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## A Review by Koch of A Whole New Mind: Moving from the Information Age to the Conceptual Age, by Daniel Pink

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## **A Review by Koch of *A Whole New Mind: Moving from the Information Age to the Conceptual Age*, by Daniel Pink**

Part of the journal section "Reviews and Responses"

Daniel Pink, *A Whole New Mind: Moving from the Information age to the Conceptual Age*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2005.

Reviewed by Susan J. Koch

### "Graduate Education with a Whole New Mind"

Every once in a while an otherwise predictable academic meeting produces some exceptionally provocative discussion and perhaps even some long term effect. Such was the case at this year's annual gathering of U.S. Graduate Deans, where the Council of Graduate Schools had invited Daniel Pink to discuss his new book, *A Whole New Mind*, in the particular context of higher education's capacity to develop human talent. Pink's time spent with us was a fascinating intersection; one that has been much in my mind as we have been focused this year on creating a new strategic direction for graduate education at the University of Northern Iowa.

The central theme of Pink's convincingly argued and highly engaging book is that the Information Age of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with its emphasis on "left-brain directed" thinking, is now giving way to a Conceptual Age where sequential, literal and textual approaches are no longer sufficient and where "right-brain" abilities, for both institutions and individuals, will be most highly prized. We've progressed, according to Pink, from a society of farmers to a society of factory workers to a society of knowledge workers and "now we're progressing yet again - to a society of creators and empathizers, of pattern recognizers and meaning makers" (50).

I found Pink's analysis of why this shift is occurring to be revealing. As he addressed our Graduate Dean's meeting, Pink asked for a show of hands from those in the audience who are presently renting a self-storage unit. A surprising number of hands were somewhat sheepishly raised, illustrating quite nicely the first of three forces that Pink maintains are at work - abundance. (As noted in the book, self-storage - a completely new business devoted solely to housing our extra "stuff" - has become a \$17 billion annual industry in the U.S.) The information economy and associated increased array of products and services has produced a standard of living and availability of goods in much of the developed world that is unprecedented. The result has been what author Virginia Postrel calls "the aesthetic imperative"; it is no longer enough to provide something that works, to be competitive in the marketplace, that something must now also be beautiful, unique and meaningful. Thus we have the new middle-class obsession with design, perhaps capitalized on most successfully by Target, where you can now purchase not just any toilet brush, but a toilet brush designed by renowned designer, Michael Graves. Pink notes that abundance has freed millions of people from the "struggle for survival" and, as Nobel Prize-winning

economist Robert Fogel wrote, "made it possible to extend the quest for self-realization from a minute fraction of the population to almost the whole of it." We see the mainstreaming of yoga, meditation and "spirituality in the workplace" and people focusing less on the "day-to-day text of their lives and more on the broader context" (35). Thus the number of graphic designers in the U.S. has increased tenfold and creative writing programs are proliferating across the higher education landscape.

Pink provides a flurry of facts to support his contention that the second force driving this shift to the Conceptual Age is Asia; Asia, that is, in the form of thousands of highly educated international knowledge workers throughout India, the Philippines and China to whom knowledge work is being outsourced from the developed world. Responding to the business question: "Can someone overseas do it cheaper?"; Oracle now has a five-thousand-person Indian staff; 48% of GE's software is produced in India, and radiologists throughout India are reading CAT scans for American hospitals. At UNI this past December, our student speaker at commencement was Computer Science M.S. graduate Vanitha Sugumaran; a young woman from India who had already been hired by Iowa agricultural equipment giant, John Deere and Company, to be part of an international team of Indian and American employees writing software for John Deere tractors. Pink notes that in the same way that mass production jobs moved offshore a few decades ago, routine work in radiology, programming, customer service, financial analysis and other areas is steadily leaving the developed world. As a result, many of today's knowledge workers are realizing that they will need to reorient their skills to be able to do what equally well-educated workers abroad can't do equally well for less money.

John Henry, as the story goes, was a steel-drivin'man who defeated a steam-powered drill and promptly laid down and died from the effort, his demise becoming a legend of the dawning Industrial Age and of automation, the third force, Pink argues, driving the shift to the Conceptual Age. Computers, of course, are the cause and, in the same way that John Henry illustrates the move into the Industrial Age; chess grand master, Garry Kasparov's epic battles with super computers Deep Blue and Deep Junior (the latter on Super Bowl Sunday in 2003) show us the inevitable trajectory of machine over man in this quintessentially left-brain endeavor. After settling for a draw, Pink tells us, in a six-game match with a million-dollar prize, Kasparov (who had once said, "No computer can ever beat me.") stated, "I give us only a few years. Then they'll win every match" (44). Pink goes on to provide convincing and cautionary examples not only from the obvious computer programming profession, but also from law and medicine where consumers now have access online to tools for diagnosis and treatment decisions as well as legal documents and services.

I believe Daniel Pink is at his best in Part II of this book when, having set the stage, he posits six essential R-Directed (that is, right-brain directed) aptitudes that can help develop the "whole new mind" that the new Conceptual Age demands. These six high-concept, high-touch senses are design, story, symphony, empathy, play and meaning, all of which are approaches, attributes and sets of skills that Pink argues will increasingly "guide our lives and shape our worlds" (67). Pink devotes one chapter each to defining and discussing these abilities; describing and giving examples of how each is being used and increasingly valued in professional activity and everyday life. In the chapter on Design, for example, Pink explains how high quality design has become democratized and is the key criterion for consumer decisions about car purchases now that engineering and pricing no longer necessarily differentiate between models. (As the infatuated owner of the new version of the classic Mini Cooper, a fetching little auto whose unique design and appeal has raised Mini ownership to nearly cult status, I can personally relate to this discussion.).

In the chapter titled *Symphony*, Pink explains that people who hope to thrive in the Conceptual Age must be able to understand and interpret "the connections between diverse and seemingly separate disciplines" (130). They must, Pink says, "become adept at analogy - at seeing one thing in terms of another" (130). He goes on to describe "boundary crossers, inventors and metaphor makers" (130) as three types of people whose symphonic abilities will serve them, their organizations and their communities well in the Conceptual Age. In the chapter on meaning, Pink describes the confluence of several forces that make the pursuit of meaning possible on a scale never before imagined.

I would have been satisfied with my investment in this book if Pink had stopped there; but because his belief (according to the introduction) is that the six senses are "fundamental human abilities that everyone can master" and that his goal in writing the book is to help the reader do just that; at the end of each of the "sense" chapters Pink provides a collection of exercises, tools and recommended readings to encourage further exploration and development of each of them. To enhance your story aptitude, subscribe to *One Story*, Pink suggests, and for \$21 per year you'll receive a great story every three weeks. Educate yourself about good design by reading design magazines like *HOW*, *iD*, *Print* and *Next* and visit design museums (He provides a list including the MoMA in New York City, the obvious choice; but also the Eisner Museum of Advertising and Design in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and the Vitra Design Museum in Weil am Rhein, Germany). Sharpen your empathic powers, Pink recommends, by taking an acting class or volunteering at a homeless shelter. Play. Laugh.

Perhaps one limitation of Pink's book is that he does not take on, though perhaps he will in a future book, the increasing disparity between the haves and the have-nots, not only between countries, but also within them. I suppose in part because of my own academic background in health disparities and human rights, I would have appreciated additional investigation and discussion about the diverging directions of individuals and societies in the developed world who have the good fortune to be engaging in this new Conceptual Age and the implications for those being left further and further behind in the least developed and poorest regions of the world.

What can educators learn from this book? What changes, if any, do we need to make in higher education so that our graduates will have the skills necessary to participate and contribute fully with a "whole new mind" in the Conceptual Age? As Pink closed his speech at our Graduate Dean's meeting, amidst much discussion he left those challenges, with their implied opportunities and solutions, firmly in the hands of the academy. He closes the book on a cautiously optimistic note, observing that the new Conceptual Age fairly "glitters with opportunity" for those who will move fastest to take advantage of it.

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