Review

_The Silent Language_
By Edward T. Hall
Reviewed by Mal Warwick

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The book also explores the reasons for this phenomenon, as well as the causes of war and conflict. The authors do touch on the way in which evangelicals and right-wing Christian extremists have found “divine” reasons to justify and continue the systematic oppression of women. Instead, the chapter on Islam comes perilously close to reinforcing widely held negative stereotypes about Muslims.

The book misses the opportunity to make the critical point that the realization of women’s rights depends on the existence of secular civil space that is only possible after societies have achieved genuine separation of church and state. That separation of church and state is crucial for the gradual emancipation of women in the West, a struggle that has taken centuries. Women in the developing world are trying to achieve their rights in compressed time frames—most of their societies gained independence from European colonizers barely 50 years ago.

What the book does effectively is to make the foreign terrain of women’s rights accessible to an average American. Although they may not have intended to, the authors blow a fresh wind into the sails of the women’s movement right here in the United States, for much more needs to be done at home as well as overseas. Violence against women in the United States continues to be a leading public health menace, and women and children make up 70 percent of the poor, and women still constitute a mere 44 percent of the U.S. Congress.

It is critical that the message we take away from this book is not simply horror at the epidemic of global gender violence and injustice. Half the Sky reminds us that women also hold solutions to our world’s greatest challenges. If Sakina Yacoobi and the girls of Afghanistan can risk their lives to overcome illiteracy, poverty, and violence, then we must be their allies by holding our own governments, corporations, and philanthropic sectors to their promises to realize women’s rights. That would make the world a brighter and more hopeful place for women around the world, and our collective futures much brighter.
Ideas

How Scale and Innovation Can Coexist

Review by Debra Dunn

Many books and articles support the view that an organization must choose between creating value through innovation and creating value by building scale and turning out cost. The thinking styles and capabilities required for success appear to be diametrically opposed. Innovators are right-brained people who rely heavily on their intuition, whereas the leaders of large, efficiency-oriented organizations achieve results through rigorous, continuously repeated analytical processes and reject decisions based on instinct and judgment.

As the dean of the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto and an advisor to many CEOs, Martin has worked with and studied a wide range of organizations. He has come to embrace the design thinking approach after seeing its powerful impact in a diverse array of companies. The vivid articulation of these company stories, paired with some very useful conceptual frameworks, makes The Design of Business both compelling and actionable.

Martin anchors many of his concepts in a framework depicting the way knowledge and analytics mastery in a dynamic interplay that he calls design thinking. This approach is necessary, according to Martin, to maintain long-term competitive advantage. As an executive at Hewlett-Packard, Martin has come to embrace the design thinking company from the outset. Unlike P&G, RIM, the company that invented the BlackBerry, was structured as a design visionary, and co-CEO Jim Balsillie leads the business side. This duality has been effective at actively pushing knowledge down the funnel while continuously returning to the mouth of the funnel, trying to discover new things or see things in a new way.

The speed of RIM's movement through the funnel has resulted in competitive advantage in both cost and innovation. Martin provides evidence that although it is difficult, it is possible to balance exploration and exploitation. The well-developed cases provide enough specificity to serve as a rough road map for leaders interested in pursuing the design thinking path. Martin also dives into the organizational issues of structure, process, and cultural norms, areas that tend to get in the way of design thinking and need to be addressed.

As someone who wears the scars of many battles fought for innovation during 22 years at Hewlett-Packard, a company that succumbed to the natural bias toward scale, I'd give most companies poor odds of achieving the balance Martin espouses, but they will be better for trying to.

An Environmental Provocateur

Review by Denis Hayes

Founded in 1984, this fast-paced, high-tech pioneer manages the tension between innovation and scale through a co-CEO model. Founder and President Mike Lazaridis is a design visionary, and co-CEO Jim Balsillie leads the business side. This duality has been effective at actively pushing knowledge down the funnel while continuously returning to the mouth of the funnel, trying to discover new things or see things in a new way.

Lafl ey set about to tackle innovation and efficiency simultaneously by turning P&G into a design organization. In 2001, he appointed Claudia Kotchka as the company’s first-ever vice president for design strategy. Lafl ey also dives into the organizational issues of structure, process, and cultural norms, areas that tend to get in the way of design thinking and need to be addressed.

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Whole Earth Discipline

An Ecopragmatist Manifesto

Stewart Brand, author of Whole Earth Discipline, is described on the book cover as an icon of the environmental movement. He actually isn’t and doesn’t want to be. Brand (who, in full disclosure, is a friend) has always been much more of an iconoclast than an icon.

In Whole Earth Discipline, he combines his deep concern for the environment, his paganism search for windmills to tilt at,
and his technological optimism to produce an intriguing, confounding, utterly Brand-type book. By that, I mean a full-throated assault on conventional wisdom, laced with enough ironic riffs and personal confessions of his own past errors to disarm most critics.

Brand came to public attention 41 years ago by publishing the wildly successful Whole Earth Catalog, a practical guide for back-to-the-land refugees from suburbia. The catalog questioned virtually every attribute of 1960s middle-class suburban America and offered a telephone directory-sized, annotated compilation of equipment for rural self-reliance. Ultimately, the back-to-the-land movement proved to be vanishingly small, over-fond of drugs, and stuck in a historical cul-de-sac.

Whole Earth Discipline, Brand examines and embraces the scientific basis of some of the principal problems that scare the hell out of environmentalists. Indeed, his bottom line on global warming is among the bleakest I’ve ever read, and it’s probably correct. The book questions assumptions that most modern environmentalists take for granted (such as that a sustainable future will rely mostly on renewable energy sources or that sustainable diets will depend on organic crops) and proposes solutions that make most environmentalists gasp (such as nuclear power, genetically modified foods, and urbanization as a complete solution to population growth).

What makes this book different from the embarrassing essays of faux environmentalists like Patrick Moore and Bjorn Lomborg (who come to conclusions similar to Brand’s) is that Brand’s environmental values are long-standing and sincere, and he

As Hall noted, “Almost everyone has difficulty believing that behavior they have always associated with ‘human nature’ is not human nature at all, but learned behavior.” In the more than three years I worked as a Peace Corps volunteer in Ecuador (1966 to 1969), I thought of that book alarmingly often: when every queue I entered dissolved into a mob; when I was given directions to a destination and told it was either “near” or “far” even though it wasn’t; when a pledge I’d taken for a promise was instantly forgotten.

Truth to tell, though, comprehending the underlying logic of this sort of cultural clash didn’t help me feel any more relaxed. I went just as crazy as anyone. Still, familiarity with Hall’s teachings continued to help me through the years. Those insights made it possible for me to get outside my white, middle-class skin during my later years of work in community organizing and political campaigns in districts with heavy ethnic minority populations.

All this experience came rushing back to me this summer when I read Hall’s obituary in The New York Times (he passed away July 20 at the age of 95). The article prompted me to reread The Silent Language. Boy, was I surprised! To be sure, Hall had placed great emphasis on time and space as elements in intercultural communication. But I’d completely forgotten about the rest of the book, which lays out a complex and detailed anthropological theory about the nature and “evocability” of culture. Once Hall launched into a discussion of his theory, he started losing me.

So what we’ve got here, it would seem, is a failure to communicate, and, not to put too fine an edge on things, in a book about communication. I stewed over this conundrum for several days. Then it hit me. The simple truth is that Hall never intended for me to read or understand his theory. He wasn’t writing for an intelligent lay audience. Instead, he was writing for an academic audience. This helps me understand how social scientists’ findings are so rarely reported in plain English. It’s because they have no intention of making themselves understood except to a limited academic audience. Finally I understand how communication really works. Or doesn’t, as the case may be. •
How can one endorse nuclear power for the world and not even mention Iran? The answer, basically, is Brand’s trade-mark technological optimism. He conflates nuclear expansion with a nimble skip to “Generation IV” reactors. (All current reactors are Generation II.) With a serious commitment, Generation IV reactors might be commercially available by the 2030s, by which time global warming will have cooked our goose if we haven’t already built an economy relying heavily on solar energy, affordable storage, and smart power grids.

Brand’s discussion of how to deal with the world’s growing population follows a similar pattern. He believes that, because of the power of urbanization, the world population will level off at about 8 billion, “followed by a descent so rapid that many will consider it a crisis.” Brand is lonely in his belief that the world’s population will peak at 8 billion and virtually alone in forecasting a precipitous decline (at least in the absence of war, pandemics, or widespread starvation). To urge environmentalists to shift our emphasis away from trying to gain assistance for family planning and women’s rights to “softening the impact of the de-population implosion” gives new meaning to “Hail Mary pass.”

Despite these problems, there is much to admire in Whole Earth Discipline. Brand starts every section with an open mind, and his is a very bright and curious one. He introduced me to several fascinating people I’d never heard of, like Steven LeBlanc and Robert Neuwirth, whose books I have now ordered. That I draw radically different conclusions from Brand’s after reading his book is almost beside the point. His goal is to make people rethink their premises, double-check their data, and revisit their logic. In the introduction, Brand writes, “My opinions are strongly stated and loosely held.” This is a book to be read with a critical, engaged intellect. But, as Brand himself would tell you, before forming any strong views on these crucial global issues, be sure to read more than one book.

The environmental movement has made such minimal progress in recent years on major global challenges that a serious re-thinking is in order. And who better to lead it than iconoclastic Stewart Brand? That’s what makes the book’s conclusions so sad. His arguments are provocative but unconvincing. The author’s fluid prose and disarming personal anecdotes are beguiling. The chapters display breadth. But the whole just doesn’t add up to his conclusions.

For example, Brand embraces a nuclear-powered future while dismissing the associated weapons proliferation. A world in which nuclear power contributes meaningfully to reducing carbon-based fuels in the next few decades is a world in which hundreds of tons of plutonium are annually shipped through the corrupt arteries of commerce, and in which sophisticated nuclear knowledge is very widely dispersed. Doesn’t slant his ideas to boost his speaker fees or to attract corporate consulting.

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