

Unbelievable Business! — On Decluttering Assumptions, Opinions and Convictions.

Isn't the world of business peculiar? From a distance it is filled with enthusiastic smiles and confident beliefs. The assurance that 'Tomorrow we will do a little better than we did today'. Or that distributed prosperity and meritocracy, continuous growth, making a difference, or sustainability without sacrifice are all vital.

Underneath all this we find even more encompassing beliefs. Two common examples come to mind:

the belief in efficiency and the belief in pace. Simply put, one might call it an underlying attitude of ‘professionalism’. A professionalism which makes large groups of humans pull together in the same direction and create entrepreneurial value.

“The familiar wins over the unusual.”

Despite its usefulness, such an etiquette of beliefs also has a dark side. Our belief in efficiency contributes to a general sameness of outcomes. And our belief in pace favours an uncritical attitude towards ideas. Both beliefs work in circuit: the less time we spend with far-off ideas, the more efficient we become. Thus, to avoid inefficiency, we rely on what has already proven to give desired results. The familiar wins over the unusual. In its extreme, this is a recipe for desertion and abandoning our capacity to generate novel ideas.

Our preference for efficiency and pace is understandable: it is mirrored in how we learn as humans. New sensations demand our focus and our resource of conscious attention is precious. We instinc-

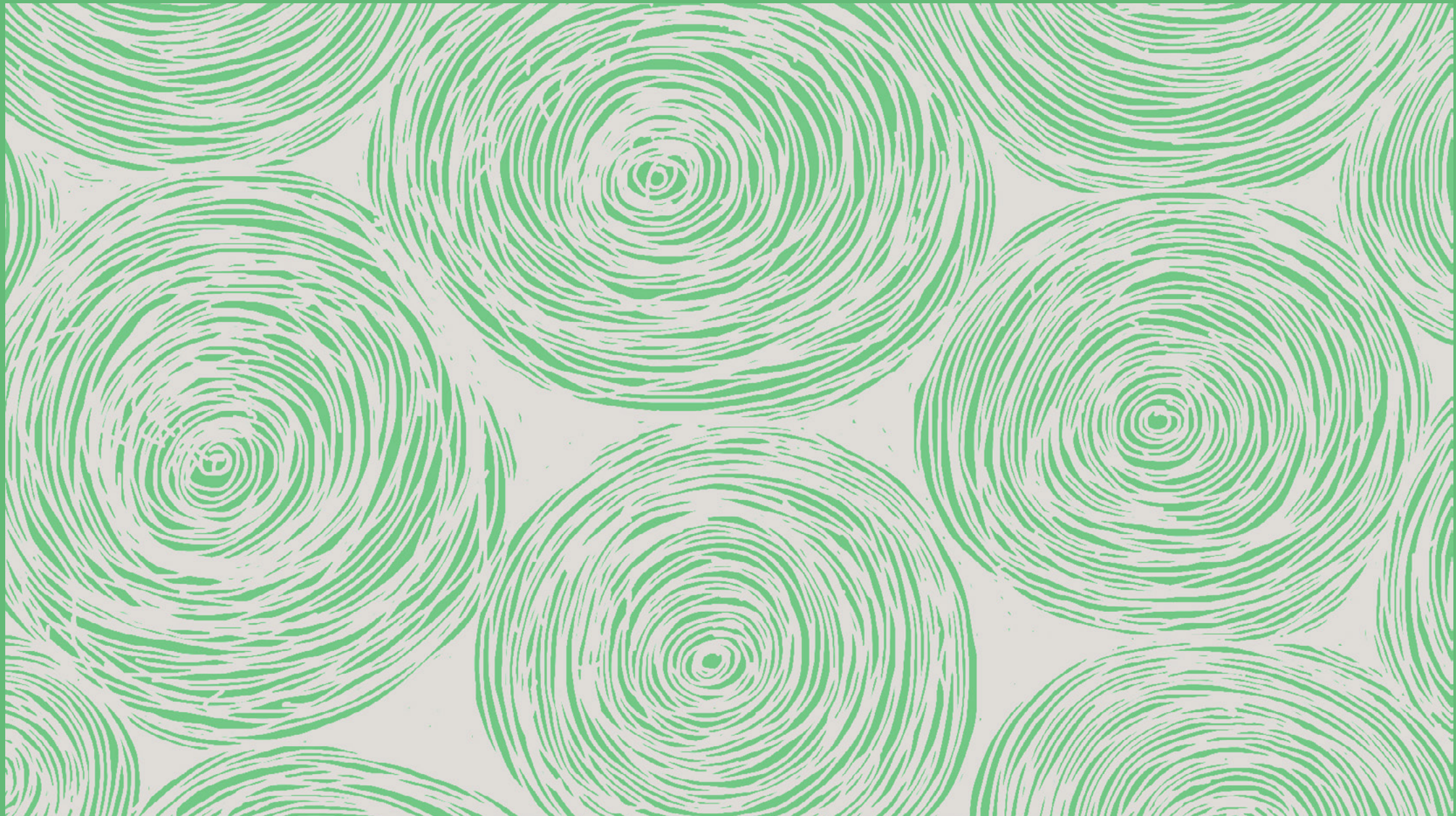
tively seize every opportunity to free up some of that resource by trusting our subconsciousness with as many mental operations as possible (what Daniel Kahnemann refers to as System 1 thinking).

In other words: we strive for efficiency and familiarity. Once a thought or phenomenon loses its newness or peculiarity, our consciousness can shift to something else. Building habits and simplifying processes are crucial to the performance of our minds. For instance, we do not explain democracy everytime we discuss political observations with someone. We simply assume a shared knowledge of concepts.

Ready-made ideas are cluttering our mind.

However, many ideas pass our critical assessment a little too easily and a little too fast. We do not assess them thoroughly. We embrace them as ready-made and take them for granted without challenge — sometimes only because they are the beliefs the

company we are part of holds dear and we need to fit in. The French philosopher Henri Bergson described such ready-made ideas as dead leaves which accumulate in the pond of our consciousness.



The more dead leaves (unquestioned ideas and habits of thought), the less we can truly see the depth of who we are — and the less able we become to discover uncharted territory.

There is an interesting way to find out how rigid the system of beliefs surrounding us is. Think of the questions that would raise eyebrows within



your company. What would prompt the most adverse reactions? What would no one ever dare ask? Do these questions relate to financial transparency; to discussing the company's eventual death; or do they challenge the need for economic growth?

Beliefs provide us with a stability that makes us refrain from letting go of them too easily. It's incredibly unsettling to question our deepest beliefs. Yet, if we do not, we unconsciously agree to limit our thinking. If we genuinely strive to explore the depth of our individual potential, we should also endeavour to keep fishing out all the dead leaves lurking among the ideas, patterns and habits we have absorbed.^[RS]



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This text is part of the zyhw-series, published by
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of thinking and creating — beyond business specialisations
and job roles. We share perspectives on questions and phenomena
we observe: all around the belief systems, narratives, and
thinking patterns in business.

Let's allow ourselves to turn things on their head and
reconsider the thought qualities and creative approaches
these present times call for.

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