

Ideational Change: Why Is It So Difficult?

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In the ocean depths off Madagascar, obsolete fish keep their laggard appointments. In the depths of the human mind, obsolete assumptions go their daily rounds. And there is little difference between the two, except that the fish do no harm.

- Robert Ardrey, 1908 -1980

The Territorial Imperative

Many Oxfordians believe that since they have switched from the Stratford man to Edward de Vere as author of the Shakespeare Canon, by definition this makes them open-minded. Would that this were true, but it isn't. Stratfordians do not have a monopoly on neophobia -- fear of the new. Many Oxfordians, like most humans, resist novel ideas which conflict with their own with raptorian tenacity, gripping their own erroneous concepts with the same taloned intensity which they habitually claim is an identifying characteristic of their Stratfordian adversaries.

The Latency Concept

A fascinating characteristic of our biological species is that we readily alter certain aspects of our daily lives and accept new technology such as horseless carriages, TV, and the internet in the twinkling of an eye, but 97% of us will resist changing a fundamental belief for our entire lives even when there is solid evidence, sometimes massive evidence, that we are wrong.

A myth may be defined as an unfounded belief held uncritically. Despite abundant mythology in all fields of human endeavor, only 3% of humans seem willing or able to question their own beliefs and adopt new theories promptly without a latent period of 25 to 40 years. The same latent period characterizes most fields of human endeavor, including the arts and most branches of science.

Why does it take so long for us to alter our opinions to a new and clearly superior mental model, i.e. a new paradigm or ideational framework? The latent period time-clock begins when new knowledge refuting old concepts becomes readily available, not when it is discovered. A wrong idea, e.g., the earth is flat, or bloodletting is the cure for

disease, may persist for centuries but the latency clock does not start ticking until new ideas are easily accessible.

Physicians are not immune to ideational blockade. For four decades, I watched MDs switch immediately to new antibiotics and new gadgetry like MRI scanning. Yet the same MDs would maintain outmoded concepts for their entire careers, putting the very lives of their patients in jeopardy. As a physician, I have witnessed both crippling and death on a number of occasions caused by outworn MD ideas and steadfast refusal to change.

So we are not dealing with trivial issues here. Think how many lives have been lost by the multiple myths which led our government, including “the best and brightest,” into the Vietnam and Iraq wars.

Guild dogma

Philosopher of social change Karl Popper, in his 1959 book *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, pointed out the rigidity of much human ideation: “At any moment we are prisoners caught in the framework of our theories, our expectations, our past experiences.”

Our culture generally does not teach the value of innovative thinking. Once an idea becomes part of guild theory, whether in literature or medicine, it becomes part of that discipline’s teachable dogma, and students are pressured to swallow it whole. As Stephen Toulmin said:

“An established conceptual scheme carries considerable intellectual authority; a dominant individual carries magisterial authority.”

Young instructors and graduate students wisely resist questioning the fundamental tenets of their mentors, thus not putting their careers in jeopardy. New guild inductees become loyal adherents of established doctrines and pass them on, usually unchanged except for a tendency towards increasing rigidity.

From an Oxfordian perspective, Stratfordians represent a hotbed of ideational status-quo. As Elenor Breed wrote in 1952 (1):

There’ll never be Status
As good as Quo.
All the old-timers

Will tell you so.

Andrew Greeley, Professor of Higher Education at the University of Illinois, described his professorial colleagues as follows:

“The typical academic suffers from an excess of what can only be called religious zeal . . . he is serenely confident of his own judgment and thus assumes that those who dare to disagree with him are not only wrong but are either stupid or in bad faith, or quite conceivably, both.”

When a new doctrine or idea comes along, it is designed to replace the now outworn, erroneous viewpoint or paradigm, but usually meets immediate resistance (2). As Karl Popper said:

“Many, if not most (humans) accept the ruling dogma of the day, do not wish to challenge it, and accept new revolutionary theory only if almost everybody else is ready to accept it.”

As Winston Churchill said, “I don’t like to have my myths tampered with.”

The power of conventional wisdom

One of the most potent forces in human experience is the power of conventional wisdom -- that which we are taught as members of our culture or our professional discipline as core knowledge. It was the late John Kenneth Galbraith, Harvard Professor of Economics, who introduced the term “conventional wisdom” in 1958 in his book, “The Affluent Society.” (3) He pointed out that a basic guild belief “is more preciously guarded than any other treasure,” and that the defense of conventional wisdom is almost a religious rite, permeated with mystique. (4)

A mental model we have learned, particularly when we are young, behaves as if it had become an intrinsic part of our intracellular DNA, like an invading DNA virus. Thus do we fight any new idea with astonishing vigor, as if it were a threat to our very survival as an organism.

For those in the potent clutches of conventional wisdom, which means most of us, truth and change are not welcomed with open arms. As Machiavelli said 500 years ago in his classic book, *The Prince* :

“There is nothing more difficult to pull off, more risky to succeed in, nor more dangerous to manage than the introduction of a new order of things.”

New ideas are almost never received warmly, a process well understood by the Christian writer, Tertullian, in the Third Century (5):

“Cum odio sui coepit veritas.

Simil atque apparuit, inimica est.”

The first reaction to truth is hatred.

The moment it appears, it is treated as an enemy.

Those who suggest a change in guild thinking, i.e., a change in the conventional wisdom, are often subjected to derogatory attacks, frequently personal, as Oxfordians have repeatedly discovered in the past 80 years -- not only from their adversaries but, as an intrinsic manifestation of their humanness, also from their own guild compatriots.

There are some exceptions to the latency concept which raise questions about its being an “intrinsic” human characteristic as opposed to a learned behavior. In particle physics and astronomy in the past 50 years, for example, changing concepts and basic research which unlocks secrets of the universe occur so frequently that successful professionals *must* have a flexible mindset ready and willing to alter course promptly. Is this intellectual adaptability learned, or do those disciplines primarily attract the 3% of humans with pliant minds open to new ideas?

Examples of Latency in scientific fields

Historically, how has man adapted to new ideas? Let’s take a look at ideational change in science in past centuries. The phenomenon of latency since Western science began in the mid-1600s can be illustrated as follows:

1. Galileo was forced by the Vatican’s Inquisition to recant his theory, based upon insightful telescopic observations, that the earth revolved around the sun and not vice-versa. It took more than 25 years after his death in 1642 for Galileo’s ideas to be adopted.
2. Isaac Newton’s elegant theory of gravity, proven mathematically in his 1687 treatise on natural philosophy, was not accepted for 30 years.
3. Verbal abuse, hostility, derision and mockery met Simpson’s suggestion of chloroform for anesthesia, Lister’s recommendations regarding antiseptics, Elliotson’s

introduction of the stethoscope into medical diagnosis, and Pasteur's recommendation of vaccination with cowpox to stimulate immunity to smallpox.

4. Einstein was awarded the 1921 Nobel Prize in Physics, not for his theory of relativity, which the Swedish Academy didn't believe, but for his work on the photoelectric effect. The Nobel committee made Einstein promise not to mention relativity in his acceptance speech (6).

Examples of Oxfordian latency in the authorship debate

Logic, rationale, and evidence are usually not sufficient to overcome guild dogma. Oxfordians are neither more nor less impervious to ideational change than other humans. Here are some Oxfordian ideas, deemed correct by this author, which have been resisted far too long by many Oxfordians:

1. That John Lyly did not have the talent to write *Euphues, The Anatomy of Wit* or *Euphues and his England*, still attributed to him even though he was listed on the title page as "compiler." Both works are clearly de Verean (7).

2. That Thomas Kyd did not write *The Spanish Tragedy* and that the true author was Edward de Vere, as recently analyzed by Chuck Berney (8).

3. That Henry Wriothesley, Third Earl of Southampton, was the son of Queen Elizabeth and Edward de Vere, i.e. the Prince Tudor theory (9).

4. That the "Portrait of an Unknown Woman," hanging in Hampton Court palace, is a portrait of a pregnant Queen Elizabeth, a portrait which was commissioned by Edward de Vere and contains vital authorship clues (10).

5. That 12 year-old Edward de Vere wrote *Tragical Historye of Romeus & Juliet*, not Arthur Brooke (11).

6. That a teen-aged Edward de Vere was the translator of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, not Arthur Golding whose name was on the title page (12).

How can some of our best and brightest refuse to believe these ideas, backed by powerful logic and increasingly compelling evidence? Because they are human, and it is easier to stick with conventional wisdom than risk backing a new idea.

Change of Model

Thomas Kuhn (13), Karl Popper (14), Fritjof Capra (15), Imre Lakatos (16), Alan Musgrave (14), Jerome Ravetz (17), Lewis Thomas (18) and others (19) have pointed out that the average latent period is 25 to 40 years for a paradigm shift to occur, i.e. for a new idea to take hold even after solid evidence against the old model and in favor of the new model has become readily available. The reason for this uniform latency was

explained by 1906 physics Nobel Prize winner Max Planck in his *Scientific Biography* :

“A new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it.”

It is a remarkable concept, validated by history, that 97% of humans not only refuse to change their basic ideas after they are proven wrong, but they resist new ideas with incredible vigor until death separates them from their earth-bound myths. As Thomas Kuhn said:

“Scientists often are not able to make the transition to a new theory and offer lifelong resistance to it. The transfer of allegiance from paradigm to paradigm is a conversion experience that cannot be forced. Sometimes a whole generation is required to affect the change.” (20)

Planck summarized the latent period more succinctly:

“Science advances funeral by funeral.”

Open minds view the world of ideas openly

What about the 3% of humans who have different brains which are open to new ideas? An outstanding example is Linus Pauling who is the only person to have won two unshared Nobel prizes, in Chemistry and Peace. He was asked at his 80th birthday party why he had been so successful in research all his life (21). He said he had concluded that it was because he handled new ideas differently from most other scientists. When a new concept appeared, he gave it equal weight with his own theories, then chose the better one. With this Strategy of Ideational Equivalency, no wonder Pauling was so successful compared to most people who utilize all of their energies doing battle to the grave against new clashing theories.

Ideational resistance is a strange phenomenon when it is so obvious that all human knowledge throughout history is the result of repeated overthrow of outworn ideas. Harold Laski, 20th Century English political scientist, commented on the resistance of “experts” to change :

“Expertise breeds an inability to accept new views

from the very depths of its preoccupation with its own conclusions.”

When models are wrong and the practices dependent on those models aren't working, proponents still cling rigidly and steadfastly to their old ideas without any attempt at reevaluation. It was the great Russian novelist, Leo Tolstoy, who reminded us that ideational change is not easy:

“I know that most men, including those at ease with the problems of greatest complexity, can seldom accept even the simplest and most obvious truth if it be such as would oblige them to admit the falsity of conclusions which they have delighted in explaining to colleagues, which they have proudly taught to others, and which they have woven thread by thread into the fabric of their lives.”

Mythology Begets Mythology

Even humans who are aware of the universality of myths fail to recognize their own. We do not subject our core knowledge and viewpoints to regular scrutiny and reassessment and therefore we remain inflexibly blind to their intrinsic wrongness. Thus myths get piled upon myths in a devastating downward spiral of delusion, quite unbeknownst to the individual who remains completely oblivious to the warning cries of the 3% of mountain top thinkers whose admonitions are lost in the “business-as-usual” quagmire of wrong-think.

“Truth,” as we have seen, is often backed by “prevailing opinion,” enhanced by the unyielding authority of textbooks and rigidified professors totally convinced of their conventional wisdom which they defend, as Galbraith pointed out, with a tenacity akin to religious fervor. In all fields, resistance to change is mighty until the entire guild undergoes a paradigm shift and a new model prevails in a new generation. The poet and writer Julia Cooley Altrocchi, an enthusiastic Oxfordian, summarized this process:

“Citadels of thought, unlike stone citadels,
cannot be overthrown in a day.”

Errors are perpetuated by traditional thinking, often with tragic consequences until such time as critical or imaginative reappraisal takes place, usually by new and younger guild members. The process usually cannot be rushed. As George Bernard Shaw said:

“You cannot convert a man whose livelihood depends upon his not being converted.”

New guild initiates are persuaded not by logic, but by the power of authority. English Ph.D. candidates are told during their Shakespeare training that the authorship controversy is absurd and therefore not an area of legitimate inquiry and research. Most Stratfordians, therefore, never spend a nanosecond studying authorship debate literature. But, after they acquire their Ph.D., they believe -- almost by Divine Right -- that they are now authorship experts. Thus they can immediately treat with contempt and disparagement anyone who advocates an alternative authorship viewpoint.

The result of so many years of authoritarian, inflexible training inevitably leads to faulty assumptions, lack of logical analysis, slanted experience, prejudiced research, and biased teaching for another generation. As Michel Montaigne, 16th century French writer, warned:

“Nothing is so firmly believed as
that which is least known.”

Oxfordians must remind themselves that this is normal, predictable human behavior of which Oxfordians are also frequently guilty. How many of us give Stratfordian ideas equal weight with our own and then choose the better concept, as opposed to instantaneous blockade? How many Oxfordians do exactly the same with new Oxfordian ideas which conflict with their own, never even giving them a chance inside their own concrete mindset?

When a concept is unusually brilliant and accompanied by strong literary and historical evidence, like Hank Whittemore’s eloquent book, *The Monument* (22), how many Oxfordians take time to study this magnificent research? How many Oxfordians reject Whittemore’s work because it conflicts with some dearly-held belief of their own which they have never subjected to reevaluation, e.g. an opinion that “the Prince Tudor theory is nonsense”?

Has any psychologist amongst us analyzed what might be the actual motivation behind the almost instantaneous rejection, often emotion-laden, by certain Oxfordians when major new research findings are published by fellow Oxfordians? Whence derives the surprising vehemence of attacks against Whittemore’s masterful analysis of *The Sonnets*?

How many other near-smoking guns or actual smoking guns, postulated and evidenced in detail by Oxfordians in the past five years, have had to face stinging hippocampal attack, disavowal and confrontation by other Oxfordians without sufficient

time allowed by them for appropriate study and unbiased analysis. How often do these individuals put into effect the Linus Paulian Doctrine of Ideational Equivalency? This has not been an intellectually refreshing or spiritually uplifting experience for the majority of Oxfordians, and it is difficult not to become concerned about the motivation involved.

We might recall the words of Cambridge Professor T.C. Lethbridge:

“It is not the observers who are at fault; it is the attitude of mind of the people who think they know better. Above all, there is the mental refusal to accept anything which contradicts what they have been taught.”

Can only death separate humans from an erroneous paradigm? Yes, usually. Except in physics and astronomy, the latent period is breached only in rare circumstances. While the routine mind is inherently threatened by change, an original person's open mind gives equal weight to new concepts. Why isn't that approach taught in our high schools and universities? Why is conventional wisdom deified? Why aren't students taught that virtually all conventional wisdom is a temporary cultural phenomenon, and that all basic human ideas should be subjected to periodic reappraisal?

Why don't we train our students to recognize and eliminate cerebral blockade, thus allowing intuition and unencumbered new ideas the marvelous opportunity to disentangle puzzling mysteries? Why can't we train humans to recognize their hostility to any new idea which conflicts with their own and to diagnose, in themselves, a tendency to resent and envy the innovations and discoveries of others, even to the point of doing battle with the rare opportunity to embrace a potential paradigm-changing smoking gun?

Universities: Safe Harbors for Conventional Wisdom?

Universities, their protests to the contrary notwithstanding, are veritable bastions of conventional wisdom. They tend to protect, not challenge, ways of thinking. Discussion? Research and openness to new ideas? Yes, but only to a point. Professors tend to encourage ideational challenge in other fields but *not* in their own. Think openly, they say, but let's not push your luck too far by intruding in my own sacrosanct domain of Obvious Truth, of which I am the self-appointed custodian.

In this way, professors often unintentionally serve as unyielding "guardians" of

comfortable old theories which are long outdated and often just plain wrong. As educational and political philosopher John Gardner said:

“The success of fools in the university world is one of God’s great mysteries.”

John Kenneth Galbraith pointed out that “high academic rank . . . itself is a reward for expounding the conventional wisdom at a properly sophisticated level.” (23)

Professors vigorously deny that they themselves are closed to new ideas. Should we ask their spouses for an independent opinion on that point? But how many of us actually do have insight into our own human frailties?

Why is anyone who goes against conventional wisdom and proposes new ideas automatically considered a “troublemaker” and “rebel”? Why is it considered “loyal” to stick with old ideas just because they are old? Why is it “mutinous” to shift rapidly to a new and much better concept? Why shouldn’t the words “rebel” and “troublemaker” be applied to those who unthinkingly stick with tired, old, erroneous ideas -- their guild’s core knowledge of conventional wisdom, much of which is pure mythology?

Why aren’t new ideas given the highest priority? How sad that so many of us, both Oxfordians and Stratfordians, are not familiar with Physics Nobel Laureate Richard Feynman’s term, “humility of the intellect.” Before we laugh at Stratfordians for lacking this quality, how many Oxfordians have intellectual humility as a prominent characteristic? To paraphrase social scientists Neil Agnew and Sandra Pike, there may be an insufficient number of such people to fill a phone booth. (2)

Why is it that intellectually-gifted people often perpetuate their myths with increasing conviction, impervious to logic and research? Lisa Fittko, resistance fighter in Nazi-occupied Europe who saw firsthand the extreme costs of oldthink, described ideational resistance in very bright people:

“Such people -- known for their eminent intellects -- are found shambling throughout history with blinders on. Sometimes it seems that the higher the mind, the bigger the blinders.” (24)

Skrabanek and McCormick, insightful authors of *Follies & Fallacies in Medicine*, explained this intriguing paradox by citing Francis Bacon’s explanation from the 1600s:

“The more intelligent the authorities, the more idiotic will

be some of their claims. When such a man sets out in the wrong direction, his superior skill and swiftness will lead him proportionately further astray.” (25)

Is the time ripe for Oxfordian ideational change?

The Greeks have a word, *kairos*, meaning a time ripe for change. Hugh Prather amplified this concept:

“There is a time to let things happen,

And a time to MAKE things happen.”

Is the time NOW to make it happen that Edward de Vere is finally, after 400 years, recognized as Shakespeare? If so, are we Oxfordians ready to meet that exciting challenge? How much time are we wasting on bickering and dissension rather than uniting in our common cause?

Skrabanek and McCormick reminded all of us how knowledge advances:

“The progress of science and the growth of knowledge depend upon clearing away rubbish and challenging accepted dogma and belief.” (26)

In the authorship debate, this does *not* mean throwing out only the obvious rubbish in the other fellow’s dogma, e.g. as manifested by “those inflexible, unthinking Strats.” We must also clear away the fossilization and falseness in our own Oxfordian ideation, of which we have plenty despite our own conventional wisdom which proclaims that we are a superb example of a refreshingly enlightened guild.

Types of smoking guns

In the authorship debate, the most powerful smoking gun would be discovery of the original Shakespeare play manuscripts in Edward de Vere’s handwriting. Such a finding, universally clear and easy to understand, should precipitate a paradigm shift almost immediately, even surmounting Stratfordian attempts to prove them a forgery.

As forensic science attests, however, a smoking gun may be quite complicated, requiring prolonged detailed investigation before understanding is achieved sufficient to convince others. Such is the nature of Hank Whittemore’s brilliant analysis of Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* (22). Even the most diligent Oxfordian may need several weeks of study to comprehend fully the majestic power of Whittemore’s thesis and its

line-by-line, word-by-word elegant proof. How many Oxfordians have actually spent this time? And of those who have, how many have unemotionally applied the Doctrine of Ideational Equivalency before doing so, giving equal weight both to Whittemore's theory and their own? How can we expect Stratfordians to change their ideas if we Oxfordians, for various reasons, refuse to do so?

How might we hasten the Paradigm Shift?

If the primary goal of Oxfordians is to convince the world that Edward de Vere is Shakespeare, how can this best be accomplished? Despite copious Oxfordian research in the past 30 years and energetic efforts to inform the public of Oxfordian data and logic, are we any closer to a paradigm shift now than in 1940 or 1980? Probably not.

Where and how will the long-awaited de Verean paradigm shift occur? It is now clear to this writer that it must begin within the Stratfordian guild itself, not amongst the general public. Oxfordians have concentrated too long on "spreading the word" to the uninitiated and have generally steered clear of Stratfordians. It is now deemed essential to plant the seed of change within Stratfordian soil, give it time to germinate, and then fertilize the concept during its inevitable growth towards Truth.

Ideational change does not derive from the older generation "seeing the light," declaring their error, and correcting their mistaken beliefs. As repeatedly pointed out by philosophers of science like Thomas Kuhn, change comes only after a suitable latent period during which powerful members of the older generation die. It is the younger generation which realizes more and more that the old ideas are just not working. Suddenly the former model is seen for what it is: an unfounded concept which is wrong -- a myth held uncritically far too long.

Once the new bandwagon starts, it is often remarkable how swiftly the myth is rejected and the paradigm shift occurs -- within a year or two, or perhaps even faster in our new internet age, as new information circles the globe in a twinkling.

Carpe diem

So how can Oxfordians best seize the moment -- *carpe diem*, as first recommended by Horace in the First Century BC: (27)

Carpe diem quam minimum credula postero.
Seize the day; put minimal trust in tomorrow.

Or, as Edward de Vere blithely interprets *carpe diem* in *Twelfth Night*:

In delay there lies no plenty,

Then come kiss me, sweet-and-twenty. (28)

Sir George Greenwood said in 1908 that if we knew who wrote *The Sonnets* we should know the true Shakespeare (29). Hank Whittemore has provided a powerful and convincing case that only Edward de Vere could have written *The Sonnets*. How many Oxfordians truly understand what an incredible opportunity we finally have -- that Whittemore's *The Monument* is most likely the only true smoking gun we have had in the 85 years, since the 1920 publication of Thomas Looney's *Shakespeare Identified?*

Stratfordian professors have universally admitted for more than a century that they do not understand *The Sonnets*. Isn't now the time for Oxfordians to make things happen -- to seize this rare moment, pull together and develop a paradigm shift strategy?

Based upon the premise that the shift must come from within the Stratfordian guild, here is one idea: raise \$30,000, buy 400 copies of *The Monument*, and send them free to young instructors and assistant professors of English who are compelled to teach *The Sonnets* despite not knowing their meaning. Whittemore's book would allow them to understand every line and every word, finally comprehending the mystery of Shakespeare's beautiful, deeply personal poetry for the first time.

How many copies of *The Monument* will be promptly deep-sixed and how many will be kept and studied by such young professors? Since no good educator relishes teaching what he does not understand, the number who actually study *The Monument* might be higher than would normally be predicted. Even if only a few young English instructors "see the light" after studying Whittemore's *magnum opus*, which this writer thinks will become one of the most important books of the 21st Century, the ideas could grow with incremental power. Thus could a paradigm shift be initiated -- from within Stratfordianism itself, where it *must* begin.

Now is a superb time for Oxfordians to unite in the common cause of triggering a de Verean paradigm shift -- which should be the central goal of all of us, unblemished by any other motivation. In that effort, we should be encouraged by recalling the words of medical philosopher Sir William Osler about shifts in basic ideas:

"The philosophies of one age become the absurdities of the next, and the foolishness of yesterday becomes the wisdom of tomorrow."

American philosopher William James' message was similar:

“A new idea is first condemned as ridiculous,
and then dismissed as trivial until finally it
becomes what everybody knows.”

For Oxfordians who have doubts about the validity of Whittemore’s Sonnet analysis, perhaps they should climb to the mountain top and reevaluate their own beliefs in the light of Linus Pauling’s Doctrine of Ideational Equivalency. All Oxfordians, as well as Stratfordians, might also remind themselves periodically of Hamlet’s prescient words to Horatio:

*There are more things in Heaven and Earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy. (30)*

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