

**i** An insight is a profound and useful understanding of a person, thing, situation or issue

## Insights live in a context

### A point in time

- Insights are most valuable when they are new, and offer an advantage over competitors
- The digital world is complex and fast moving, and therefore rich in potential insights

### Required scale

- Insights which are dismissed in a big company for being too niche might be valuable in a startup
- e.g. [“Yeast mini-flakes are perfect for vegans who love cheese”](#)
- Big ideas start small. See [The Innovator's Dilemma](#).

### Prevailing assumptions

- Many ideas are dismissed because they fall foul of an implicit assumption
- e.g. “People won’t want electric cars because there is nowhere to charge them”



“What if we built our own charging network?”

### Family of related insights

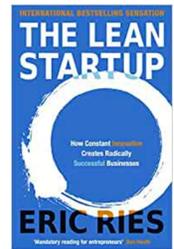
- One insight is rarely sufficient
- Insights breed insights
- [Creativity, Inc.](#) explains how DreamWorks strings together thousands of ideas, big and small

## Insights can feel obvious in hindsight because our assumptions adapt without us noticing

- When Drew Houston, the founder of Dropbox, was trying to raise money, he was told in meeting after meeting that the file sharing market was crowded with existing products
- Investors didn’t understand Drew’s proposition because it was subtle, and it was easier for them to think in terms of their existing, assumed market knowledge
- Drew eventually overcame this problem by using a video to explain his insight. Today Dropbox is a \$10bn company



The mind is “a machine for jumping to conclusions”  
– [Thinking, Fast and Slow](#) by Daniel Kahneman



Story of Dropbox founding  
– [The Lean Startup](#) by Eric Ries

## Improve your chances of being insightful by nurturing your unconscious mind

In his 1951 book *The Art of Clear Thinking*, Rudolph Flesch identified half a dozen, unrelated fields in which similar, four-steps models of insightful thinking had been developed spontaneously

### 1. Sweat – Gather inputs

- Ongoing, chronic curiosity
- Talk to people, and take in the widest diversity of inputs from different cultures / perspectives / points of view
- Immerse yourself in new places & experiences
- Dig where your interests lie

### 2. Timeout – Let your unconscious mind work

- Insight problems demand the focused application of subconscious processing. This means distracting the conscious mind
- Try exercise, [walking](#) or doing boring tasks (like mowing the lawn, washing up, or ironing)
- Work on something else

### 3. Eureka – Record ideas when they come to you

- When insight strikes, it often does so at inconvenient times – during a dream or just when waking, when out running, or in the shower
- Write down your ideas when they happen – keep pens and pads by the bed, recording apps on your phone, and waterproof crayons in the shower. Try [Mem](#).

### 4. Prove – Test and iterate your idea

- While it’s important that you can articulate your insight simply and clearly, don’t spend too much time making it perfect
- Share your insights with colleagues and clients, and start road-testing as early as you feel happy to
- The world is so complex that it’s impossible to have perfect insight. Winning companies are able to iterate and learn