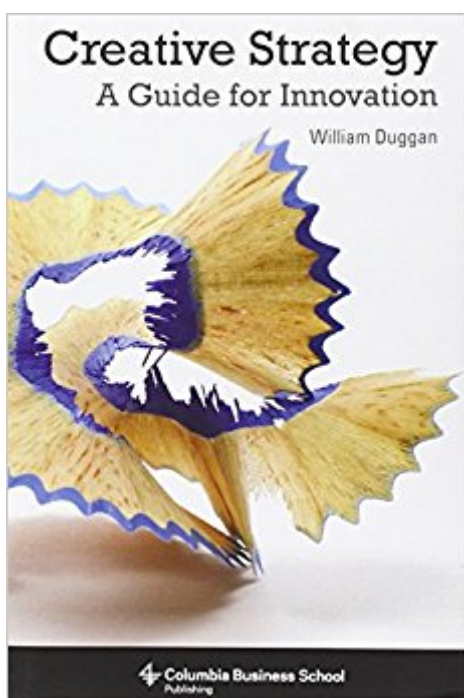


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# Creative Strategy: A Guide For Innovation (Columbia Business School Publishing)



## Synopsis

William Duggan's 2007 book, *Strategic Intuition*, showed how innovation really happens in business and other fields and how that matches what modern neuroscience tells us about how creative ideas form in the human mind. In his new book, *Creative Strategy*, Duggan offers a step-by-step guide to help individuals and organizations put that same method to work for their own innovations.

Duggan's book solves the most important problem of how innovation actually happens. Other methods of creativity, strategy, and innovation explain how to research and analyze a situation, but they don't guide toward the next step: developing a creative idea for what to do. Or they rely on the magic of "brainstorming" — just tossing out ideas. Instead, Duggan shows how creative strategy follows the natural three-step method of the human brain: breaking down a problem into parts and then searching for past examples to create a new combination to solve the problem. That's how innovation really happens. Duggan explains how to follow these three steps to innovate in business and any other field as an individual, a team, or a whole company. The crucial middle step — the search for past examples — takes readers beyond their own brain to a "what-works scan" of what others have done within and outside of the company, industry, and country. It is a global search for good ideas to combine as a new innovation. Duggan illustrates creative strategy through real-world cases of innovation that use the same method: from Netflix to Edison, from Google to Henry Ford. He also shows how to integrate creative strategy into other methods you might currently use, such as Porter's Five Forces or Design Thinking. *Creative Strategy* takes the mystery out of innovation and puts it within your grasp.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Columbia Business School lecturer Duggan's follow-up to his 2007 book, *Strategic Intuition*, is a practical guide to a big idea about innovation, aimed at individuals working by themselves, on teams, or in the context of a whole organization. The real difficulty with innovation is not the execution, but coming up with great ideas in the first place. Duggan uses the neuroscience of innovation to describe the brain's learning-and-memory process of analysis to come up with the best new ideas, and to break down the process step by step—applying the strategic intuition of the previous book in a systematic way to solve problems. The process is broken into three stages: problem identification; the what-works scan, a survey of how others have solved the same problem; and creative combination, which analyzes that process to arrive at a solution. Duggan politely but determinedly critiques the management tools selected by Bain & Co. for its annually compiled top 10 list, describing the pros and cons of various methods and why his is superior. A slim but persuasive guide to innovative thinking. Agent: Michael Bourret, Dystel & Goderich Literary Management. (Dec.)

A slim but persuasive guide to innovative thinking. (Publishers Weekly) With this book, you too can learn how to be a spearhead of innovation. (Steph Lippitt NY Creative Interns)

I learned about this book before it was published and eagerly awaited its release. I've read all of Duggan's other books (*Napoleon's Glance: The Secret of Strategy* (Nation Books), *The Art of What Works: How Success Really Happens* and *Strategic Intuition: The Creative Spark in Human Achievement*) and enjoyed them. In fact, I've recommended them to influential strategic thinkers at my company and have pushed to incorporate their ideas in our strategic principles. Before I critique this book, allow me to give you a bit of context I've earned after having read all of Duggan's books. First, all of his books make the same points. He refreshes the examples, which is appreciated, but the ideas are the same. Each book puts a new wrapper on these ideas by relabeling them. What was *Napoleon's Glance* was relabeled as "the art of what works." The art of what works was revealed to be "strategic intuition." This most recent book's contribution is to tell us that one develops creative strategies by using strategic intuition. In each successive book, Duggan allocates more pages to explaining this semantic tableau without advancing any new thinking. Old wine in a new bottle.

That's probably my biggest disappointment. I should have stopped with the first book. I agree with him that synthesis is the missing piece overlooked at business schools and is sometimes overrun or allegedly replaced by deeper analysis. Duggan makes it clear that analysis is no substitute for synthesis. I've looked far and wide for good frameworks, processes and tools to teach people to get better at synthesis. I have not found the silver bullet. That's why, when I read the description of *Creative Strategy*, I got really excited. This is supposed to be the book for putting his ideas into practice. Well, after reading it I can tell you that it has the same tool (he calls it the insight matrix) that was in *The Art of What Works: How Success Really Happens* and *Strategic Intuition: The Creative Spark in Human Achievement*. He does give you more specifics about the set of workshops you could hold to get a group of people to apply the insight matrix but I think that was pretty evident already. I was hoping for a better tool and didn't get one. Not only does he talk about the insight matrix yet again, he uses the same shop worn example from GE Appliances in the late 1990s to show how to put it into practice. I could forgive it being old if it weren't for the fact that it doesn't illustrate one of Duggan's key points, that new ideas are combinations of past ones. In the GE example, the GE team is able to solve their problem by copying wholesale an idea from another GE business unit. No synthesis of ideas to create a novel idea occurs. Duggan does provide all kinds of examples to show strategic intuition/the art of what works/creative strategy/Napoleon's glance at work (Google, Starbucks, Apple, etc) but all the business examples are about entrepreneurship, not solving the typical strategic problems that most business people face e.g. how should we position our new brand, stop a competitor from entering our market, etc. It's great to see just how much serendipity and intuition played a role in creating Google but how does that help me figure out what to do with the problem on my desk? Bringing this back to the positive, Duggan's main messages are really good and are often overlooked or ignored in business:- Hope is not a strategy. If you can't see a way to get where you'd like to go, you're probably better served trying to go somewhere else. (Although I think Mintzberg develops this idea with much more richness and rigor in his work on emergent strategy. See his *Strategy Safari* for a much wider discussion on how businesses create strategies.)- Drowning yourself in analysis of your problem probably isn't going to help you solve it. Analysis doesn't produce ideas.- Look around you! Use analogies, steal ideas shamelessly, research what's been done before both inside and outside your company. (If you like this idea, look up Gavetti and Rivkin's HBR paper called "How Strategists Really Think.")- Don't expect ideas to come to you on cue. The expectation that your hour or day long brainstorm will produce the breakthrough idea is pretty laughable when you think about it. But, all too often, that's what we do. The net net: if you haven't yet read any of Duggan's books, this is a fine one to read

(although I think *Strategic Intuition: The Creative Spark in Human Achievement* was slightly better) but if you've read any of the others, feel free to skip.

The whole concept makes so much sense. It clarifies the why and provides a practical path to the how. A process for personal, team or institutional use - one that mirrors how the brain works ...

Very good! The last few sections reviewing the competing concepts are not as helpful.

Traditional methods of strategy show you how to analyse your strategic situation, but do not give you the next step, which is how to get a creative idea for what to do, according to William Duggan in this book. The typical two-step strategy creation process involves firstly strategic research and analysis, and secondly brainstorming a solution. However, a brainstorming approach relies on information already in the participants' heads, and usually results in a weak solution. The author's Creative Strategy approach provides a deceptively simple three-phase approach to coming up with an innovation:

- \* Phase 1 involves breaking a problem down into its element parts
- \* Phase 2 involves scanning sources to find precedents that fit each element
- \* Phase 3 involves combining a subset of those precedents to solve a problem

Thus the Creative Strategy approach spends less time and resources on initial strategic analysis, and a lot more time and resources on investigating what other firms, industries and cultures are doing, in order to discover precedents which could be imported as components of an entirely new strategy. The strongest strategies are devised through a process of external research and combination, rather than through a process confined to internal reflection. So, does it work? In my opinion, the author makes out quite a persuasive case, and his method provides a convincing explanation for the scientific process behind many innovations which would otherwise be explained away as unrepeatable "flashes of inspiration". He explains how the Creative Strategy process can be applied to a range of different types of innovation problems including: creating a new product, service or function; creating new business models; entrepreneurial innovation; social enterprise; and personal strategy. I recommend this book for anyone involved in business or non-profit strategy planning.

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