

# Learning

What is it, and how can we catalyse it?

Learning is important. It is the mechanism that enables us to adapt to our environment, to survive and succeed in the world. All life learns in one form or another. What marks us out as humans is our capacity to cumulatively learn from our predecessors.

Over time, the amount of information we have a responsibility to pass on to the next generation has grown. Some of this is quick and easy to learn naturally, but much is not. As a result, we have created organisations and processes dedicated to this endeavour.

## Some things are easier to learn than others.

We find it easy or *natural* to learn to speak, recognise faces and build relationships. Cultural information, on the other hand, is much harder to learn. For this reason, schools and teachers exist.



INSIGHT 2

## What we attend to is what we learn.

We learn what we think about and what we think about is determined by what we attend to. Attention is the gatekeeper of learning and, so, the ultimate commodity in the classroom.



INSIGHT 3

## We can only attend to a few things at once.

Thinking works best when we attend to no more than two or three interacting pieces of information at once. Multitasking is a myth.



INSIGHT 4



INSIGHT 1



INSIGHT 5

## What we know determines what we can learn.

Our capacity to attend to something is influenced by our knowledge of it, and how recently we've been thinking of it. We find it much easier to perceive or see things we have a frame of reference for.

## We attend to things we value.

Our limited thinking capacity demands that we have some way of prioritising what to attend to. The more value we place on something, the more we will invest in attending to and thinking about it.



INSIGHT 6

## Learning is a persistent change in knowledge.

Thinking is the process that leads to such a change, a process governed by our working memory. By attending to information in the environment, we alter the very fabric of our memory.



INSIGHT 7

## We learn by gradually modifying what we know.

The only way knowledge change can happen is by gradually modifying or elaborating what already exists in our minds, one piece at a time.

## Understanding arises through connection.

We can modify our knowledge in two ways — by forging connections, and by consolidating those links.



INSIGHT 8

## Fluency arises through consolidation.

For knowledge to be useful it has to be sufficiently stable and persistent, and so as well as forging connections, we've also got to consolidate those connections.



INSIGHT 9