

## ONE MINUTE WITH



## Ken Hudson

Occupation: **Chief executive**Organisation: **The Speed Thinking Zone****You advocate 'speed thinking' – what is it?**

Speed thinking is any time you consciously and deliberately increase the pace at which you think. By thinking quickly, you can bypass your internal censor and create breakthrough ideas to everyday problems.

**Is thinking, or reflection, a lost art in business?**

Yes. We confuse being busy for real thinking, reflection and learning. Many managers have jumped ahead to the next project before reflecting on what they could have done differently or what they have learned. By comparison, speed thinking is about intense, focused thinking for a short period of time.

**How do you teach people to think more quickly?**

Raise awareness that:

- 1) You can vary the pace at which you think.
- 2) There are advantages in doing so. Like any skill development, it requires some effort and practice.

**How does speed thinking work?**

The starting point is creating at least nine possibilities in two minutes. For example, what are nine things you could do for which your customer would say thank you? Or what are nine ways to surprise your boss? Then you might select the most interesting possibility and make it nine times better – again in two minutes. By doing so, you create a powerful concept in less than five minutes. The important point is just to start, don't filter.

Leo D'Angelo Fisher

*Ken Hudson is the author of The Idea Accelerator (Allen & Unwin, 2008)*



## LEADERSHIP

## CUT OUT FOR THE ROLE

Effective leaders must understand and align multiple elements to achieve strategic shifts. **Report: Tim Orton**

- Effective leaders shape organisations, but their leadership is in turn also strongly shaped by their organisations. Except for the strongest of leaders, the organisation is typically the more powerful shaping force.

How managers lead is influenced by their individual leadership, the company's strategic imperatives and its business context. Leadership programs that fail to address each of these areas risk falling short of achieving the transformational impact that chief executives want.

Individual leadership refers to the character, strength and style of individual leaders. There are leaders who can shape either part or all of their company, but they have to be extremely capable. Richard Branson has successfully shaped Virgin brands to reflect his personal leadership qualities – hip, trendsetting and innovative.

Strategic imperatives define the future of the business, determining the issues on which leaders must focus. In today's environment, Australian manufacturers must cut costs to survive, so leaders put their effort into savings and cost cutting, whereas in the mining industry leadership focuses on growth.

Business context represents the

industry in which it operates, its organisational design and its history. Each has a powerful impact on leadership. The competitive structure, margins of an industry, the structure of the company, and the appetite for risk shape leaders' behaviours and actions.

The sad reality of many businesses embarking on leadership development is that the outcomes they want to achieve are at odds with their business context and at times their strategic imperatives. Leadership development programs are often a reaction to a problem that is emerging or has emerged from the business context.

For example, many leadership development programs are designed to develop collaboration. However collaboration is rarely valued in a business that is designed with a strong vertical reporting system and reinforced with incentives. Similarly, developing leadership capabilities in innovation will not yield results if the culture of the business won't allow leaders to take the risks associated with innovation.

Executives considering investing in leadership development should first undertake a searching examination of the character of their organisation. They should understand how their leaders are shaped to behave due to the context in which they are working. They should recognise the constraints they face not as negatives but reality.

Many of the accepted practices in any business have been developed to achieve results. The challenge is when the business decides to change strategy. The way things have been done, the way the context has functioned and the way leaders think and behave can retard the achievement of new strategic objectives.

When transformation initiatives work on strategy and context, a leadership development program can be a vital element in increasing the speed and depth of change. Leaders should be honest about whether the leadership they seek is consistent with their business context and strategic imperatives. If it is, a leadership program will greatly accelerate their intent. If not, they must make a choice: change the leadership program to align with organisational reality or change the organisational design to reinforce the desired leadership. **BRW**

*Tim Orton is managing director of management consulting and leadership development firm The Nous Group.*



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