

NANO TOOLS FOR LEADERS®

REINVENT YOUR BUSINESS: SHAKING UP YOUR MENTAL MODELS, PART TWO

Nano Tools for Leaders® are fast, effective leadership tools that you can learn and start using in less than 15 minutes — with the potential to significantly impact your success as a leader and the engagement and productivity of the people you lead.

Contributor: Yoram (Jerry) Wind, PhD, The Lauder Professor, Professor of Marketing, The Wharton School

THE GOAL:

Continuously refresh your thinking and that of your organization by using three methods for challenging your mental models.



NANO TOOL:

“We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.” — Albert Einstein

[Part One of this Nano Tool](#) shared three approaches that individual leaders and their teams can use to stay competitive by challenging their mental models. From “zooming in and out” to learning from winners and losers and visualizing the future, these powerful techniques work to disrupt conventional thinking, question the status quo, and encourage creativity.

The next three approaches are designed to work at the organizational level to help businesses stay ahead in today’s dynamic environment. They challenge the inertia and complacency that can inhibit competitive advantage and hold businesses back.

ACTION STEPS:

Challenging mental models on an organizational level requires substantial effort. It involves large numbers of people and benefits from ongoing work, both of which demand coordination and oversight. Like investors who maintain diverse portfolios of stocks to minimize risk, businesses should develop a portfolio of approaches to maximize their chance of developing new ways of thinking about business challenges and opportunities.

- 1. Seek diverse disciplinary perspectives.** Most business challenges cannot be addressed by a single discipline. Instead, use many disciplines to gain access to a variety of different insights. What would Marketing say about the situation? How does Finance’s perspective differ? What do front-line employees see that others don’t? Gather input from across your organization, your industry, and even outside both. Doing so will help you think more carefully about your mental models and help you find better solutions to your problems.
- 2. Destroy your brand.** Most employees are reluctant to challenge the decisions of those with higher authority, but challenging your organization’s brand can help keep your company relevant in the eyes of the customer. Meet with a number of employees (excluding the brand leader) who will act as newcomers to your industry charged with finding ways to destroy your brand. Typically this is accomplished by challenging its key mental models. After they present to the brand team, develop strategies to prevent such destruction.

- 3. Collaborate with your customers to harness their insights.** The role of consumers is rapidly changing as they become more empowered and more skeptical of brands and companies. This approach challenges previous mental models by using consumers' insights and engaging them as co-developers. Allowing consumers to participate in the production process as designers, producers, price setters, distributors, advertisers, and/or marketers will significantly help businesses develop more cost-effective strategies and better satisfy its customers.

HOW COMPANIES USE IT:

- The open innovation company InnoCentive helps organizations solve their problems by connecting them with diverse sources of innovation. They noticed that companies experiencing problems tended to access only knowledge that they are familiar with. InnoCentive instead encouraged those companies to venture away from their fixed views or personal knowledge bases, broadcast their solution requirements to the world, and thereby move from being problem solvers to solution seekers. From its "broadcast search," InnoCentive revolutionized its industry by showing that the greater the diversity of scientific approaches used in a problem, the greater the likelihood of finding a successful solution. You can add to the "wisdom of the crowd" by checking [InnoCentive's current challenges](#).
- Google's prominence can be attributed to many innovative factors, including its ability to maintain an open culture among its employees and managers. The company challenges conventional mental models by encouraging employees to be hands-on contributors. Google helps its employees feel comfortable with sharing their ideas and opinions by holding weekly meetings in which they converse directly with company leaders. The meetings allow Googlers to interact within and across teams, up and down the chain of command.
- In 2010, Ford recognized the growing power of consumers and launched its Fiesta Movement campaign by giving 100 consumers Ford Fiestas for 6 months and asking them to go on monthly adventures, documenting their experiences with their cars. Ford imposed no constraints on what the users could share. Instead of spending millions of dollars on an advertising campaign, they let consumers get the word out about the car. Ford spent minimally on standard ads, and received over 50,000 information requests for the Fiesta (virtually all from non-Ford owners), and sold 10,000 units in the first six days of sale.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- *Anticipate: The Art of Leading by Looking Ahead*, Rob-Jan de Jong (AMACOM, 2015). Provides proven techniques for looking ahead and exploring many plausible futures — including the author's trademarked FuturePriming process, which helps distinguish signal from noise.
- *The Power of Impossible Thinking: Transform the Business of Your Life and the Life of Your Business*, Jerry Wind and Colin Cook (FT Press, 2006). Offers a practical guide for understanding the powers and limits of mental models, and for making better sense of, and better decisions in, our rapidly changing environment.
- Jerry Wind is faculty director of [Wharton Fellows: Master Classes and Networking for Senior Executives](#), and teaches in [Global CEO Program: A Transformational Journey](#) and [LinkS@Wharton](#).

ABOUT NANO TOOLS:

Nano Tools for Leaders® was conceived and developed by Deb Giffen, MCC, Director of Innovative Learning Solutions at Wharton Executive Education. It is jointly sponsored by Wharton Executive Education and Wharton's Center for Leadership and Change Management, Wharton Professor of Management Michael Useem, Director. Nano Tools Academic Director is Professor John Paul MacDuffie, Professor of Management at the Wharton School and Director of the Program on Vehicle and Mobility Innovation (PVMI) at Wharton's Mack Institute for Innovation Management.