

Analysis of the book "seeing what others don't" by gary a klein

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The book *Seeing What Others Don't: the remarkable ways we gain insights* is written by Gary A Klein, a research psychologist, who claims to reveal the ultimate secret of insights. Insights play an extremely important role not only in big things such as human history or unprecedented discovery, but also in daily routines or business world.

The author Gary Klein is a pioneer in the field of Naturalistic Decision Making (NDM) and Recognition-primed decision (RPD) Model. NDM is a framework studies how people make decisions and perform cognitive functions in complicated real-life cases. These situations may include factors such as limited time, huge uncertainty, risks, constraints, and unstable conditions (Klein, 2016). RPD Model researches how people make quick, effective decisions under complex circumstances. however, in this model, the decision maker will produce a number of possible solutions in minds and then compare each under the constraints in the situation, and select the first viable option (Mind Tool, 2015). The RPD Model has also influenced in the ways that the US Marines and Army train their officers to make decisions (Wikipedia, 2018). In short, he studies how people make decisions under complex situations, which is also the basement of the book. During Klein's research, he realized that insights and decision making are closely bonded. So, he proposed three questions and tries to solve them in the book. These questions are: how to create insights ? What prevents insight from working? How to improve the ability?

Talking about insights, there's a fabrication figure who is extremely insightful to every tiny details - Sherlock Holmes. The scenario when Watson first meets Holmes is like this: " How are you?" " You have been in Afghanistan, I <https://assignbuster.com/analysis-of-the-book-seeing-what-others-dont-by-gary-a-klein/>

perceive.” “ How on earth did you know that?” “ Never mind.” I believe many readers are impressed by the detective’s smartness. Anyhow, Klein claims that if you know the secret of gaining insights, you can be as insightful as Holmes after deliberate training. This book contains 120 real-world cases because Klein does not want laboratory conditioning experiments, which could be very different from real life situations. Also he wants to know under what kind of specific psychological and reality circumstances will people evoke insights. In his book, he believes that insights, is not simple a Aha moment, it is a whole brand new thinking system that has been ignored by people for long time. He clarifies the difference between intuition and insight: one is perceived under familiar pattern situation, the other one is the discovery of new pattern.

I would like to start by clarifying the definition of insights. From Cambridge Dictionary, insight is the ability to have a clear, deep and sometimes sudden understanding of a complicated problem or situation. However, for Klein, insight is an unexpected shift in understandings that change our behaviors, feelings, and goals. Before Klein, there had several studies about insights. Take Graham Wallas as an example. Wallas, who wrote *The Art of Thought* in 1926, described a four-stage model of gaining insight: preparation, incubation, illumination and verification (Wallas, 1926). This 4-stage model is applicable to Klein as well, but the difference is that Klein looks more at examples that incubation has no time to grow and where there is no particular preparation at all.

Klein believes that good insights have impact, they not only change how we understand things, they also change how we perform or act. He suggests that in modern society, performance improvement is important in countless aspects, like in work arena or scientific research. He proposes an equation: performance improvement = decrease in errors and uncertainty + increase in insights. Most people who want to enhance performances will focus on errors which are more controllable. We can have proof if errors decrease by making checklists or using statistics, whereas there is no clear way to prove the gain of insights because it is hard to measure or count the existence of insights. It is much easier to maintain the status quo and focus performance progress on eliminating mistakes we may make in what we do. But if people who want to optimize performance must think both are necessary - error reduction and insight generation. Therefore, Klein creates an other model that has three bases rather than a simply linear process - The Triple Path.

First of all, I have to mention that the word belief that Klein uses is ' anchor', which implies people are anchored to their own way of seeing the world. Just like belief, ' anchor' could be in any form of information or idea. Most people's values are built on what we think is true. So, insight changes what we believe and changes the way seeing the world. However, sometimes anchors can be untrue. After labeling 120 real life cases, Klein categorizes the way of gaining insights in to 3 main paths. Contradiction path forms insights by eliminating untenable anchors and building new anchors which are closer to reality. Connection path, which includes coincidence and curiosity, basically means spotting an implication between things you thought there was no connections before. So simply it means adding an new

anchor and obtain new understanding. Creative Desperation path usually happens under extreme circumstance where people try to break or escape from impasses, then we discard the weak anchor and establish new perception.

Klein gives each path with several examples, I select the most representative ones for every path. For the Contradiction path, he depicts a new young cop's experience. It was an usual day, the cop drove the car and inadvertently glanced at the fancy new BMW in front of. The driver took a long drag on his cigarette, and flicked the ashes in the car. The cop could not believe someone will ash in a new car (this is his insight) So the diver was definitely not the owner of the car nor a friend who borrowed it. There was a huge chance that the car was stolen. Then the cop lit up and stopped the BMW. It was indeed stolen, " the insightful cop did a wonderful job," said by the book. However, what I perceived is that this story has little connection to insight.

The first thing is that as a BMW car, there is huge possibility for the existence of car ashtray. Seeing someone ashes in the car and then directly get the conclusion that the driver is not the owner would be sort of unilateral. Or what if it happened in a particular state where smoking is prohibited while driving, so under this case, the young cop will have no insight. It is more untenable because the logic is upside-down: the fact is that it was the fancy new car caught the attention of the cop, then happened the rest of the story. It was not because the insight the cop had to push him notice this car. If Klein summarize this story as how smart the cop is, I would

rather say it is how stupid the thief is. Who will steal a fancy car, while knowing nothing about the function and structure of it, just smoked inside and with window widely opened when there was a police car behind?

Charles Darwin followed the Connection path in formulating his theory of evolution driven by natural selection. After his expedition returned to England, Darwin wondered what drove the variations in species he had seen on voyage. He knew that some breeders could deliberately cultivate favorable variations. Why would that occur in nature? In September 1838, Darwin read An Essay on the Principle of Population by the Thomas Robert Malthus on population growth and the competition for resources. Malthus's essay claimed that populations grow until they exceed the food supply and then the members of the population compete with each other. Darwin immediately saw how this could explain the variations in species he had observed (his insight). In the competition for resources, any random variation that created an advantage would be selected and others would lose out. Darwin found a connection between his theory and Malthus's idea in the Population essay. " Reading Malthus gave Darwin the missing piece that fit all his observations together."

Connection path is all about being open to unfamiliar ideas to create new understanding. The book said " lots of people read Malthus's book, but only Darwin saw how to apply Malthus's ideas to the evolution of species. " On the contrast, what I know is that Darwin has been influenced by many writers, scholars, philosophers, and friends to result his own theory system. So saying Malthus's ideas fit all Darwin's observations is inaccurate and

irresponsible, even a little bit deceitful. What Malthus' essay did to Darwin was just like a reference. Besides, there is a word trick in the second sentence. It is not because Darwin's work has similarity with Malthus's, he is the only guy applies Malthus' idea to the theory. It is because Darwin, at that time, was the only or one of the very few people who studied the evolution of species, and some ideas in his work maybe has refereed to Malthus's essay. It is not surprising that one of the most famous scholars in human history read other people's work and considered different arguments.

This story cannot even be counted as insight gaining. This is what a cautious scholar should do. Moreover, Malthus, an ordained minister, believed that hunger and disease were aspects of life implemented by God to stop populations from exploding. He saw the competitive nature of life as a divine means to inspire men to work. What's more, The true inspiration that Malthus provides to Darwin was not the one depicted in the book: Darwin used to believe that population grows until people are assigned equally with existing resources, and then stabilized. Malthus' idea of competition helped inspire Darwin to refine natural selection.

This example of Creative Desperation path is about a trapped firefighter learned to fight fire with fire by setting a new fire to create an escape route. The background was a forest fire happening on steep ridges. The weather was dry, so the fire came furiously and fast. The best hideout would be the rocky patch, where has no fuel for combustion. One of the firefighters couldn't get the hideout in time since the rocky patch was about 200 yards away from him with the fire thirty seconds behind. He suddenly came up

with idea that the heavy dry grass he was running through could be his life saver. He lighted the grass on the slope ahead, and dived into the hot ashes, successfully escaped from the blowup. However, it was a well trained firefighter who adopted the most uncertain way to survive: finding enough grass, waiting the large amount of grass to finish burning, and then hiding himself all actions needed to be done within 30 seconds. Saying it as a insightful gaining experience, it is closer to the desperately strong desire to survive.

The book is long winded and repetitive as Klein keeps reiterating the same points over and over, and he never really tell readers how to cultivate insight. Even in the book's summary chapter, he says " I also have some ideas about improving the chances of gaining insights. If we want to increase our own insights, we should know about the different paths" and then repeats the meaning of 3 paths again! Frankly speaking, he just said " who knows?" in a seemingly academic expression. " If we want to help others gain insights, we should listen sympathetically for flawed belief ; If we want to help organizations increase insights, we must first diagnose what is going wrong." Personally, I don't think belief held by people who seek for insights must be flawed, there is no direct connection between the two (probably I will figure out when applying Connection Path in future).