Helen Androlia **ha!**

there is no such thing as 'right'.

embrace being wrong instead.

ok, now let me qualify that

you usually work alone in the world of creative strategy.

I don't have hard data for this, but the majority of us rarely work with other strategists on a brief. You may be a channel or SME strategist adding to the larger brief, or adapting a 'big idea' for your area of a campaign. Perhaps you are part of an integrated agency team, or representing an agency that handles a specific aspect of a client's business. Or maybe you have peers, reports or a CSO that you can discuss the work with.

Budgets, time and sometimes even just the number of strategist on your team, however, mean that you rarely have two strategists working independently or in tandem on a brief considering the solution to the same problem.

this, coupled with a curious mind and a healthy skepticism, can make us insecure and uncertain about our choices.

much of the training* and thought processes that makes us good strategists also **make us critical about our own work** in certain ways and **we have nothing else to compare our solutions to**.

*'Training is relative. Most strategists come through a non-traditional path, like Accounts or Research, and tend to learn on the job. I started as a channel strategist (social media) at a time where it was just really getting started and had to learn all the formal aspects as I went along. I'll admit this has definitely contributed to my inner critic and self-doubt, as even now I strive hard to be a 'real strategist', rather than someone who just sort of fell into the work.

two key behaviours influence this:

comparative thinking* is a useful critical tool.

social comparison** is a normal social strategy.

*Comparative Thinking is the process of using tools like metaphor, simile or analogy to understand new ideas, or 'this is like something I know and understand'. We can also use it as a baseline to understand exceptions. Consider the weather as a good example; today may be hotter or colder than usual for this time of year.

**Social Comparison is a form of comparative thinking where we naturally look to people that we consider our peers (not always social peers, but sometimes proximity, industry or even just through social media) to determine the value of our own performance. It can be helpful – motivating, or creating a sense of gratitude – but can also develop jealousy or scorn in a more negative application.

combined, however, they can be destructive for a strategist.

Think about it this way: we are trained to question everything, even ourselves, and our minds crave comparison to know if we are doing well – or better – than others.

If we aren't sure of ourselves, have no one to tell us that we're on the right track and then have nothing to compare our answers to, how can we ever feel confident in our work?

we believe that others are **smarter** and arrive at better solutions **because we have nothing to compare it to in the moment – or ever.**

And it's unlikely that we will ever know otherwise. After all, our brief is the only brief our creative teams ever see. When we lose a pitch, we don't see the other responses to the client brief. It's just us, our research and feedback from our client and internal teams - and we won't know if it will successful until we head to market.

so when you start adding certain heuristics and a couple of spicy cognitive biases*, you get deep insecurity and uncertainty.

*Pick your fighter, folks. Your Imposter Syndrome could be fueled by any of the following, or more:

Anchoring Bias – is my first idea right, or am I tight on time?
Affect Heuristic – does this suck, or have I just been in a slump?
Bounded Rationality – is it good, or is it just 'good enough'?
Hard-Easy Effect – am I just judging this all wrong?
Mere Exposure Effect – is this correct, or just something familiar?

i can tell you objectively there is no single 'right'.

There is Fact, there is Truth, and then there is our Truth.
Naïve Realism is another great bias: we believe that our perspective is the most objective one, rather than how our emotions, experiences and more influence our approach.

What's even more interesting is that we think there is an objective perspective at all.

i have evaluated hundreds of student projects at this point.

i can tell you that **the vast majority** of them did the damn thing and **solved the problem**.

It's true that you are biased. We all are. We tend to skew towards doubt – especially if we had more time, more research, more data, more of anything – because we know that we could always have more information and we would rather be 'right' because we know what could be at stake.

albeit in different ways.

Every tool you have to make decisions was formed by your personal and professional experiences.

The analogies you leverage.
Where you source your information.
Times you were successful – and times you failed.
Your education. Your culture. Your preferences and taste.

My students have always been incredibly diverse in age, gender presentation and ethnicity.
Their tools were formed in much the same way as yours, and each of them used them with
the same diversity of responses.

you do the work like you.

you use all your knowledge, experiences and biases to approach the brief the best way you know how.

someone else may do it differently, but **that doesn't make your approach inherently wrong.**

I've always hated the saying 'there is more than one way to skin a cat' – I think it's really ugly and evocative – but it's not wrong. There are hundreds of frameworks designed to solve strategic problems. One of my favourite strategists on LinkedIn, Baiba Matisone, has collected the majority in a great download. Surely more than one of these are correct, no? Consider how vast the diversity of thought that produced this range of approaches.

there is definitely a wrong though. you should run towards it.

make it your first thing. make it part of the brief.

One of my favourite things to ask myself in the process is what is the wrong thing to do and why?

Maybe it's too obvious, too lazy, or just won't deliver on the KPIs. Defining the wrong and why it is wrong allows to me to better identify what my brief needs to do, and to caution my creative team against doing what I know is wrong.

if you know with great certainty **what the wrong thing to do is**, then logically going in the exact opposite direction will get you a lot closer to **whatever subjective 'right' you're trying to reach**.

After all, if we know it's the wrong thing, at least we know something, right?

ha!

don't think about wrong as a failure.

think of it as **the only objective starting point to determine how you will solve the problem**, and that your solution is as right as anyone else's.

you're just biased is all.

Thank you for reading all this way.

Just know I appreciate the act and the person behind it.

Helen Androlia
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Insufferable Know-It-All