



Three Rs Book Excerpt

1. The Crisis of Concept

Humans functioning as individuals and in teams, groups, private and public organizations face a crisis as we move into the twenty-first century. No, not the crisis of scarcity that leaps immediately to mind. We face a crisis of concept.

Technological revolutions have created the knowledge-based economy and transformed society according to Drucker⁽¹⁾, Gilder⁽²⁾, Beck⁽³⁾, and other analysts. The speed and choice of everything from credit to commuting have increased exponentially over the last few decades. Yet, our management of ourselves has scarcely improved.

Public confidence in all types of public and private institutions is shaky. We have recently witnessed the collapse of entire systems of government - as well as the extensive shake-up of our education, health-care, law and order, and other social institutions. Wealth-creation, as measured by productivity indicators, has slowed across the most developed economies in the last thirty years. Private and public enterprises have been rocked by a plethora of efforts to re-invent, re-orient, re-engineer, re-design, and re-organize themselves - with variable results. Individuals worldwide are finding they are working more and liking it less. Self-improvement and self-help books, tapes, and courses abound - yet surveys indicate growing levels of frustration and stress. So what is the problem?

The problem has been that our society has dealt with increasing speed and complexity by oversimplifying our mind-sets. Thinkers such as Allan Bloom and John Ralston Saul argue that our collective mentality has become *closed* and materialistic⁽⁴⁾ - we have lost (or maybe just put aside in order to cope) our ability to think deeply about issues and problems. Analysts note that our collective attention spans have shortened to the point where it is almost impossible to convey a complex idea and still *hold* most readers. Today's citizens are used to instantly available full-colour video of current events - indeed news stories seem to be dictated by the availability of pictures, not the perceived social or intellectual importance of their content.

In summary, our institutions and organizations are less productive and stable, our teams less successful, and our lives less fulfilled than they could be given our potential. A collective lack of appropriate perspective is partially responsible for this malaise.

What is needed is a simple, *balanced* basis for focusing our attention. F. Scott Fitzgerald said,

The test of first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function.

Our basis for managing ourselves must become smarter. It must on the one-hand concentrate sufficient focus, while on the other hand recognize the trade-offs made among different goals.

We need some fundamental concepts which we can use as touch stones to ensure that our institutions, our organizations, our teams, and our lives perform successfully and in balance. These touchstones should also serve as rhetorical questions to be used when interpreting information about performance.

1. Peter Drucker, Managing in A Time of Great Change, Truman Talley, 1995.
2. George Gilder, Wired Magazine, 1996 and various articles in Forbes Magazine 1990s.
3. Nuala Beck, Shifting Gears, Harper Collins, 1992, plus various articles.
4. The depth of these arguements in, for example, The Closing of the American Mind, Allan Bloom, or Voltaire's Bastards, Ralston Saul, is far too great to be discussed here. Let's simplify the point to say that analytical approaches have narrowed in our collective western thinking.

© [S. Montague, The Three Rs of Performance: Core concepts for planning, measurement, and management](#), Performance Management Network Inc., 1997, pp 2-3.