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Reflections on Reading

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REFLECTIONS ON READING

Professor John E. Jackson of the Naval War College is the Program Manager for the Chief of Naval Operations Professional Reading Program.

In early March 2018, the Naval War College responded to direction from the Under Secretary of the Navy to host a workshop entitled “Breaking the Mold: Strategy and War in the 21st Century.” The Honorable Thomas Modly traveled to the College to deliver a rousing keynote address to over sixty scholars and operators from across the Navy and the wider defense intellectual community. He challenged each participant to “break the mold” of conventional thinking to develop new war-fighting concepts in the sea, air, land, space, and cyberspace domains.

Under Secretary Modly said, in part:

In a word, I believe that breaking the mold will require a preeminent focus on the need for *agility*. Agility is *the* term which I believe best describes the overall organizational quality that has determined, and will determine, who and what survives in any increasingly competitive, rapidly changing, and unpredictable environment. This is the environment our Navy faces today, so I think we will ultimately be judged by how well we transition our forces and our supporting organizations to a future in which *agility* is their defining characteristic. Therefore, we must advance agility when we think about, and build, our future force structure. We need more ships and aircraft and vehicles, but that equipment must provide flexibility, adaptability, faster development cycles, reduced maintenance requirements, greater lethality, and an industrial strategy that sustains a modern, flexible, and sustainable industrial base.

The Chief of Naval Operations Professional Reading Program (CNO-PRP) is replete with books that focus on agility, flexibility, innovation, and “mold-breaking” thinking. The following descriptions, adapted from material provided by each book’s publisher, explain why the books are of interest to military officers, government civilian leaders, and others.

- *The Second Machine Age: Work, Progress, and Prosperity in a Time of Brilliant Technologies*, by Erik Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee (W. W. Norton, 2014). The authors—two thinkers at the forefront of their field—reveal the forces driving the reinvention of our lives and our economy. As the full

impact of digital technologies is felt, we will realize immense bounty in the form of dazzling personal technology, advanced infrastructure, and near-boundless access to the cultural items that enrich our lives. Drawing on years of research and up-to-the-minute trends, Brynjolfsson and McAfee identify the best strategies for survival and offer a new path to prosperity. These include revamping education so it prepares people for the next economy instead of the last one, designing new collaborations that pair brute processing power with human ingenuity, and embracing policies that make sense in a radically transformed landscape.

- *The Innovator's Dilemma: The Revolutionary Book That Will Change the Way You Do Business*, by Clayton M. Christensen (HarperBusiness Essentials, 2003). This is a revolutionary business book that has changed corporate America forever. Based on a truly radical idea—that great companies can fail precisely because they do everything “right”—this *Wall Street Journal*, *Business Week*, and *New York Times Business* best seller is one of the most provocative and important business books ever written. Entrepreneurs, managers, and CEOs ignore its wisdom and its warnings at their great peril.
- *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, by Daniel Kahneman (Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2011). In this international best seller, Kahneman, a renowned psychologist and winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics, takes us on a groundbreaking tour of the mind and explains the two systems that drive the way we think. System 1 is fast, intuitive, and emotional; System 2 is slower, more deliberative, and more logical. The impact of overconfidence on corporate strategies, the difficulties of predicting what will make us happy in the future, the profound effect of cognitive biases on everything from playing the stock market to planning our next vacation—each of these can be understood only by knowing how the two systems shape our judgments and decisions. Engaging the reader in a lively conversation about how we think, Kahneman reveals where we can and cannot trust our intuitions and how we can tap into the benefits of slow thinking.
- *Inviting Disaster: Lessons from the Edge of Technology; An Inside Look at Catastrophes and Why They Happen*, by James R. Chiles (HarperBusiness, 2002). Weaving a dramatic narrative that explains how breakdowns in systems result in such disasters as the chain-reaction crash of an Air France Concorde and the meltdown at the Chernobyl nuclear power station, Chiles vividly demonstrates how the battle between man and machine may be escalating beyond manageable limits—and why we all have a stake in its outcome. Included in this edition is a special introduction providing a

behind-the-scenes look at the World Trade Center catastrophe. Combining firsthand accounts of employees' escapes with an in-depth look at the structural reasons behind the towers' collapse, Chiles addresses the question, Were the towers "two tall heroes" or structures with a fatal flaw?

These books, and many others within the CNO-PRP, can help military readers (and would-be innovators) take a detailed look at the inner workings of minds facing sometimes overwhelming challenges. They may help you to "break the mold" of conventional thinking and develop an agile mind, as encouraged by the Under Secretary of the Navy.

JOHN E. JACKSON