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Imagination in Research: An Economist's View

Reviewed by Gene Wunderlich

George W Ladd. Ames Iowa State University Press, 1987, 146 pp, \$9 95 (paper)

Where do good ideas come from? Can we make better use of our intuition? Do we know more than we know? Professor Ladd's stimulating little book on vision in research stems from, and elaborates on, his article, "Artistic Research Tools for Scientific Minds" (*American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, Vol 61, No 1, Feb 1979) He missed a chance to reinforce the linkage to artistic tools by not referring to Betty Edwards' art book, *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*

In the first of four parts, Ladd relates the rational, logical aspects of scientific inquiry to the speculative, creative aspects by drawing largely on the left hemisphere/right hemisphere model of the brain The large second part consists of a series of not obviously related mini-lectures on attitude, doubt, tension, distraction, writing, and many more subjects Most can be read independently, but together they say there are environments, conditions, and efforts that stimulate the imagination In the third section, Ladd acknowledges luck, but points out that luck needs help The fourth

part, directed at teachers of research methods and methodology, emphasizes discovery by students and continuous revision by teachers

The subtitle of the book, "An Economist's View," implies that the author will focus on imagination in economics or, alternatively, that he will show how economics can contribute to imaginative processes He does neither There is little in *Imagination in Research* that could not apply to any field of inquiry It is curious that Ladd does not even suggest that economics might have something to offer imaginative processes (for example, are there cost-effective ways of doubting?) The omissions may have been intentional—and valid

The book is oriented primarily toward the thought processes of individuals Even when he mentions the sharing of ideas in exchange, Ladd focuses on the individual rather than the collective or institutional growth and development of ideas It might have been useful had he explored the sources and uses of imagination in organizations Can a society or an organization have imagination? A reasonable possibility

Imagination in Research abounds in good ideas There is something in it for everyone students, seasoned researchers, and perhaps also for keepers of the research environment You can read it in bits, and use many of those bits as launching pads for your own excursions into ideas

The reviewer is an agricultural economist with the Resources and Technology Division, ERS

In Earlier Issues

Self-appraisal—serious self-appraisal—is often recommended, rarely practiced

O V Wells
Vol 4, No 3, July 1952
