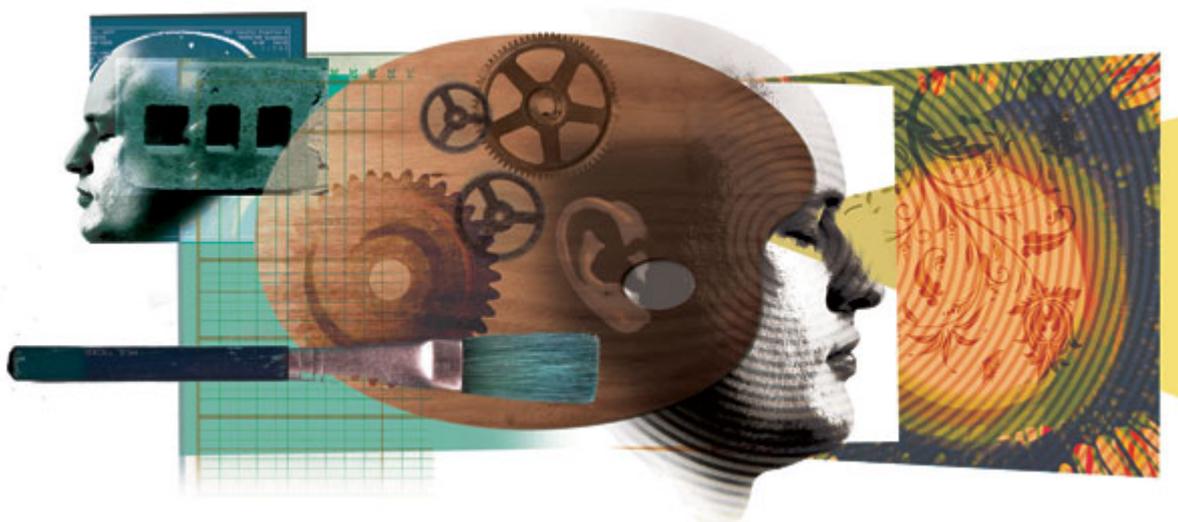


Let Computers Compute. It's the Age of the Right Brain.



By JANET RAE-DUPREE

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“Imagination is more important than knowledge.”

— [Albert Einstein](#)

I'M of two minds. As a matter of fact, so are you. And until recently, corporate America wasn't doing much to take advantage of one of them. But now that we're hip-deep in what has been called both the “Creative Economy” and the “Conceptual Age,” no one can afford to ignore the artist within: the right hemisphere of the brain.

Although popularized in the 1980s by the artist Betty Edwards in her book “Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain,” the right-brain-left-brain dichotomy originated with the research of the American biologist Roger W. Sperry in the 1960s. Through studying “split brain” animals and human patients, whose brain hemispheres had been disconnected (in humans, this was done to prevent severe epileptic seizures), he found that each side of the brain plays its own role in cognition. The left side, home of the human language center, is the outspoken logical, linear half of the equation. The right side, home to spatial perception and nonverbal concepts, is the nonlinear, high-concept source of the imagination and of pleasure.

The two function cheek-by-jowl, constantly sending signals back and forth through a bundle of 200 million to 300 million nerve fibers to help balance learning, analysis and communication throughout the brain.

But now that computers can emulate many of the sequential skills of the brain's left hemisphere — the part that sees the individual trees in a forest — the author Daniel Pink argues that it's time for our imaginative right brain, which sees the entire forest all at once, to take center stage.

“These abilities have always been part of what it means to be human,” notes Mr. Pink, who synthesized his ideas about the new role of right-brain thinking in his 2005 book “A Whole New Mind.” “It's just that after a few generations in the Information Age, many of our high-concept, high-touch muscles have atrophied. The challenge is to work them back into shape.”

Why bother? Because much of the left-brain-centric work that the Information Age workers of America once did — computer programming, financial accounting, routing calls — is now done more cheaply in Asia or more efficiently by computers. If it can be outsourced or automated, it probably has been.

Now the master of fine arts, or M.F.A., Mr. Pink says, “is the new M.B.A.”

He’s not the only one saying it. When [General Motors](#) hired [Robert A. Lutz](#) in 2001 to whip its product development into shape, he told The New York Times about his new approach. “It’s more right brain. It’s more creative,” he said.

“I see us as being in the art business,” he said, “art, entertainment and mobile sculpture, which, coincidentally, also happens to provide transportation.”

When a car company like G.M. is in the art business, every company in any other industry is, too.

So it makes sense that business executives are turning to the original pop culture icon of right-brain thinking, “Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain,” for guidance into their right minds. Ms. Edwards retired in 1998, but her son, Brian Bomeisler, teaches scores of corporate and public workshops each year.

The list of companies Mr. Bomeisler has worked with is a Who’s Who of the Fortune 500. “That corny phrase ‘thinking outside the box,’ that’s what I do for corporations,” he says. “In teaching them how to draw, I’m teaching them an entirely new way to see. They unbox their minds and absorb what’s really there, with all of the complexity and beauty. One of the common phrases that students use afterward is that the world appears to be so much richer.”

During a two-day workshop with [Halliburton](#) Energy Services, Mr. Bomeisler watched as a team’s drawings slowly revealed an obvious solution to a longstanding problem. Team members realized from drawing that they had been enjoying their special status as a task force and had become so fascinated with the problem before them that they were in no hurry to solve it. This was resolved after management set a strict deadline and promised the group equally intriguing problems in the future.

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That ability to help others see from an artist’s perspective was the reason Ms. Edwards decided to write her book, she said in an e-mail message. “My main task in writing the drawing book was to dig down underneath everything I knew about art and drawing to try to find the most fundamental level of ‘thinking’ that goes on in drawing,” she said. “What was I seeing, how was I ‘seeing’ what I was seeing, and how was I transforming those perceptions into a drawing? It makes my brain hurt even now to remember the effort required by that seemingly simple task.”

That alternate way of thinking has traditionally been marginalized in corporate America, as it has been in the rest of our culture. Dr. Sperry, who had a doctorate in zoology, noted the prejudice in 1973 when he remarked: “Our educational system, as well as science in general, tends to neglect the nonverbal form of intellect. What it comes down to is that modern society discriminates against the right hemisphere.”

Mr. Pink hopes his latest book, “The Adventures of Johnny Bunko: The Last Career Guide You’ll Ever Need,” will help set things right. Promoted as “the first business comic book,” the paperback is drawn as if it were a Japanese manga novel. In the story, the office cubicle dweller Johnny Bunko is taught the true rules of the career game — including “There is no plan” and “Make excellent mistakes” — by a superhero fairy godmother who appears when he breaks open a pair of chopsticks.

THE primary moral to the story, Mr. Pink says, is this: There’s power in making career choices for fundamental reasons, such as doing something you love, instead of instrumental reasons, like hoping a job will be a steppingstone to something else.

It's a message Dr. Sperry seemed to understand when he accepted the [Nobel Prize](#) in medicine in 1981. "The great pleasure and feeling in my right brain," he said, "is more than my left brain can find the words to tell you."

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Janet Rae-Dupree writes about science and emerging technology in Silicon Valley.

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