

## From Divergence to Group Think (and hopefully - beyond)

I toured the Barber Motorsports Museum with my uncle and saw very modern to very old motorcycles. What struck me most was the diversity of approaches used for early bikes. All had 2 wheels, an engine, a drive system, a steering system, and a way to slow down. A wide variety of technologies and designs were used for each system. If there was a different way to do it, someone tried it.

Fairly quickly, most adapted to a narrow range of solutions, and bikes started looking more and more alike – both from a design and technology point of view. ***From divergence, the market trended toward convergence of ideas. What happened?***

Certain ways became known as the best ways to solve the problems at hand, and people used what worked best. While a certain diversity remained, more was in common than was different.

This happens broadly, whether it's motorcycles, cars, telephones, TV's, or even laundry products.

*Converging to good solutions is a not bad thing, but it creates **the risk of "group think"**.* This can cause stagnation in development of new solutions because it drives a complacent mindset that leads to people say, "Why change? What we're doing is good enough, and besides – we've always done it this way"

Yet if the whole market converges to very similar solutions – products eventually differ only in cost and brand equity. When consumers learn "they all work about the same", more and more choose the lower price option. That is not good for business.

These are times when a true breakthrough can stimulate business and drive market share growth and incremental profit. *But group think stands in the way.*

To complicate matters, most true breakthroughs require giving consumers either a new benefit or new functionality that improves delivery of current benefits. And, here's the challenge: most people think at the level of executional details and pay cursory attention to the higher order aspects of benefits and functions. Net, they struggle to understand the importance of new benefits or new functionality. *Note: See my articles "Bringing Order to Chaos" about benefits, functions, technical approaches, and execution details.*

How can you break up group think? It's simple yet hard. *You must establish a **new** group think!* You must convince key people that change will provide compelling rewards that make business sense. ***You must convince them that the biggest risk is not change, but rather – staying at the status quo.***

You must do this until you have critical mass. If you stop short of critical mass having the new group think, the slightest change in company priorities will derail the change.

This takes perseverance and compelling data. The data can't just be compelling to you. It must compel those you are trying to win over. So, you need to spend time thinking, "who do I need to win over?" Then, you must talk to them and see what will compel them to join the critical mass with you. Then, you must get the data and use it to prove your point to them and others.

Back to motorcycles to close...the market did re-diverge after the initial convergence. Companies saw opportunities for different types of motorcycles...for the road, off-road, racing, touring, etc. Different technologies and designs were needed for the different types of bikes. This is also common...a continuing cycle of divergence and convergence. But, getting out of post-convergence group think takes winning a critical mass over to diverge again...every time.