

# The IDEA Textbook

*Guru-guru* Thinking,  
Dentsu-style

So Yamada

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## **Any IDEAs?**

Surely everyone has been asked this question at least once in their lifetime. But what exactly is an IDEA? What is its characteristic? How do you make one?

An idea could be anything from a figment of your imagination, to the philosophical core of say, Platonism. It all depends on how the word IDEA is used. In other words, asking if someone has any ideas is not a simple question that can easily be answered.

Dentsu has an interesting and unique thinking process for the creation of IDEAs. This isn't just about a skill for making advertisements. Rather, it's a way of thinking that can mobilize every imaginable innovation. It's all about how to use your brain as you're supposed to use it, because your brain is something that will not change, no matter where technology takes us in the future.

This is something that has been passed from master to apprentice through the generations of our company. For some reason though, until today, there has never been a

textbook written about it. Now this process, which I shall call “*guru-guru* thinking,” will be broadly introduced for the very first time through this book.

The IDEA we’re talking about here is definitely not a figment of your imagination or something that happens to come to mind. This IDEA is a brand new perspective towards a goal that can pinpoint solutions. In the world of advertising and communication, this can be a big idea, a core idea, or perhaps even a communication concept. In the world of business management, it all boils down to one meaning: concept. In this book, I’ve written IDEA all in capital letters just to keep it separate from its common use.

It is important for me to make it clear that this is not a “how to” type of book promising you miracles by the time you finish reading it.

Neither is it a book full of totally confusing abstract advice demanding you to be more imaginative, to disregard common sense, or to think like a designer.

There is only one purpose to this book and that is for you to

understand the steps involved in actually creating an IDEA.

Time and again, I have seen people struggling because they don't know what it is that they're supposed be doing. Of course, it takes quite a bit of experience to be in full control of an IDEA, but even that comes with a methodology tag.

Let me take you to my theory.

## **Assessing the Circumstances**

Will it work? Will it flop?

When you're up against trouble and you have to figure your own way out, the first thing you need to do is to assess the situation.

*I've got to get more figures on that product I'm in charge of.*

or

*I need to see her smile.*

You may have a goal in mind, but getting there is a far reach from reality and that is what's bothering you. Would it be possible to make it work with a few adjustments here and there? Or are you beyond help?

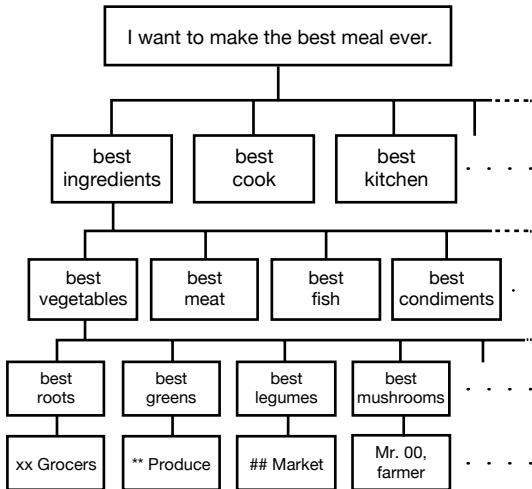
If there is indeed a way to make it work, then I recommend following a process known as logical thinking.

Logical thinking is the method of finding the answer in a tree

structure by analyzing a mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive (MECE) situation. You hypothesize and then verify possible solutions until you find the right one. (There are many books that discuss this thinking process so please feel free to consult them for further details.)

Rather than thinking about what might be best, the beauty of this approach of going along with what is better, if nothing else, is speed. Besides, most of the world's problems can be solved by following this logical, linear process of thinking.

### The process of logical thinking



However, there are times when articulating a problem in one direction like this can get you nowhere. Perhaps fewer than one out of ten, but there are times when this just doesn't work. There comes a point where you have to extend the line so far that you end up facing even more complex, fundamental problems that you can no longer avoid. Then you need to go back and re-create something from its original structure. In other words, you need innovation. This is when you have to move



yourself off the track, and switch over to a completely different way of thinking.

It's called "*guru-guru* thinking."

## **The Philosophy behind *Guru-guru* Thinking**

### The western approach: Descartes

Rene Descartes was a philosopher who made his mark in the western style of logical, linear thinking, so much so that the process could not be discussed without mention of him. In his book Discourse on the Method, Descartes explains his own mathematical knowledge as a productive philosophical method characterized by four basic rules:

1. Never to accept anything for true which I did not clearly know to be such; that is to say, carefully to avoid precipitancy and prejudice, and to comprise nothing more in my judgment than what was presented to my mind so clearly and distinctly as to exclude all ground of doubt.
2. To divide each of the difficulties under examination into as many parts as possible, and as might be necessary for its adequate solution.
3. To conduct my thoughts in such order that, by commencing with objects the simplest and easiest to know, I might ascend by

little and little, and, as it were, step by step, to the knowledge of the more complex; assigning in thought a certain order even to those objects which in their own nature do not stand in a relation of antecedence and sequence.

4. In every case to make enumerations so complete, and reviews so general, that I might be assured that nothing was omitted.

This style of dividing every question into small parts by clearly separating the subject (ego) and object (non-ego) from the psyche, and subjecting every possible aspect to thorough suspicion, is objective and lucid.

In addition, Descartes' philosophy of mathematically fitting all of the justifiable parts to improve its entirety is what supports logical thinking in a sense that it is more acceptable to do what is better than to contemplate what is best.

However, in the real world, Descartes' approach is not necessarily universal. There are at least two major weaknesses.

First of all, there is a limit to what can be justified. Realistically speaking, how often would you find something that is presented ... so clearly and distinctly as to exclude all ground of doubt?

Something as simple as “I love edamame” could turn into a huge doubt the moment you bite into a soggy bean that came from the frozen foods section. Moreover (and I will discuss this later), the idea that something is justified because it is based on mathematical data is simply an illusion.

The other weakness is the insufficient time axis. Unless you were able to stop time and freeze everything at hand, there is no way that you could divide a particular situation into multiple portions for analysis. That would have to be something that is constantly in the past and not in the ever-changing present.

Profiling a complete analysis and then losing all hope for reality is, in essence, not doing anything at all. For example, saying that there are no opportunities in a mature market is something of the past. Only those who are prepared to take the time to change the structure of the market – without giving up – can pioneer the future.

Logical thinking is an objective process that is generally justified. However, it will not create IDEAs. All the effort in the world to diligently pile one analysis on top of another will not give rise to innovation.

## The eastern approach: Holism

On the other hand, in the Orient there is a tradition of unifying the subject and object, as characterized in the following paradoxical dialogue between a Zen Master and his apprentice.

Monk: Where is the road?

Master: Straight ahead.

Monk: Why can't I see it?

Master: That, young man, is because you have an ego.

Monk: If I cannot see it because of my ego, is it visible to you, my master?

Master: As long as you place your ego and nonego at contrasting positions, you are simply switching them from subject to object. You will never see, no matter how hard you try.

Monk: So then if I rid myself of my ego and nonego, will I be able to see?

Master: If you did not have an ego or a nonego, the road could not possibly be an issue then, could it?

By focusing on the road, the monk is alienating his self (ego/

subject) from the road (nonego/object), thus making it eternally impossible to see that road. When you reach for the road, it will disappear. But that road will not become yours unless you reach for it. This is the paradox that must be accepted in order to see the entire picture as one.

Eastern philosophical tradition is not only about such riddling dialogue. It is also evident in every aspect of daily life. Oriental medicine, which has grown through its history of over 2,000 years, continues to show clinical success based on the philosophy of holism.

*As such, it is not possible for any form of life on earth to exist independently. Every being moves, works, and changes through its connections. Holism is basically the very thought of seeing everything as a whole. (edited)*

*In oriental medicine too, an illness is located, the cause and symptoms clarified, and then analyzed. The entirety referred to here involves all of the endless connections within the body without disconnecting and removing one part from the rest. It is essential for this part to have a role as a member of the entirety, and that is what needs to be thought about.*

Oto Miura, *Toyo Igaku wo Shitteimasuka*  
(Do you Know Oriental Medicine?)

*A significant feature of guru-guru thinking can be found in holism.*

In *guru-guru* thinking too, the problem is located, the cause and conditions clarified and then analyzed. And as in oriental medicine, the problem is not disconnected and removed, but rather thought of as being an ever-connected part of the *whole*; having a role in the ever-changing entirety.

## The Four Modes

*Guru-guru* thinking is a process used to create an IDEA. It is done by one individual, exhaustively using one brain. First, the imagination is broadened from an oriental subjective perspective, after which western objective logic is used to bundle it all together. Nobody is going to pay any attention to a flimsy argument that sounds like it is coming from a critic's mouth. What is required here is proactive engagement with total immersion of the whole personality.

That process is made up of four modes, each with its own purpose.

The first mode, to prepare ingredients for thought, is

**Feeling.** Following that, to brainstorm every single possibility, is **Scattering**. The third mode is **Finding**, when you discover the actual IDEA. Finally, in order to turn that IDEA into a reality, you follow the fourth mode, which is **Polishing**.

The four modes of *guru-guru* thinking:

- (1) Feeling
- (2) Scattering
- (3) Finding
- (4) Polishing

I will discuss each mode individually later on, but following these four modes just once carries you through your left brain to your right, and from your right brain to your left. It takes you around and around in circles, all inside one single brain.

Then after your first Feeling-Scattering-Finding-Polishing cycle, you are naturally ready to go back to mode one, Feeling. As a result, you continue to think in circles, round and round like a spiral (*guru-guru*).

We decided to call this “*guru-guru* thinking” because of its difference from the logical, linear approach.



In the Japanese language, there are adverbs that describe physical sensations:

It's raining *shito-shito*. (Lightly, with no sound.)

It's raining *za-za*. (Heavily, with the sound of beating the ground.)

It's raining *zaba-zaba*. (Like a storm.)

It's raining *doba-doba*. (Practically flooding.)

This is similar to words like *bow-wow* or *cock-a-doodle-doo* in English, but the nuance is not that of a child speaking. And depending on how it feels personally, the words can be changed to make absolutely new expressions like *sa-sa* or *doban-doban*.

*Guru-guru* is another one of these expressions of physical sensation. It describes the feeling of going round-and-round without stopping – of circling the same area over and over again. It is indeed the perfect title for a thinking process involving a physical sensation.

By the way, you may know of Dentsu's 10 Principles. It was written in 1951 by the company's fourth president Hideo

Yoshida, to inspire his employees.

One of them (in Japanese) says, “Keep your head at *full rotation*, and always be aware of every direction. There is absolutely no room for error. That is what business is all about.” It was translated into English as, “At all times, challenge yourself to think creatively and find new solutions.” What this means is that you can *think creatively and find new solutions by keeping your head going in circles at full rotation (guru-guru) while always being aware of every direction, with absolutely no exception*. While they may somewhat resemble moral theory, the 10 Principles illustrate the tradition of Dentsu’s unique thinking process.

I would like to emphasize at this point that the *guru-guru* thinking process is in no way repeating Descartes’ approach. This is on the contrary, because the latter modes – Finding and Polishing – make strict logical adjustments through analyses. Besides, it is a matter of course that when you get hold of an IDEA, it could only be explained to a third party if it were logical.

Descartes’ approach alone however, is not enough to create IDEAs with fundamental solutions. There must be a

balance between the holistic acceptance of everything as it is, and the austerity of Descartes.

Let's take a look at the four modes in detail, one at a time, so that I can explain this better.

### **DENTSU'S 10 PRINCIPLES**

- Initiate projects on your own instead of waiting for work to be assigned.
- Take an active role in all your endeavors, not a passive one.
- Search for large and complex challenges.
- Welcome difficult assignments. Progress lies in accomplishing difficult work.
- Once you begin a task, complete it. Never give up.
- Lead and set an example for your fellow workers.
- Set goals for yourself to ensure a constant sense of purpose.
- Move with confidence. It gives your work force and substance.
- At all times, challenge yourself to think creatively and find new solutions.
- When confrontation is necessary, don't shy away from it. Confrontation is often necessary to achieve progress.

## **Feeling Mode – Take it in with an “Uh-huh”**

### IDEA ingredients

In order to create an IDEA, you must first prepare the ingredients. This is the purpose of the first mode, Feeling.

There are two main ingredients that we need.

The first ingredient is all that concerns everything that ever happened on earth, in every place, throughout history. This is called general knowledge. It is not within the bounds of education as we know it, but includes all life experiences like your best date ever, or family quarrels over inheritance.

The other ingredient is all that concerns every problem you come across. If it is about advertising, then it is everything that concerns a product and its consumers. If it is about wanting to see your girlfriend smile, then it is everything that has to do with her, from tastes and preferences, her recent moods, gifts you’ve ever received from her, success stories in magazines, you name it. Anyway, you need everything that could

possibly have to do with anything, and that is called *specialized knowledge*.

Just as you need the finest ingredients to cook a delicious meal, you cannot do without a wealth of general knowledge and specialized knowledge to create an outstanding IDEA. The problem here is that some people strongly believe that the ingredients of the IDEA must be unprejudiced. This is the Curse of Descartes.

### The curse of Descartes

Knowledge is information with meaning. For instance, what we see feeding into the Internet in huge amounts is nothing more than information. However, the moment this information mingles with human thought, it becomes knowledge. For this reason, we must have information in order to prepare knowledge. There are two types of information: *qualitative data and quantitative data*.

We know very well that qualitative data that cannot be quantified – such as live voices we hear during interviews, or

impressions we see with our own eyes – help a great deal in creating IDEAs, but of course we could never be too sure. When it comes to business for example, there are none too few, who will depend on quantitative data in the end, asking: “Has this been verified \_?” These people have a long way to go before gaining the knowledge they need to form a new viewpoint.

That something is correct because it is based on quantitative data that is misleading in the first place. If you have ever filled out a questionnaire, I’m sure you can relate. The completed answer sheet is a specimen of loose ends. Surely you haven’t lied, but this is not who you really are. If you were asked another way, perhaps you could have explained yourself better. In the end, you’re left with a feeling of incompleteness.

These answers are translated into figures to represent hundreds, thousands or even tens of thousands and become the calculated survey result. This may be useful as reference, but it is in no way an ingenious piece of evidence *that presents itself so clearly and distinctly as to exclude all ground of doubt.*

To successfully collect the ingredients we need to create

IDEAs, we must first overcome the Curse of Descartes.

## The teachings of Bruce Lee

I wonder if you know of Bruce Lee, Hong Kong’s superstar. During an early scene in one of his most famous movies “Enter the Dragon,” Bruce Lee is teaching a student how to focus on *emotional content*, and when the student gets it right, Bruce Lee asks, “That’s it! How does it feel?” The student says, “Let me think...,” and Bruce Lee tells him:

*Don’t think! Feel!!*

*It is like a finger pointing away to the moon.*

*Don’t concentrate on the finger, or you will miss all of that heavenly glory.*

What he is saying is that by concentrating on the *part* that is your finger, you are separating yourself from the moon. As a result, you are losing sight of your true self who ought to be experiencing the sensation of being one with the moon. In this disposition we can find a way to overcome the Curse of Descartes.

Whether your data is quantitative or qualitative, take every bit of information there is and “Don’t think! Feel!!” Do not separate it into manageable tiny parts, but work to absorb all possible forms of information as knowledge, as though you are creating a separate entirety within yourself.

To be able to do this, the point is to put a stop on all decision-making and temporarily understand your input with a quote-unquote. It could be data analyzed with leading-edge methods. Just take it in as it is with an “uh-huh.” Perhaps it’s a rumor you overheard somewhere. Just take it in with an “uh-huh.” Financial statements, corporate history, a message from the president – anything you think might have any connection – take it all in equally, with an “uh-huh.”

Keep repeating these *uh-huh*’s until the realm of your subject begins to develop on its own within you.

Some people, when simply given the information “Don’t think, Feel!” will shut off their thinking process completely and just gaze. Needless to say, that will not lead you to obtain the necessary information. What needs to be done here is not to shut off the thinking process, but to shut off the deciding



process. In other words, simply take it in before worrying about whether there are any reasons to doubt that this information is reliable. Then when you are confronted with that information, your brain kicks into full gear.

When I was in charge of a world famous girls’ doll, I spent several hours in a specialty shop, taking in every bit of information available inside that pink store, with my entire body – simply with an “uh-huh.” Even when I, a middle-aged man, took a number of character toys to the cash register and was offered a fan club invitation with a look that said, “I understand,” I took it in with an “uh-huh” – with my entire body.

When I was in a certain Japanese suburban city planning my strategy for Chinese seasoning, I took in as many stories from local businessmen and housewives as I could, with an “uh-huh.” I ate in 11 Chinese restaurants during my two nights and three days there, with an “uh-huh,” making my stomach go through all kinds of abuse.

It’s important to use every physical experience and not only objective information that the left-brain can understand.

For argument’s sake, I could say that it’s both simply watching without making any judgments and watching yourself watch whatever it is you’re watching, at the same time. To put it more simply, it comes down to “Don’t think! Feel!!!”

## Scattering Mode – Bear Solitude to Make it Work

An IDEA is a new combination

You may get the urge to rush and organize all those bits of knowledge you acquired in Feeling Mode. Wait. If you do that, you'll waist all of your hard earned ingredients.

There is an episode in the Chinese Daoist book Zhuangzi about the gods who, through their lack of understanding, think that they would be paying a debt of gratitude to Hundun by giving him orifices but amidst the confusion end up killing him instead. To get our IDEAS, let's go in the opposite direction from Descartes. We won't organize them, we'll scatter them. By doing so, we think out every possibility for every IDEA until all are exhausted. That is the purpose of this mode.

The most famous method of scattering is *brainstorming*. This method of gathering in groups to generate a large number of ideas with free divergent production withholding criticism, and then working with these to create further ideas began in

the US in the 1930s. Brainstorming is a technique designed for organizations, but in this mode, something similar will be done by one person with the use of one brain.

You may think that an IDEA must be created out of absolutely nothing, but that's where you are mistaken. An IDEA is no more than a combination of specialized knowledge and general knowledge. Think of a certain product sitting on a shelf (specialized knowledge). Then look at it from an angle you had never thought about before (general knowledge). When you combine the two, you're beginning to create an IDEA, and the IDEA is the new viewpoint. Surely the certain product sitting on a shelf has a number of dimensions. And there are probably a great number of *angles you had never thought about before*. Now take each and every one of those and fit them together.

## Scatter training

In the process of advertising and product development, if the theme is within the realm of communication that alters someone's perception in order to find an answer to the issue at hand,

all considerations can be summed up in one focal point. That point becomes the new bond, tying the target with the product. All specialized knowledge and general knowledge are assembled here and go back and forth between the product and the target, while exhausting every possibility.

It is not uncommon for young copywriters just starting out to be ordered by their superiors to “think of 100 copy suggestions for this product by tomorrow.” In the advertising industry, this method of scatter training has been around for a long time.

Say the order is to think of a copy that will make people want to try bungee jumping.

As long as young adults are targets and the characteristic of the product is considered to be a test of bravery, you’ll only end up with the same style of copy, like “show off your courage” or “here’s something to brag about”. But consider appealing to a totally different target – let’s say, a woman in her 50s. Perhaps the bungee could be thought of as a fitness tool for a better posture or blood circulation. Or how about focusing on a different characteristic of the product – like how it’s an

activity that uses body weight – and you can say, “the heavier you are, the more fun you’ll have.” Or think about the increasing number of people committing suicide...

It might be an idea to come up with a combination using another product that has been successful. Perhaps an idea that totally goes against any moral standards. Realistically it is very unlikely that you could come up with a hundred suggestions, but you write them out one after another, and you stick with it. The thing is, when you actually write the words down, more often than not they won’t express the exact image you intended. Don’t let that discourage you. You’ve got to keep at it, using your faintest imagination, becoming more creative with your wording. A repetition of trial-and-error, churning out every possibility until you’ve exhausted your supply – and then some more.

As such, you create 100 samples (prototypes) during the early stage of the entire process, for what it’s worth. While you’re doing this, you push yourself for answers to questions like “Why is this no good?” or “What’s so good about this one?” – over and over again.

A Dentsu copywriter, Jumpei Iwata, once told me, “It’s not the same for everyone, but I can write about 50 in one sitting. I don’t even have to try that hard. You know, within my limits. After that I start twisting and turning, not knowing if I’m there or over the top. I can’t afford to be afraid of making a fool out of myself when I’m pulling out these ideas, or I just won’t get very many done. You’ve got to drive yourself to the limit to create an IDEA that no one else is going to think of. That’s what it’s all about.”

Not being afraid of making a fool out of yourself and driving yourself to the limit are very important factors in the Scattering Mode. Especially for general knowledge, you really have to scrape at the inside of your heart to get anything worth using. The biggest difference between this and brainstorming is that in an organized session, nobody will drive a participating member to the limit.

The more people are trained to reason, the more difficulty they seem to have in the Scattering Mode. That’s probably because they’re subconsciously trying to find the *right answer*. Searching deep within, being pushed to the limit, embarrassing

yourself as you're caught up in chaos – this subjective, passionate, yet lonely process is the Scattering Mode.



## **Finding Mode – When the Imagination Clicks**

To discover is to organize

In the midst of a Scattering Mode, you will repeatedly imagine something working and then find that the image disappears. After a while though, all of a sudden, you've found your IDEA! This is exactly what happened to Archimedes when he first shouted "Eureka!" (meaning "I found it" in Greek) as he saw his bathwater overflowing. It is truly a dramatic experience that comes with quite a rush. That is likely the reason people talk about this inspiration as if it were a miraculous gift from God or something. But if these were products of coincidence, we wouldn't have an argument for the methodology of IDEA making.

The essence of Finding Mode is *organization*. Let me explain what that means as I discuss the three characteristics of an IDEA.

An IDEA is always paired with its challenge

Let me remind you of my definition of IDEA. It is a *brand new perspective towards a goal that can pinpoint solutions*.

The challenge that needs a solution is what separates an IDEA from an offhand thought. It's quite simple but you would be surprised at the number of people who don't realize this.

You discover your IDEA (Finding) the moment your Goal-Challenge-IDEA structure is aligned, thus clarifying the solution to your goal. That something that just wasn't in place, no matter how hard you wracked your brain and thought about it, suddenly organized itself and you feel so much better. It's like when the last piece fits perfectly into a very challenging jigsaw puzzle.



Many people also misunderstand, but in fact the challenge only becomes clear the moment the IDEA is discovered.

With logical thinking, the challenge that requires a solution

first comes to light after a succession of objective analyses. However, the issue here is that all else has failed. Under these circumstances you will not be able to find a single clue to your solution by analyzing the past.

You may already have noticed, but while you are exhausting all thinkable IDEA possibilities in Scattering Mode, you are also deliberating an equal number of challenges. The third mode – Finding – is finding the perfect match, pairing the challenge with its IDEA.

“From here on, it is not how quickly you can find an answer to a question, but how interesting you can make the question to begin with. The point is taking that seemingly hopeless question and turning it into a drama that has grasped everyone’s attention.” These were the words of wisdom written by my master at Dentsu in his book. As in creating an IDEA, establishing the challenge is an extremely creative process.

**IDEAS are expressed in words**

Actually, a lot of people find it difficult to explain their IDEAs. This is the same as not having an IDEA at all. An IDEA must

be clearly organized and expressed in words.

At first this may seem quite natural, but it comes with a segment that is easy to miss.

IDEAs are new combinations. New perspectives. In other words they did not exist in this world until a few moments ago. It is not easy to explain something that is totally new to this world, and that is because you cannot explain it in everyday language.

This is when metaphors come in handy. When you want to explain something, you can borrow from something else and use it as a metaphor. “Art is magic,” or “time is money,” for example.

Using metaphors helps you to instinctively understand, and in turn others to understand your intentions. In the idea of cloud computing for instance, the metaphor was successful in making users instinctively understand that they are paying for service provided by someone on the other side of the Internet. As a result, a large number of businesses joined in, helping the

industry to thrive.

According to Aristotle, “Now strange words simply puzzle us; ordinary words convey only what we know already. It is from metaphor that we can best get hold of something fresh.”

When putting IDEAs into words, a good metaphor is the key.

**An IDEA will fit on the palm of your hand**

The third characteristic is that an IDEA will fit on the palm of your hand. This is a vital point in Finding Mode – another thing my master taught me.

The Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity is a place where people from the advertising industry across the globe gather and compete with their IDEAs. As it is the top notch, all IDEAs have cleared a certain level, making this a good collection of examples for anyone to study.

When I took part as a member of the jury in the 56th Cannes Lions (2009), three campaigns competed for the Media Grand Prix. Of them, I found South Africa’s Trillion-Dollar Campaign to be the most overwhelming.

## TRILLION-DOLLAR CAMPAIGN

Flyers

Billboard

Posters

\*Real Zimbabwean bills were used as paper for all flyers, billboards and posters.

In just a few hours after the campaign was launched it was major news, attracting over two million hits on the web in one week, with The Zimbabwean flowing back into the country across the border like never before.

As part of his regime's ironfisted policy, President Mugabe had imposed extreme luxury taxes on a new independent local paper called The Zimbabwean, making it impossible for the paper to survive. The company had to raise funds in South Africa and other neighboring countries so that it could once again provide opinion at home.

We could easily establish a number of challenges to reach this goal: *“Getting the newspaper’s achievements known.”* *“Spread awareness about Mugabe’s oppression of speech against the newspaper.”* *“Make it known that the newspaper is in an economic bind.”* – among others.

They had chosen to “Spread awareness about Mugabe’s evil regime.” In order to find a solution, they focused on the trillion-dollar bill that inflation had reduced the value of no more than a piece of paper. The IDEA of advertising on trillion-dollar bills because it was cheaper than using white poster paper was such a powerful message in itself, that it aroused considerable public opinion. I hear it led to a number of successful fund-raisers.



Regardless of the fact that the purpose was to raise money, it was because the challenge was established in the spirit of journalism that this campaign undoubtedly attracted the amount of sentiment it did.

The campaign that surpassed both “Trillion Dollar Campaign” and “The Best Job in the World” (which I will discuss later) to

win the Grand Prix was Japan’s entry, “Kit Mail.”

## KIT MAIL

- 1) Write message
- 2) Affix stamp
- 3) Mail

Sold in over 20,000 post offices with no competition, Kit Mail was hype.

The client’s goal was to continue to expand brand exposure, despite harsh competition in chocolate stands at convenience stores and supermarkets.

Normally, Kit Kat is associated with taking a break; something people buy for themselves. For this reason, establishing the challenge could have easily leaned toward *penetrating brand value or making up new (personal) opportunities to take a break.*

It is likely, however, that the creators realized that continuing with this type of process would not get them anywhere. What they thought of instead was an attempt to set an example of habitual buying for others, with a new focus; *chocolate with a message – read your mail and eat it.* And with



that, they set out to sell Kit Kat at over 20,000 post offices nationwide.

Kit Kat campaigns may have started as a play on words for examinees (Kit Kat and Kitto Katsu – meaning “sure to win”) but this IDEA is ingenious in the way that it opened up a whole new perspective for the brand image: Have a break. Have a Kit Kat.

For example, each individually wrapped Kit Kat sold in the big bag version has a place to write a message on it. A much larger volume of consumption can be expected because it’s not just one person buying for himself. What’s more, Kit Kat’s competition now includes memo pads and post-its. I would say this is a good example of how a brilliant IDEA triggered innovation.



The campaign that got most of the world's attention was perhaps an entry from Australia called *The Best Job in the World*. The client was Tourism Queensland whose goal was to *Promote the Great Barrier Reef to the World, on a One-million Dollar Budget*.

The IDEA that made this possible was *The Best Job in the World (at the Great Barrier Reef)*. A small corner of a newspaper read: “Six months on Hamilton Island. The only requirement is to enjoy life on the Great Barrier Reef and report about it via blogs. Salary package AUD 150,000.” As soon as this ad hit the classifieds, everyone in every country was talking about it. Carefully prepared gimmicks helped to draw attention too, so that the whole world was glued to see who would be the finalists.

### **THE BEST JOB IN THE WORLD**

The campaign brought in 34,684 applications from 201 countries, with nearly seven million hits on their website in eight weeks, and generated a total of over 100 million dollars worth of media exposure.

Logical thinking would have analyzed reasons more tourists

were not visiting the area: *They don't know how beautiful the ocean is. They don't have an opportunity to remember the wonders of that ocean. They don't appreciate how good the food is. They don't know how easy it is to get there. They're afraid of sharks.* – and on and on. Logical thinking would investigate these suppositions, deliberate them in detail and narrow them down.

In fact, the challenge: *They don't have an opportunity to remember the wonders of that ocean (= reconfirming the wonders)* only became fully effective because it was paired with an IDEA. You cannot find new viewpoints through challenges by thinking logically.

This campaign was successful in involving the entire world on a very limited budget. What made it successful was this simple IDEA: The Best Job in the World.



*The Trillion-Dollar Campaign – Kit Mail – The Best Job in the World.*

All three of these IDEAs use words that an elementary school child would understand. They are short and to the point. Although the campaigns are large-scale, they do not have structures that are sophisticated with great numbers of elements. Also, the choice of words that help people to see is much more convincing than using business jargon that sounds correct.

Brilliant IDEAs are familiar, simple and real. That's why they can *fit on the palm of your hand*.

An IDEA always comes with its challenge as a set. It is expressed in words. It fits on the palm of your hand. The purpose of this mode - Finding - is to keep these characteristics in mind when you make your discovery.

When you discover, the most important thing is that the Goal–Challenge–IDEA structure is established logically. Carefully make sure that your goal, your challenge and your IDEA represent your methods and purposes. It will not be easy to organize everything clearly, but keep at it and search for

those words that in the end, fit perfectly.

Unlike the eastern approach in Feeling Mode and Scattering Mode, Finding Mode requires a western sense of austerity.

## **Polishing Mode – Reconfigure Every Technology**

### Three elements of innovation

The purpose of Polishing Mode is to realize the IDEA. Follow the new perspective that the IDEA is pointing to and restructure the plan.

Dentsu identifies the three elements of innovation as *Entrepreneurship, IDEAs and Technology*. Notice that IDEAs are separated from technology.

For example, in advertising, there are a great number of technologies. The technology needed to create an interesting commercial; the technology needed to write a sentimental copy; the technology needed to plan graphic design and media – staging a large-scale event or researching advertising effects are also important skills which require technologies. These technologies each turn into concrete plans under certain perspectives and when they're all grouped together, it's called a campaign.

### **THREE ELEMENTS OF INNOVATION**

- Entrepreneurship
- IDEAs
- Technology

Later on when a new IDEA has risen, old perspectives are thrown out and the group is dismantled. Then, following the new perspective illustrated by this IDEA, technologies are built up again from scratch.

As such, in Polishing Mode, technologies are reconfigured by IDEAs before being sent out into the world as concrete plans.

## Samurai Machine SESSYA-1

A local shopping area called *Ekinan* was losing customers due to the newly established huge shopping mall nearby. *Ekinan* was quickly becoming forgotten by the local people and as a result, a fish shop, a butcher's shop, and other establishments went out of business. *Ekinan* continued to decline and there was an urgent need to seek a way to re-vitalize the area.

To solve this situation, we proposed the creation of a character called “Samurai Machine SESSYA-1” based on the

IDEA of “a hero next door” that you can go see every day. All details of the project were based on this perspective.

The first step was to make a TV drama series.

The great samurai family and Shogun Tokugawa, the head of Edo, were originally from this area and that’s how the samurai character SESSYA-1 was born. The story was about SESSYA-1’s fight against Splash Alien who was planning to invade our planet Earth. The drama took place in the real *Ekinan* shopping area, and actual people who worked in *Ekinan* appeared in every episode. In the story, Splash Alien tries to take over *Ekinan* and attacks SESSYA-1. The drama had 13 episodes in total and aired every Sunday morning on a local TV station.

The next step was to organize a free “Hero Show.”

When viewers visited *Ekinan*, they could meet not only the drama’s performers (actual owners and workers from the vegetable shop, the noodle restaurant and so on), but also the main characters, SESSYA-1 and Splash Alien. Though it was a secret kept especially from the children, those who wore the full-body suits were the people from *Ekinan* who had some spare time to volunteer and play the hero. Visitors could get their pictures taken with SESSYA-1 and Splash Alien or even



get autographs. The local *Ekinan* shopping area turned into an amusement park people could enjoy for free.

Finally, we prepared a flow plan to induce visitors to drop in and do some shopping.

An original poster was created for each of the 80 shops. Also, each shop released original products related to the character and the show. The products were only available at the *Ekinan* shops, and this attracted more customers.

The project immediately aroused a lot of attention on the Internet. The number of customers dropping by the area increased by 120%. The area regained vitality with the participation of shop owners themselves and the project was a great success.

A number of people have been involved in this project. The screenwriter, the director, the actors, the cameramen, the actual vegetable shop and the noodle restaurant owners – all of these people worked based on one perspective: “a hero next door.” As a result, a total project with one function became complete.

From the goal and from the plan

Well then. In Finding Mode, we carefully checked the logical consistency of the Goal-Challenge-IDEA structure. In Polishing Mode also, we need to totally verify the linear connection: Goal-Challenge-IDEA-Plan.

It is especially important that while creating the plan based on the perspective illustrated by the IDEA, to check and make sure that meanwhile the IDEA really has the power to create a master plan. This is where the IDEA that was found in Finding Mode is thoroughly polished from both the goal end and the plan end of the line.



I often see people diligently clutching on to every IDEA they ever get hold of, as if it's the gospel. But holding on to an IDEA that is not bringing you a good plan defeats the entire purpose. If you think you need to, don't hesitate to rearrange

your IDEA.

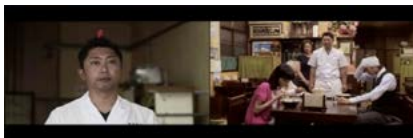
You must use every technology to launch the plan, all the while polishing your IDEA – until the bitter end.



SESSYA-1

Splash Alien

A real shop at Ekinan



The actual noodle shop owner

Shop owner appearing on the drama

## Thus IDEAs Become Addictive

Enter the spiral

So, what do you think of *guru-guru* thinking?

The Feeling Mode is a *left brain*→*right brain* process taking in every piece of information and treating it as part of a whole. The Scattering Mode spreads the image subjectively in a *right brain*→*right brain* process. In the Finding Mode, the image is organized in a *right brain*→*left brain* process, and finally, the Polishing Mode requires the reconfiguration of technology from a brand new perspective, making it a *left brain*→*left brain* process.

Contrary to common belief, the right brain plays a key role in collecting data, and the moment the IDEA is discovered (Finding), the left brain must take over.

By simply making one round through the four modes, you are traveling through the left brain to the right and from the right brain back to the left, using your whole brain equally – right brain thinking yet left brain thinking, vertical thinking yet

lateral thinking, linear thinking yet non-linear thinking, logical yet creative, correct yet playful. All of these are what makes up *guru-guru* thinking.

In the end, as I mentioned before, this process does not stop at one cycle. Once you are in Polishing Mode, you somehow find yourself back in Feeling Mode, starting you on a journey through an endless spiral.

When your IDEA is implemented as a plan, the world will react in a number of ways. Pay close attention, because by *feeling* you will once again get hold of ingredients you need to create IDEAs.

For this, you will need specialized knowledge to find a solution to the present situation, and at the same time general knowledge to begin working a completely different problem. In advertising, knowledge gained from campaigns for food products and electronics is of course useful in its respective fields, but at the same time could prove to be very helpful in a motor vehicle campaign.

As you can see, the spiral is never-ending. It continues to go *guru-guru* (round and round and round and round). Of course success helps, but even failure is an ingredient you need for your next IDEA. Rich experiences give rise to quality IDEAs, which further lead to quality experiences. Thus IDEAs become addictive.

### ***GURU-GURU* THINKING FLOWCHART**

left brain → right brain

1) Feeling

right brain → right brain

2) Scattering

right brain → left brain

3) Finding

left brain → left brain

4) Polishing

## And Finally... Innovation

### The SECI process

In *guru-guru* thinking, one individual uses one brain to create an IDEA. Let me focus a little bit more on how this can work to produce innovation (not just technological innovation but innovative changes in a broad sense of the term, with new values) in organizations, businesses or society as a whole.

By the way, ever since I joined Dentsu, I have always gone to work wearing a loud tie and suspenders. (Although lately I've been lazy about the tie because I've gained too much weight and can't stand the heat.) I was influenced by Dr. Hirotaka Takeuchi, my strategy professor at university. In 1995, Dr. Takeuchi and Dr. Ikujiro Nonaka co-authored a book called The Knowledge-Creating Company.

The two professors argue that “the essence of innovation is the process of creating knowledge.” What they mean is, organizations create knowledge using an interaction of two types of knowledge: explicit knowledge (objective, scientific

knowledge that can be explained in words and numbers like in a manual) and tacit knowledge (subjective, conceptual knowledge that cannot easily be expressed, such as a craftsman's skills).

They explain the actual process of doing this in a cycle that involves four modes called *SECI*.

### 1) Socialization

In this mode, members of an organization meet and, through common experiences and intuitions, share, acquire and amplify their tacit knowledge. They use tacit knowledge to create more tacit knowledge. The good old-fashioned Honda City\* is given as an example of what happens in The Knowledge-Creating Company.

In 1978, top management at Honda Motor Company started to become anxious about their cars becoming too familiar. They inaugurated the development of a new concept car with the slogan, "Let's gamble," gathering project team members from sales, development and manufacturing.

Honda apparently conducts *brainstorming camps* where they have thorough and detailed discussions about difficult project development problems. At this camp, it doesn't



matter who you are or what your status in the company is. Members not only have creative discussions but also share experiences as they build mutual trust.

\*Honda City, a subcompact car manufactured by Honda Motor Company, gained sensational popularity among young people from 1981 to 1993. While pursuing its largest capacity in qualities such as comfort, mileage and power, the suspension and engine that supported these features were designed to be as small as possible. Meanwhile, while other cars were being designed with sharp low profiles to reduce air resistance, the City gained further success when it came out with its innovative Tall Boy design that ensured plenty of space inside the vehicle.

## 2) Externalization

Also known as the quintessence of knowledge-creation, externalization plays an extremely important role in that it creates a “concept” with a new perspective by transferring thought (tacit knowledge) into speech (explicit knowledge).

In the case of the Honda City, the team leader started by asking his team, “If an automobile were an organism, how should it evolve?” They came up with a new “man-maximum, machine-minimum” slogan, which together with a “sphere” image lead them to the concept for *Tall Boy*.

## 3) Combination

In this mode the externalized concept and explicit

knowledge are systematically combined and then reconfigured. Taking the *Tall Boy* concept and using the various elements of explicit knowledge within the organization to build the vehicle is an example of this process.

#### 4) Internalization

Through action, explicit knowledge becomes part of the individual base as tacit knowledge. In other words, “learning by doing.”

This explains the know-how and feelings acquired in the Honda City project experience. It is shared by each individual, while widely talked about in the organization as a success story.

SECI stands for the first letter of each mode, Socialization→Externalization→Combination→Internalization. The process actually becomes a continuing spiral. Interactions between tacit and explicit knowledge are repeated while going back and forth between visions/principles and personal reality until it finally produces innovation (knowledge-creation).

In SECI, a concept is created and that concept leads to

innovation. However, this is strictly an *organizational* model. The key is the relationship between members who share a space and stimulate each other. On the other hand, *guru-guru* thinking that finds solutions by creating IDEAs is an *individual* process. The question is how to do it all in one brain.

You may have noticed however, that although organizations and individuals differ in scale, both procedures move in the same way. Both a concept and an IDEA are perspectives with the same purpose and therefore resemble each other. Because socialization corresponds with Scattering Mode, the starting point may be different, but once the cycles become spiral, it makes no difference.

In short, when an organization is looking for innovation (knowledge creation), the individual taking initiative should be armed with the *guru-guru* thinking process.

### SECI Model

tacit knowledge → tacit knowledge

#### 1) Socialization

tacit knowledge → explicit knowledge

#### 2) Externalization

explicit knowledge → explicit knowledge

### 3) Combination

explicit knowledge → tacit knowledge

### 4) Internalization

## Now put it into practice

That concludes my discussion on the *guru-guru* thinking process for the creation of IDEAs. The rest depends on how much hands-on experience you can get.

You may find that when you finally decide to put it into practice, it doesn't work as well as you'd expected. To make it a bit easier, you can always "borrow" the help of someone who is used to *guru-guru* thinking. It's true that nowadays those seeking advice from copywriters skilled in scattering often rely on them for business solutions as well.

"As copywriters our center of focus used to be on perfecting the copy with a fine expression. Nowadays it takes more than just being 'the expert.' Before submitting a good copy, it is important to really think about what might be good for the client and to make suggestions. In the past few years I've

noticed a change in the clients. More of them are coming to me for an opinion rather than an answer.” (Takashi Nakahata)

“I guess we’re more like consultants now. A simple phrase we suggest could become an advertisement. Then again, it could take on a totally different shape.” (Konosuke Kamitani)

The bottom line is, *guru-guru* thinking is a subjective effort. You can get all the help you want, but in the end it is your own brain that has to be in top gear.

As it also says in Dentsu’s 10 Principles:

Once you begin a task, complete it. Never give up.

For further understanding

Lastly, I would like to recommend two books to help you get a deeper understanding of *guru-guru* thinking.

The first book is [A Technique for Producing Ideas](#) by James Webb Young. In this book, Young talks about the four stages

outlined by Graham Wallace – 1) Preparation, 2) Incubation, 3) Illumination and 4) Verification. This is a classic that also became the base of the IDEA making model in *guru-guru* thinking.

Another book you should read is The Knowledge-Creating Company by Ikujiro Nonaka and Hirotaka Takeuchi.

In the 1990's, this book was globally acclaimed as a model explanation of the Japanese style of management. However its fundamental contribution was that it identifies the application of the “embodied mind” to business, as Merleau-Ponty pointed out. It is truly a classic piece of literature that will never grow old.

When global management research met the pulsating flow of knowledge in the field of advertising, *guru-guru* thinking began.

## **Commentary by Kenji Shiratsuchi**

Innovative ideas change the company. They change society.

Peter F. Drucker's books are very popular. He coined the term Knowledge Society to describe post-capitalist society. By no means was he referring to the elementary "did you know...?" type of knowledge we see in quiz shows that are ever so popular in Japan. He was talking about a more dynamic power that creates effects and change. Conceptual ability and expression, or in other words creativity, is indeed the source of all businesses in modern 21st century capitalism. It comes in a variety of titles and definitions; knowledge capitalism, next society, soft power, creative class and so on, depending on who the advocator is. But the underlying message is the same.

This book takes a close look at the process of creating ideas, which is the essence of creativity that is so important.

For example, advertising companies on both sides of the Pacific stress creativity as their core competence. No other

industry has done that before.

However, there is surprisingly little information available about how ideas for amazing campaigns and concepts are dreamt up. What are their methods and secrets? In Japan, the common definition of idea would likely be inspiration, but it is not that simple. An idea is a creative solution that is produced after the essences of all kinds of issues are carefully thought through.

In many companies today, almost every department faces difficult issues in all areas including management strategy, global strategy, business strategy, research and development, product development, sales strategy, store development, CRM, CSR, PR management, you name it. If there is a demand for each of these issues to be resolved independently or comprehensively, in an original manner, the capacity to manage the process of creating ideas needs to be separated from the advertising company's main field of communication and further expanded to reach more areas where it can be made useful.

A British journalist who once referred to 21st century capitalism as an Idea Economy predicted that there would be more places in such a society for employees of advertising



companies that have upheld the importance of creativity and ideas, to exalt in an even greater variety of interests.

I believe that this was also on So Yamada's mind when he wrote this book.

Through his experiences, the satisfaction (including the pain) of producing an idea and the joy when this idea brilliantly resolves a challenge, have taught him all too well that this power can be used now, to assist in resolving a broad range of issues facing companies and society.

He says he was able to relate to Dentsu Senior Vice President\* Kotaro Sugiyama's dream that "ideas themselves will one day be a commodity and the day will come when Japan is a leading exporter," which is what motivated him to write the book. Mr. Sugiyama is a pioneer of modern creative expression in Japan. I am certain that there are many other diversely talented young workers in the Dentsu group who share So Yamada's sentiments.

After reading this enlightening book of idea-making for beginners, if members of companies, universities, government, media, NPOs, NGOs and various other sectors who are interested could join the young people at Dentsu, work together by learning from each other, and with the power of

ideas successfully resolve the ever serious and diversifying issues facing businesses and society, this would play a sure role in realizing that dream.

Though they may not be big, I look forward to seeing the fruits of attractive ideas inspired by this book.

Kenji Shiratsuchi  
Executive Officer  
Dentsu

\*Kotaro Sugiyama was Senior Vice President at the time the first edition of this book was published.

## About the Author:

So Yamada

Planner, Strategic Planning Division, Dentsu Inc.

Has a passion for food and drink. Finds sheer bliss in drinking Japanese sake while nibbling at sashimi fish at his favorite izakaya restaurant after work.

Writes a column about fish cooking in an Asahi members' paper since 2006.

Media Lions Juror at 2009 Cannes International Advertising Festival

Visiting Professor at Meijigakuin University since 2012.

All proceeds to So Yamada from sales of this book will be donated to the Hitotsubachi University Fund.

The IDEA Textbook

*Guru-guru* Thinking – Dentsu-style

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