

## Chapter 08

### **A Wealth of Experience**

#### Using the Past, Inventing the Future

With vast thirty three years of experience with him, Lafley processed and capitalized on it to become a consummate integrative thinker. The most striking part was that he used his experiences both to deepen his mastery and nurture his originality, rather than focusing on one at the cost the other. He consciously accumulated experiences that cultivated mastery. Simultaneously he also worked to build his capacity for producing novel outcomes. This originality often expressed itself in Lafley's merchandising decisions like importing ceramic elephants, collecting fuel before price hike, introducing compact detergents or Tide liquid dish wash.

Spontaneity, experimentation, flexibility and openness aren't terribly rare qualities in and of themselves. But it's the mark of an integrative thinker to nurture those markers of originality while at the same time deepening mastery, whose markers – organization, planning, focus and repetition – are originality's seeming opposites.

Lafley's accumulated mastery and originality gave him the confidence to take risk. This success would not have been possible with mastery or originality alone. Lafley depended on his mastery to understand real meaning of voluntaries and how retailers would react, what would be the impact on P&G manufacturing and distribution. Without mastery, Lafley's originality would not have withstood the rigors of the real world.

#### Lafley's Lessons about Experiences

1 Stance and tools influence experiences. Normally we have inclination to accumulate experiences that reinforce the stance and tools we start with. Stance guides the acquisition of tools and tools guide the type of experiences we have. People who believe that existing models are identical to reality and fear

opposing models aren't likely to believe that better models exist. They will be impatient to choose available model whatever its shortcomings be. They will use only inductive & deductive reasoning.

In stark contrast, Lafley believed existing models are just the best anyone has come up with to date and relish opposing models. He waited for the better model to be found, and was certain he will find it by wading through the complexity and staying patient. He used generative reasoning, causal modeling and assertive inquiry. Experience, people like Lafley gain building new models will reinforce their initial stance and the skill; and will increase sensitivity with which they deploy integrative thinking tools.

2 Experiences, in turn, influence tools and stance. The feedback loop from experiences to tools happened again during his time as President of P&G's Asia-Pacific region. In Japan he observed how the best Japanese firms, typically, had an obsessive concern for the design of the consumer experience – from the product itself to its packaging, experiences of shopping for it in a store. He learnt that design could be a competitive advantage for P&G and created a post of VP of Design, established an external design advisory board and developed close relationship with IDEO, leading design firm.

3a Experiences can deepen mastery. Mastery requires repeated experiences in a particular domain. In the essentially infinite morass of data, they can pull out the few salient data points that make a difference and mentally map their causal relationships. And because they have done it many times before, they know from their experience how to structure the problem in order to create a resolution. Mastery comes only through planned and structured repetition of a consistent type of experience. But to become masterful, it is necessary have a plan and structure for observing and reflecting on each act.

3b. Experiences can nurture originality. Some contexts don't reward the repetition; structuring and planning that are the hallmarks of mastery. Those non-standard contexts require the creation of a new approach or solution - that is,

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originality. Originality demands a willingness to experiment, spontaneity in response to a novel situation and openness to trying something different than perhaps first planned or intended. It's important to become comfortable with the process of trial and error and iterative prototyping, or else you'll be tempted to focus on least risky option in place of originality.

4 Mastery has to be combined with originality. Mastery and originality require each other to grow. They are the result of the most powerful experiences. Using experiences to drive a combination of mastery and originality is characteristic of integrative thinkers. Mastery is an enabling condition for originality, which in turn, is a generative condition for mastery. The modes are interdependent.

### Personal Knowledge as a System

Each time you use generative reasoning, causal modeling and assertive inquiry to construct a creative resolution, you deepen your understanding of the tools used to produce the constructive outcome and reinforce the belief that you are capable of forging creative resolutions. You also improve the odds that your next attempt at creative resolution will succeed as you bring greater level of skill to the new task.

### Personal Knowledge as a System

For some the positive spiral starts young. But we can benefit greatly by experiences going forward. We need to think about our own stance. We also need to record our predictions in a way that our actual outcome can be audited against our expectations and learn from experiences. We have to ask what would have to be true for a particular model to be valid.

### The personal Knowledge System of the Integrative Thinker

The typical features of the integrative thinker's personal knowledge system – her stance, tools and experiences flow from each other by providing information and guidance. With this combination of stance, tools and experiences, integrative

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thinkers grow continually more proficient at generating creative resolutions. With your patience and reflection this personal knowledge system can help you.

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