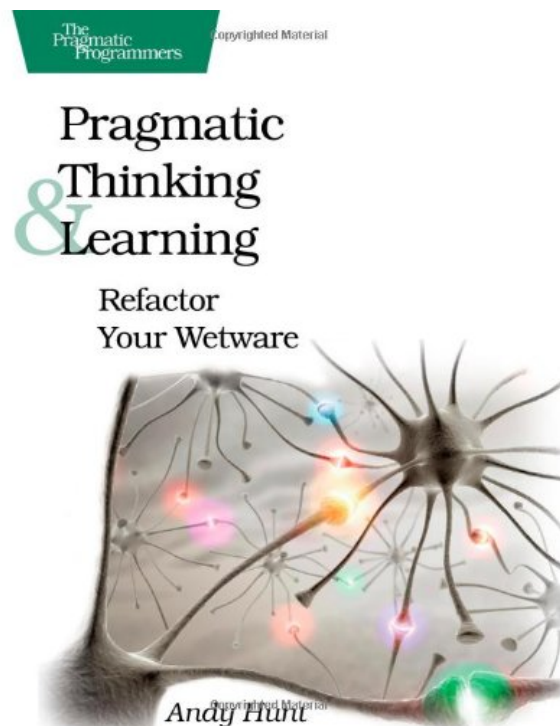# PRAGMATIC THINKING AND LEARNING: REFACTOR YOUR WETWARE (PRAGMATIC PROGRAMMERS) BY ANDY HUNT

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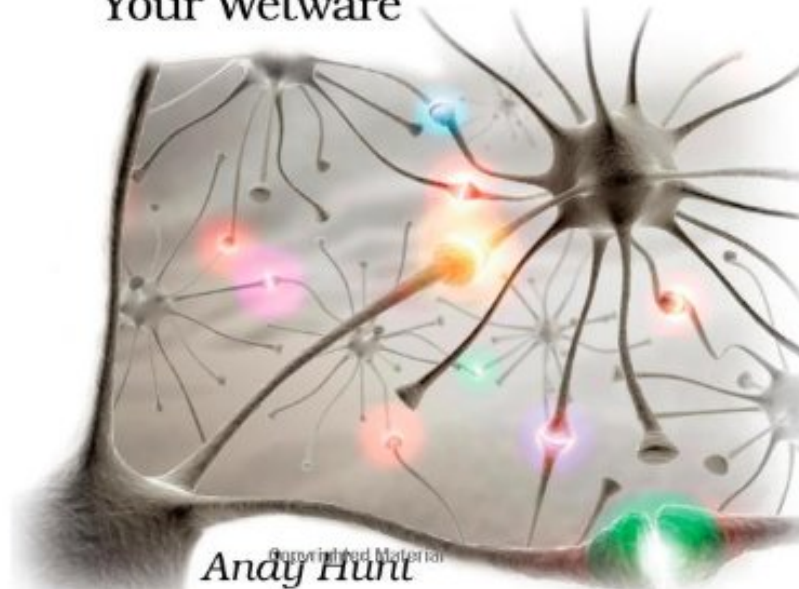
Pragmatic
Thinking
& Learning

Refactor
Your Wetware

Andy Hunt

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Review

"I've recommended it to anyone who will stand still long enough to listen to me. I was familiar with some of the ideas and techniques from my various readings on the science of learning, but its invaluable to have them gathered in one concise book, especially one geared towards developers."

—Dr. Paul V. Gestwicki, Professor & Director of Undergraduate Programs, Ball State University

"I've always been looking for something to help me improve my learning skills, but i've never found anything as effective as this book."

—Oscar Del Ben, Software Developer

"Absolutely terrific! I'm only beginning the 3rd chapter and I've already found the book VERY, VERY useful. It makes me look at what I am doing and how I do it in a different light."

—Carol Saah, Java Software Developer

About the Author
Andy Hunt is a programmer turned consultant, author and publisher. He co-authored the best-selling book The Pragmatic Programmer, was one of the 17 founders of the Agile Alliance, and co-founded the Pragmatic Bookshelf, publishing award-winning and critically acclaimed books for software developers.

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Software development happens in your head. Not in an editor, IDE, or designtool. You're well educated on how to work with software and hardware, but what about wetware--our own brains? Learning new skills and new technology is critical to your career, and it's all in your head.

In this book by Andy Hunt, you'll learn how our brains are wired, and how to take advantage of your brain's architecture. You'll learn new tricks and tipsto learn more, faster, and retain more of what you learn.

You need a pragmatic approach to thinking and learning. You need to Refactor Your Wetware.

Programmers have to learn constantly; not just the stereotypical new technologies, but also the problem domain of the application, the whims of the user community, the quirks of your teammates, the shifting sands of the industry, and the evolving characteristics of the project itself as it is built.

We'll journey together through bits of cognitive and neuroscience, learning and behavioral theory. You'll see some surprising aspects of how our brains work, and how you can take advantage of the system to improve your own learning and thinking skills.

In this book you'll learn how to:

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Andy Hunt is a programmer turned consultant, author and publisher. He co-authored the best-selling book The Pragmatic Programmer, was one of the 17 founders of the Agile Alliance, and co-founded the Pragmatic Bookshelf, publishing award-winning and critically acclaimed books for software developers. Most helpful customer reviews183 of 207 people found the following review helpful.
Go read something else

By Ivan Tarasov

I was thrilled when I learned about this book and I waited impatiently for it to arrive from Amazon. Boy, was I disappointed!

The idea of such a book is great, somebody should have done it. The execution though is the one that is bad. The book is mostly focused around small number of defining concepts, which are supposed to explain and substantiate all the facts about the way brain works and the suggestions of how to become more efficient in whatever you do. These concepts are the L-mode and R-mode of the brain, the Dreyfus model of skill acquisition, and the metaphoric comparison of a brain with a two-CPU computer.

Unfortunately, L/R-mode theory is now considered wrong and dated (the theory is more than 20 years old -- a lot has happened in neuroscience since then), and basing and substantiation suggestions on it is questionable. Even though the suggestions themselves are mostly reasonable and useful (in case you have not come up with them on your own yet), the constant L/R-mode preaching makes an impression of somebody selling you snake oil. The L/R-mode explanations make up a bulk of the book, sound really fishy, and get annoying pretty quickly.

Dreyfus model, although somewhat useful in some fields, not too useful in the context of research work and science (and any non-trivial software engineering), where things are a tad more complicated [note: this is my personal opinion, don't take my word on it and read about it elsewhere if you want]. That wouldn't be a problem, if Dreyfus model wasn't used throughout the book to explain things.

Comparing a brain with a two-CPU computer is just blatantly wrong, the way the brain works is not even in vicinity of how CPUs (and the related wiring) work -- just read some other books and research papers on the subject. Thus using the metaphor abundantly in a book which tries to give an impression of a book where the facts are checked and substantiated is questionable.

Of course, that's not all. I found many places in the text where something was stated (which wasn't obviously true or false), but as if it was following from some other facts. If you're not careful enough when reading, you are likely to learn something that isn't.

Less important things which I didn't like: the narration and the design/formatting/images and text relevance. From the start the author notes that this book is not necessarily intended for programmers, however the text is full of irrelevant programming allusions which would bore any non-programmer to death, without any chance of getting any useful meaning from the allusion. Heck, I'm a programmer and I was bored and struck with superfluity of these examples. Oh, and don't forget about smileys in the text. Don't get me wrong, I'm not narrow-minded, however I still believe that well-edited text in a book on a serious topic could do without smileys and still be able to communicate jocular mood if there's need for it. The book is full of irrelevant examples and images (I love images, provided they are useful!), take the "unix wizard" image as an example. There's even an awful attempt at infographics (p.229, fig.8.4, "Relative IQ point loss") which takes almost half a page and is really a bad example of using a bar chart.

Another annoying thing is that another book by the same author - "Pragmatic Programmer" - is praised persistently throughout the text. Although it's not a bad book, there should be some restraint in self-advertising.

To be fair, there are some good suggestions and practices. It's rather unfortunate that they get diluted by a mush of bad science and lacking narration.

Verdict: if you want to spend your time reading a good book on the topic, go read something else, for example, Medina's Brain Rules: 12 Principles for Surviving and Thriving at Work, Home, and School, Weinberg's Becoming a Technical Leader: An Organic Problem-Solving Approach, or DeMarco's Peopleware: Productive Projects and Teams (Second Edition).2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Interesting Review of Thinking and How to Think Better

By K. Scott Proctor

"Pragmatic Thinking and Learning: Refactor Your Wetware" is a book about thinking and learning. Andy Hunt, the author, elegantly and logically builds a story about how the human brain thinks and learns.

This book offers a great deal more than a common "how to" book in that Hunt provides a great deal of context associated with the topics that he covers. With many direct references to other books and material, I found myself noting a lot of the books that Hunt references as books for future reading.

Anyone with a desire to maximize the manner in which they think and learn, or a desire to understand these processes better, stands to benefit from this book. Highly recommended due to its real-world uses and implications, combined with its rich and interesting historical content.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Pure fun on how the brain works

By Tiago Cesar Katcipis

This book is a treasure chest of awesome stuff on how the brain actually works and how you can use it on your advantage, with great metaphors that are very simple to understand (at least for a programmer :-)).See all 86 customer reviews...

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