdated facts are mental fossils that are best abandoned." Kindle location 292

"As we think and talk, we often slip into the mindsets of three different professions: preachers, prosecutors, and politicians. In each of these modes, we take on a particular identity and use a distinct set of tools. We go into preacher mode when our sacred beliefs are in jeopardy: we deliver sermons to protect and promote our ideals. We enter prosecutor mode when we recognize flaws in other people's reasoning: we marshal arguments to prove them wrong and win our case. We shift into politician mode when we're seeking to win over an audience: we campaign and lobby for the approval of our constituents. The risk is that we become so wrapped up in preaching that we're right, prosecuting others who are wrong, and politicking for support that we don't bother to rethink our own views." Kindle location 305 – 311

"If you're a scientist by trade, rethinking is fundamental to your profession. You're paid to be constantly aware of the limits of your understanding. You're expected to doubt what you know, be curious about what you don't know, and update your views based on new data. But being a scientist is not just a profession. It's a frame of mind—a mode of thinking that differs from preaching, prosecuting, and politicking. We move into scientist mode when we're searching for the truth: we run experiments to test hypotheses and discover knowledge. Is it possible to train people in other fields to think more like scientists, and if so, do they end up making smarter choices?" Kindle location 322-330

"Mental horsepower doesn't guarantee mental dexterity. No matter how much brainpower you have, if you lack the motivation to change your mind, you'll miss many occasions to think again. Research reveals that the higher you score on an IQ test, the more likely you are to fall for stereotypes, because you're faster at recognizing patterns. And recent experiments suggest that the smarter you are, the more you might struggle to update your beliefs." Kindle location 379

"My favorite bias is the 'I'm not biased' bias, in which people believe they're more objective than others. It turns out that smart people are more likely to fall into this trap. The brighter you are, the harder it can be to see your own limitations. Being good at thinking can make you worse at rethinking." Kindle location 393

"Experts assessed American presidents on a long list of personality traits and compared them to rankings by independent historians and political scientists. Only one trait consistently predicted presidential greatness after controlling for factors like years in office, wars, and scandals. It wasn't whether presidents were ambitious or forceful, friendly or Machiavellian; it wasn't whether they were attractive, witty, poised, or polished. What set great presidents apart was their intellectual curiosity and openness." Kindle location 416

"As I've studied the process of rethinking, I've found that it often unfolds in a cycle. It starts with intellectual humility—knowing what we don't know. Recognizing our shortcomings opens the door to doubt. As we question our current understanding, we become curious about what information we're missing. That search leads us to new discoveries, which in turn maintain our humility by reinforcing how much we still have to learn. If knowledge is power, knowing what we don't know is wisdom." Kindle location 424-427

"Scientific thinking favors humility over pride, doubt over certainty, curiosity over closure." Kindle location 430

"Our convictions can lock us in prisons of our own making. The solution is not to decelerate our thinking—it's to accelerate our rethinking. That's what resurrected Apple from the brink of bankruptcy to become the world's most valuable company." Kindle location 449

"The curse of knowledge is that it closes our minds to what we don't know. Good judgment depends on having the skill—and the will—to open our minds." Kindle location 474

"We all have blind spots in our knowledge and opinions. The bad news is that they can leave us blind to our blindness, which gives us false confidence in our judgment and prevents us from rethinking." Kindle location 508

"According to what's now known as the Dunning-Kruger effect, it's when we lack competence that we're most likely to be brimming with overconfidence." Kindle location 560

"The less intelligent we are in a particular domain, the more we seem to overestimate our actual intelligence in that domain." Kindle location 564

"The more superior participants thought their knowledge was, the more they overestimated themselves—and the less interested they were in learning and updating. If you think you know more about history or science than most people, chances are you know less than you think." Kindle location 582

"Absolute beginners rarely fall into the Dunning-Kruger trap. If you don't know a thing about football, you probably don't walk around believing you know more than the coach." Kindle location 616

"It's when we progress from novice to amateur that we become overconfident. A bit of knowledge can be a dangerous thing." Kindle location 619

"What we want to attain is confident humility: having faith in our capability while appreciating that we may not have the right solution or even be addressing the right problem. That gives us enough doubt to reexamine our old knowledge and enough confidence to pursue new insights." Kindle location 651-2

"When adults have the confidence to acknowledge what they don't know, they pay more attention to how strong evidence is and spend more time reading material that contradicts their opinions." Kindle location 667

"Attachment. That's what keeps us from recognizing when our opinions are off the mark and rethinking them. To unlock the joy of being wrong, we need to detach. I've learned that two kinds of detachment are especially useful: detaching your present from your past and detaching your opinions from your identity." Kindle location 977

"Every time we encounter new information, we have a choice. We can attach our opinions to our identities and stand our ground in the stubbornness of preaching and prosecuting. Or we can operate more like scientists, defining ourselves as people committed to the pursuit of truth—even if it means proving our own views wrong." Kindle location 1,021

"Relationship conflict is destructive in part because it stands in the way of rethinking. Task conflict can be constructive when it brings diversity of thought, preventing us from getting trapped in overconfidence cycles." Kindle location 1,063

"We learn more from people who challenge our thought process than those who affirm our conclusions. Strong leaders engage their critics and make themselves stronger. Weak leaders silence their critics and make themselves weaker." Kindle location 1,141

"Some organizations and occupations counter those tendencies by building challenge networks into their cultures." Kindle location 1,147

"In science, a challenge network is often a cornerstone of the peer-review process. We submit articles anonymously, and they're reviewed blindly by independent experts." Kindle location 1,150

"A major problem with task conflict is that it often spills over into relationship conflict. One minute you're disagreeing about how much seasoning to put on the Thanksgiving turkey, and the next minute you find yourself yelling 'You smell!'" Kindle location 1,210

"The Wright brothers were masters at having intense task conflict without relationship conflict. When they raised their voices, it reflected intensity rather than hostility. As their mechanic marveled, 'I don't think they really got mad, but they sure got awfully hot.' Experiments show that simply framing a dispute as a debate rather than as a disagreement signals that you're receptive to considering dissenting opinions and changing your mind, which in turn motivates the other person to share more information with you." Kindle location 1,219

"Starting a disagreement by asking, 'Can we debate?' sends a message that you want to think like a scientist, not a preacher or a prosecutor—and encourages the other person to think that way, too." Kindle location 1,225

"When we're trying to persuade people, we frequently take an adversarial approach. Instead of opening their minds, we effectively shut them down or rile them up. They play defense by putting up a shield, play offense by preaching their perspectives and prosecuting ours, or play politics by telling us what we want to hear without changing what they actually think. I want to explore a more collaborative approach—one in which we show more humility and curiosity, and invite others to think more like scientists." Kindle location 1,341

"A good debate is not a war. It's not even a tug-of-war, where you can drag your opponent to your side if you pull hard enough on the rope. It's more like a dance that hasn't been choreographed, negotiated with a partner who has a different set of steps in mind. If you try too hard to lead, your partner will resist. If you can adapt your moves to hers, and get her to do the same, you're more likely to end up in rhythm." Kindle location 1,366