Your survival depends on your ability to unlearn. V4

What is the purpose of this article?
This article enables a discussion about what is learning and the best ways to learn. The audience for the article includes all business leaders who need to succeed in a future which is both unknown and very different from the past.

This article does not provide tax, legal or financial advice.
You must do your own research and fact-based analysis using current and relevant information.
AI did not write this article. 100% human written.

What are the critical learnings in this article?
1) Your historical data, facts, knowledge, mental models, and assumptions of how the world operates are fast becoming obsolete
2) The best way for you to learn is to create your own conclusions and recommendations based on your own analysis of data you've collected.
3) The worst way for you to learn is to read reports and attend presentations.
4) Learning and unlearning is hard to do, especially if you've been a successful leader.

What do you learn?
1) You learn: data, facts, knowledge, skills, mental models, of how the world operates. And you make assumptions. Your learning comprises a combination of the past, present and future worlds.
2) Unlearning is also required to get rid of obsolete data, facts, knowledge, mental models, and assumptions of how the world operates or will operate.
3) Learning is a biological process of changing your brain structure. New connections are made between brain cells and existing connections are strengthened. Unlearning is also a biological process. If your brain cells and interconnections don't change, you are not learning.
4) Listening to lectures and presentations results in little learning.
5) Creating and delivering presentations results in significant learning.

Why is continuous learning and unlearning critical to your company's long-term survival and success?
1) Peter Drucker in 1994 explained why companies end up in crisis "The assumptions on which the organization has been built and is being run no longer fit reality" [1]
2) Your historical data, facts, knowledge, mental models, and assumptions of how the world operates are fast becoming obsolete. [2]
3) McKinsey Partners in a recent website stated that long-term performance depends upon everyone agreeing and understanding what reality is.

What happens when you learn something? 3
1) Learning is a biological process of changing your brain structure. New connections are made between brain cells and existing connections are strengthened.
2) Unlearning is also a biological process.
3) If your brain cells and interconnections don't change, you are not learning.

Data, facts, mental models, and assumptions all depend upon your brain structure

What are some ways to maximize your learning? [4, 5]
You need significant and sustainable changes to your brain to achieve major increases in your knowledge and your retention of that knowledge over the long term. This is known as active learning. Some examples of active learning include:
1) Creating your own conclusions and recommendations based on your own analysis of data you've collected.
2) Answering questions in a Socratic dialogue.
3) Role playing.
4) Simulation.
5) Case study analysis.

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What are some ways to minimize your learning? [6]
The following passive learning approaches don't result in any significant and sustainable changes to your brain cells. As a result, there is limited long-term understanding and knowledge retention.
1) Attending a lecture
2) Seeing someone deliver a presentation with recommendations, facts, and analysis.
3) Reading a report.
4) Asking questions and getting immediate answers.

Why is learning hard for you to do, especially if you've been a successful leader? 7
New data, facts, knowledge, mental models, and assumptions are different from and contradict what you've learned in the past.
What are some of your psychological barriers to your learning and unlearning?
1) You were an expert – able to successfully do things without deeply thinking about it. Unlearning takes you back to making mistakes, which can be very disturbing to you. You like to project competence and confidence.
2) You have become emotionally attached to your mental models and the past.
3) Your past expertise and experience are part of your identity. Information which contradicts your past, triggers defensive mechanisms to protect your ego.
4) Past successes create the cognitive bias that overestimates your ability in new areas. This results in your believing that you don't need to learn.

What are the neurological barriers to your learning and unlearning? [8]
1) Learning and unlearning is a painful process which requires weakening old neural connections and creating new, stronger, neural connections.
2) When those skills and knowledge that resulted in your success are challenged, your brain triggers the same defensive and emotional stress response as when you are in physical danger.
3) When you're under stress, the part of your brain that detects danger, reduces access to the planning and reasoning parts of your brain. When you are in high anxiety, you are incapable of learning new or complex information.
4) Your brain has developed many short cuts to enable fast decision making. But when the world that created those short cuts has changed, or when your brain is overloaded, you'll continue to make those same short cut decisions – which are no longer valid.

What are your next steps?
1) Define the words/concepts you're using, in a glossary. I've seen major confusion when the same words mean different things to different people.
2) You believe that your historical data, facts, knowledge, mental models, and assumptions of how the world operates are fast becoming obsolete.
3) You understand that learning and unlearning will be a long and painful process. You need to decide whether to invest the mental effort and time.
4) You need a strategic advisor (or advisory board) that: understands what learning and unlearning is; provides you with a safe environment to transform yourself; and who you trust as you go through the many mistakes in learning.

Footnotes
These footnote articles are mostly written for the general audience and are easy to read. When you do your own research, you'll find a large number fact-based research articles written by professors.

[1] Peter Drucker, "The Theory of the Business", *Harvard Business Review*, 1994 September Oct Issue, https://www2.mvcc.edu/shn/pdf/presentations/2022-virtual/Theory-of-the-Business-hbr.PDF

[2] Samuel Arbesman, "Be forewarned: Your knowledge is decaying", Harvard Business Review, 2012 Nov 05 https://hbr.org/2012/11/be-forewarned-your-knowledge-i

[3] "How the brain changes during learning and why loving the material matters", University of Alabama https://www.uab.edu/humanresources/home/learndev/feed/all-articles/productivity?catid=189&id=1009:how-the-brain-changes-during-learning-and-why-loving-the-material-matters&view=article

[4] Peter Reuell, "Lessons in learning, *The Harvard Gazette*, 2019 Sep 04

https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2019/09/study-shows-that-students-learn-more-when-taking-part-in-classrooms-that-employ-active-learning-strategies/

[5] Michelene T. H. Chi and Nicole S. Boucher, “Applying the ICAP Framework to Improve Classroom Learning”, Stony Brook Universityu
https://www.stonybrook.edu/celt/design-and-teach/active-learning/itow-applying-the-icap-framework-to-improve-classroom-learning-chi-boucher-accessible.pdf

[6] Juan Siliezar, “Finding hands on approaches to remote learning”, *The Harvard Gazette*, 2021 October 01
https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2021/10/study-finds-students-learn-better-through-physical-participation/

[7] Daniel Kahneman, Dan Lovallo, Olivier Sibony, ”Before you make that big decision”, 2011 June
https://execed.hkubs.hku.hk/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Harvard-Business-Review-Before-You-Make-That-Big-Decision.pdf

[8] A.J. Keller, “Why your brain resists becoming someone new”, *Neurosity*, 2026 February
https://neurosity.co/guides/identity-inertia-brain-personal-change

What further reading should you do?

Tom Koor, “Does your company have current knowledge and facts”, Koor and Associates
https://koorandassociates.org/avoiding-business-failure/does-your-company-have-current-knowledge-and-facts/

Tom Koor, “Note taking is key to value creation”, *Koor and Associates*
https://koorandassociates.org/creating-business-value/note-taking-is-key-to-value-creation/

Tom Koor, “Is your company planning to fail?”, *Koor and Associates*
https://koorandassociates.org/avoiding-business-failure/is-your-company-planning-to-fail/

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