

UNLIMITED POTENTIAL

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Newsletter

5 Highly Valued Minds for the Future

"The empires of the future will be empires of the mind." – Winston Churchill

In a ruthless, globally competitive market, companies cannot afford the luxury of holding onto more employees than they need. With economic constraints and technological advances, some jobs are being eliminated completely – a trend that will surely continue.

A new generation of sophisticated information and communication technologies, together with new forms of business reorganization and management, is wiping out full-time employment for millions of blue- and white-collar workers.

What does this mean? There is work, but it's not the same as it used to be. There are jobs, but not the same ones offered a few years ago. And unless you want to go after menial work, you'll need to acquire a disciplined education and variety of experiences, while also developing a highly valued mind.

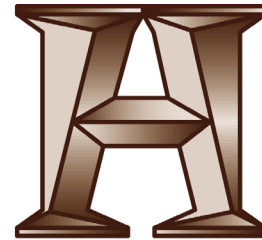
We've all read about accelerating globalization, information overload, the drastic ascent of technology and science, and the threat of growing competition. Each of these challenges will require new ways of thinking and learning for those hoping to create a successful future.

Our Mind(s) Matter

In *Five Minds for the Future* (Harvard Business School Press, 2007), author and noted psychologist Howard Gardner says our mind – actually, minds – matter. We achieve greater professional success by learning how to think and learn in new ways.

Gardner, well known in psychological circles for his theory of multiple intelligences, believes five different kinds of minds are critical to remaining a highly prized asset in an organization, especially in times of economic cutbacks. Human capability, he asserts, cannot be reduced to a single metric: IQ.

According to Gardner, five cognitive capacities will be



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in great demand in the years ahead:

1. The Disciplined Mind
2. The Synthesizing Mind
3. The Creating Mind
4. The Respectful Mind
5. The Ethical Mind

Developing these mental capacities equips us to deal with future expectations, as well as that which cannot be anticipated.

If we fail to develop these minds, we'll be at the mercy of forces we can't understand: overwhelmed by information, unable to succeed in the workplace, and incapable of making judicious decisions in personal and professional matters.

The first three kinds of minds deal primarily with cognitive abilities. The last two deal with our relations to other human beings. Unless we increasingly place value on diversity and common good, we risk our survival.

In our interconnected world, it's not enough to state what each group needs for survival on its own turf. In the long run, it is not possible for parts of the world to thrive while others remain desperately poor and frustrated.

The Disciplined Mind

The disciplined mind has mastered at least one way of thinking – a mode of cognition that belongs to a specific scholarly discipline, craft or profession. Lawyers think like lawyers, engineers like engineers, managers like managers. That said, it's also important to be broadly familiar with other major academic disciplines' approaches, including math, science, history and the arts.

To create a disciplined mind, start by figuring out the central concepts of the discipline you wish to master. Be it gravity, supply and demand, or the doctrine of intent in criminal law, the field you choose has key foundational concepts, methods and procedures.

You need to develop many "entry points" into your discipline. Those who have mastered a subject can think about it in many ways: storytelling, debate, graphics, humor, drama or classic exposition. If you communicate your expertise in only one medium, then you don't really know your subject.

The end goal is to "perform your understanding." This isn't mere recitation of known case studies or performance of standard experiments. You must use your knowledge to attack problems you've never seen. You then need expert feedback to determine how well you fared.

The disciplined mind never stops learning for at least

two reasons:

1. More information emerges each day. Those with disciplined minds know they must continue to assimilate new knowledge or risk being left behind.
2. You must be passionate about knowing more and intrinsically enjoy the process of learning new things.

The Synthesizing Mind

The synthesizing mind is adept at selecting crucial information from the copious amounts available, across disciplines. This requires the skill of pattern recognition. You must recognize important new information and skills and then incorporate them into your knowledge base and professional repertoire. You must discern what merits your attention and what to ignore, organizing this information in ways that make sense to yourself and others.

Great synthesizers are nothing new. Plato and Aristotle sought to organize all human knowledge, as did Augustine, Aquinas and others philosophical giants. Today, scholars like E.O. Wilson continue the tradition, which is more difficult and critical than ever before. Human knowledge apparently doubles every few years. Without synthesis, much of this knowledge is unusable.

The good news? You can learn to be a better synthesizing thinker. Start by understanding the different types of syntheses, such as narratives (perhaps the oldest form). Think of stories from the Bible, myths and legends, or finely crafted historical works.

The Creating Mind

The creating mind goes beyond existing knowledge and syntheses to pose new questions, offer new solutions and configure new genres. Creation builds on one or more established disciplines. It requires an informed "field" to make quality, acceptable judgments.

Human creativity is at a premium. Businesses want employees who can develop a "new vision" and "extend existing product categories," on top of completing their daily work.

It wasn't always this way. In times past, society often feared or misunderstood creativity, dismissing it as a product of divine intervention or pure luck. Galileo was imprisoned during the Renaissance. Neither Johann Sebastian Bach nor Vincent Van Gogh were appreciated in their lifetimes. Freud, Darwin and Keynes received more than their share of ridicule.

“In the past,” Gardner writes, “creative individuals in a society were at best a mixed blessing ... possibly to be honored by posterity at some later point.” By contrast, in the present and future, creative thinking is a routinized norm that will continue to grow.

Creative thinkers are no longer deemed exceptional; they’re the expected new hire. Psychologists have gained a better feel for what creativity entails and how people can develop it. Work by psychologists like Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi show that creativity is not a lone endeavor, but three elements that interact to foster lasting breakthroughs:

1. An individual must master a discipline or area and constantly work at it.
2. Creativity requires a “cultural domain” that provides models, rules and norms to work with or against.
3. The creative individual needs opportunities to perform.

The key ingredient is a creative temperament (which need not be innate). Creative people are dissatisfied with their own work and that of others. They go against the grain; it may be painful, but the alternative is even more excruciating. They notice anomalies and try to explain them, rather than explain them away.

Generally, creative people are tough, tenacious and undeterred by hard work or failures. Even when they do succeed, they look over the horizon to find the next mountain to climb.

The Respectful Mind

The respectful mind responds sympathetically and constructively to differences among individuals and groups. Those with respectful minds work beyond mere tolerance and political correctness; they develop the capacity for forgiveness.

Human beings naturally band into groups – and as soon as such groups form, members start to dislike one another. This pattern appears repeatedly in humans and other primates, for that matter.

Group members bond and define themselves relative to “outgroups,” which are typically characterized as inferior, dangerous or subhuman. Explanations for this tendency abound, with different scientific frameworks emerging over decades of exploration.

Currently, many look to evolutionary psychology for an explanation, though this sociobiological story is probably far too simple. Whatever the reason for outgroups, we must overcome our tendency to create them. With modern weapons, we make the world a dangerous place.

The solution is a relatively simple one: Cultivate respect for others. And while it does, indeed, seem like a tenet of Kindergarten 101, it is much harder to achieve.

Teaching respectfulness in business schools is certainly a promising means of fostering tolerance. With this kind of foundation, students can continue to cultivate tolerance and respect when they graduate to the workplace and political realm.

The Ethical Mind

Ethically minded individuals abstract crucial features of their roles at work and as citizens.

They act consistently with these conceptualizations, striving for good work and ethical balance in micro to global environments.

Given a choice, most people would opt for life in an “ethical world,” in which everyone focused on doing “good work.” If everyone pledged to do the right thing, the world would surely be a better place.

Four tools, while not sufficient for good work, are probably necessary:

1. **A mission.** Without a mission, you don’t know what you’re aiming to achieve. Try to develop a clear, actionable mission statement that embodies your values.
2. **One or more good models.** Similarly, without models, doing the ethical thing is much harder. Of course, models can be positive (“I want to be like him”) or negative (“That’s exactly what I don’t want to be”).
3. **An individual version of the “mirror test.”** Look into the mirror and ask yourself if you like what you see. Do you approve of what you’re doing at work? It’s easy to deceive yourself, so get confirmation from people you respect.
4. **A professional version of the mirror test.** Look into the mirror and see if your colleagues are living up to their professional obligations. If not, what can you do to improve the ethical fiber of your profession?

Doing good work is easiest if you have proper support, both at home and at work. Your peers’ ethical influence is especially important.

Our leaders must also remind us of what it means to be a good worker. Without reminders, it’s far too easy to suffer an ethical relapse. The ethical mind is always vigilant, finely tuned to detect the small yet critical opportunities for ethical behaviors.

The Future Is Now

In reality, many individuals in positions of influence are deficient in one or more of the five kinds of minds discussed here. In the status quo, we're blind to their importance in both our business schools and organizations.

Shrewd managers or leaders select people who already possess these minds. They then challenge their employees to maintain, sharpen and catalyze their capacities so teams can work together effectively and serve as role models for future recruits.

The critical questions to ask yourself are:

1. With which of these minds do I already show strength?
2. How can I improve my mental capabilities?
3. Where can I stretch my abilities to enable growth?
4. Which of these minds do I need to learn?
5. Who in my organization can help mentor me?

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