

# Introduction

This book is a practical guide to a big idea about innovation. It's an idea with roots in modern neuroscience, classical military strategy, and Asian philosophy, and it's played a part in countless cases of creative innovation in business and other fields. Over the past decade, I've explained the idea in a series of books and articles, and I've taught the idea to thousands of graduate students and executives in courses at Columbia Business School and in sessions at companies around the world. This book offers a method to apply the idea, in a form that any innovator can learn and use, without any advanced training in business or economics or any other technical field. All you need is a passion for ideas and a desire to put them into action for personal and professional fulfillment. You can use this method as an individual, in a team, or throughout your organization.

The idea is *creative strategy*. It solves the problem of innovation, not just for designing new products but for coming up with creative ideas for strategy at any level: the overall company, a division, a team, or just yourself. It applies to businesses, government agencies, nonprofits, and your own career and personal development. In all kinds of strategy, you always need a creative idea to some degree because the world around you is always changing, so the future is never exactly the same as the past. Your strategy must change to keep up with the times. But how should it change, exactly?

There are two kinds of traditional methods that claim to yield creative ideas for strategy: methods of creativity and methods of strategy. You will see that neither set of traditional methods actually solves the problem. Methods of strategy show you how to analyze your strategic situation, but that's where they stop. They don't give you the next step, how to get a creative idea for what to do. Methods of creativity show you how to come up with lots of creative ideas, but they don't connect those ideas to your strategy. So you end up doing lots of strategic analysis first, and then go into a room to brainstorm creative ideas. There is no connection between the two methods.

This common sequence—formal analysis, then creative brainstorming—actually comes from an old theory of how the brain works. You've probably heard this: the left side of the brain is analytical, and the right side is creative. So first you do your analysis (left side) and then let your creativity (right side) take over. Unfortunately, this is not how the brain really works. In the past ten years, neuroscience has overturned that old model of the brain. We now know that analysis and creativity are not two different functions on two different sides of the brain. In the new model—called *learning-and-memory*—analysis and creativity work together in all modes of thought. You cannot have an idea without both.

The new science of learning-and-memory reveals at last how creative ideas form in the mind. When you do something yourself or learn what someone else did, those details go into your memory. When you face a new situation, your brain breaks down the problem into pieces and then searches through your brain for memories that fit each piece. It then makes a new combination from those pieces of memory. The combination is new, but the elements are not. These three steps—break it down, search, combine—are very different from the two conventional steps of analyze and brainstorm. Creative strategy puts the three steps of learning-and-memory for new situations into a practical method that fits how the human brain actually works.

Part I of this book offers a step-by-step guide to the practice of creative strategy. It begins with a picture of how the brain puts creative ideas together, and then shows how that translates into a formal method for innovation. As you proceed through Part I, you will see that each creative strategy step differs in key ways from traditional methods of strategy, creativity, and innovation. At various points I pause to explain the differences to keep the distinctions clear.

Part II goes into these traditional methods in greater depth to help you alter or depart from them to make room for creative strategy. For example,

perhaps you currently use Porter's Five Forces or Blue Ocean Strategy, Six Thinking Hats, the Balanced Scorecard, Design Thinking, Design for Six Sigma, brainstorming sessions of various kinds, or the like. Your aim is to make them work with creative strategy, not against it, and Part II shows you how.

Part III offers miscellaneous materials that provide more background for you to refer to according to your interest or need. It includes a brief summary of the creative strategy method and a review of key sources that led me to the main ideas of this book. As it turns out, I used creative strategy to create creative strategy, and this section shows where the ideas came from that made up the new combination.

As you go through this guide, try to look at creative strategy with a "beginner's mind," as they say in Zen—itsself a key source for creative strategy. Try to clear your mind of other methods and allow it space to consider this new idea. At the end, when you've gone through it all, you can decide whether to toss the book away or try to apply its methods, at least in part. Of course I hope, if you've read this far, you're willing to give it a chance.

