

Shifting Paradigms

The Science and Scientists That Matter Most to Our Future

OVERVIEW:

Buzzwords. From CRISPR to blockchain, they fill our scientific and technological discussions. But what if these words cloud the fact that science and technology aren't making truly fundamental strides?

In his seminal 1962 work *"The Structure of Scientific Revolutions"*, physicist and philosopher Thomas Kuhn drew a distinction between "normal science" and "paradigm shifts". The latter changes our understanding of the universe, moving it to new and higher planes such as Newtonian physics and, later, Bohr's model of the atom did in their times. Reality stays the same, but our conception of it changes.

Big Think recommends a digital media program that highlights the need for paradigm shifts in order to achieve bold scientific discovery and progress. Using Kuhn as a lens, the program will pursue two parallel goals -- identifying the science and scientists whose work has the greatest potential to contribute to the next paradigm shifts (as opposed to normal science) and profiling and elucidating their work through compelling multimedia for the benefit of public awareness and understanding.

Toward the end of identifying potential paradigm shifters, Big Think suggests taking up the mantle of the now defunct Edge.org, which pioneered the idea of hosting interdisciplinary salons online among elite thinkers. We will call on a diverse array of leading thinkers, both within the sciences and at their margins, to consider the distinction between normal and paradigmatic science. Each participant will be asked to identify what work and which researchers they think are most likely to shift scientific and technological paradigms. These contributions will be solicited through short essays written by invited contributors as well as video interviews produced by Big Think.

With guidance from the contributors to this digital salon, Big Think will profile the researchers whose work emerges as most likely to shift existing paradigms. Over the course of a year, our goal will be to extensively profile, through video interviews, explainers, and written articles, the work of six paradigm shifting scientists across several dimensions:

- 1) Contextualize the current paradigm dominant in their particular scientific field (the scientific history, the dominant assumptions, and their empirical limitations).
- 2) Establish the “extraordinary” nature of a researcher’s work and it’s potential to upend the current paradigm.
- 3) Define the debate between current and potential paradigms--as well as their respective advocates--with an eye to their ability to make meaningful predictions about the future.
- 4) Recall stories from the history of science that underscore the twists and turns in the paradigm-shifting process and mapping them on to these present examples.

BIG THINK REACH:

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