

## ORIGINALS: HOW NON-CONFORMISTS MOVE THE WORLD

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- People who suffer the most from a given state of affairs are paradoxically the least likely to question, challenge, reject or change it.
- Child prodigies rarely go on to change the world. When psychologists study history's most eminent and influential people, they discover that many of them were not unusually gifted as children. If you assemble a large group of child prodigies and follow them for their entire lives, you will find that they do not outshine their less precocious peers from families of similar means.
- Practice makes perfect, but it does not make new. The gifted learn to play magnificent Mozart melodies and beautiful Beethoven symphonies, but never compose their own original scores. They focus their energy on consuming existing scientific knowledge, not producing new insights. They conform to the codified rules of established games, rather than inventing their own rules or games. All along the way, they strive to earn the approval of their parents and the admiration of their teachers.
- Research demonstrates that it is the most creative children who are the least likely to become the teacher's pet.
- Teachers tend to discriminate against highly creative students, labeling them as troublemakers.
- Child prodigies are hindered by achievement motivation. The drive to succeed is responsible for many of the world's greatest accomplishments. When we are determined to excel, we have the fuel to work harder, longer, and smarter. But as cultures rack up a significant number of achievements, originality is increasingly left to a specialized few.
- Once people pass an intermediate level in the need to achieve, there is evidence that they actually become less creative.
- It is a myth that originality requires extreme risk taking. In every domain, the people who move the world forward with original ideas are rarely paragons of conviction and commitment. If you are risk averse and have some doubts about the feasibility of your ideas, it is likely that your business will be guild to last. If you are a freewheeling gambler, your startup is far more fragile.
- Successful originals take extreme risks in one arena and offset them with extreme caution in another.
- Entrepreneurs are significantly more risk-averse than the general population.
- To unlock mindsets, we gave people examples of people becoming the architects of their own jobs, customizing their tasks and relationships to better align with their interests, skills, and values – like an artistic salesperson volunteering to design a new logo and an outgoing financial analyst communicating with clients using video chat instead of email. Then, they looked at their familiar jobs in an unfamiliar way: *vuja de*. They set out to create a new vision of their roles that was more ideal but still realistic.
- By refusing to stick with their default jobs and default skills, they became happier and more effective – and qualified themselves for roles that were a better fit. Many of their limits, they came to realize, were of their own making.
- People who choose to champion originality feel the same fear, the same doubt, as the rest of us. What sets them apart is that they take action anyway. They know in their hearts that failing would yield less regret than failing to try.

- The biggest barrier to originality is not idea generation, it idea selection.
- In every field, even the most eminent creators typically produce a large quantity of work that is technically sound but considered unremarkable by experts and audiences. In a study of over 15,000 classical music compositions, the more pieces a composer produced in a given five-year window, the greater the spike in the odds of a hit.
- If you want to be original, the most important possible thing you could do is do a high volume of work.
- The most prolific people not only have the highest originality; they also generate their most original output during periods in which they produce the largest volume.
- The best way to get better at judging our ideas is to gather feedback. Put a lot of ideas out there and see which ones are praised and adopted by your target audience.
- As we gain knowledge about a domain, we become prisoners of our prototypes.
- The group of forecasters that comes close to attaining mastery is fellow creators evaluating one another's ideas.
- Many performers enjoy the approval of audiences but covet the admiration of their peers. The usual explanation for this preference is status striving; we crave acceptance by our peer group. Berg's research suggests that we are drawn to peer evaluations because they provide the most reliable judgments.
- By spending six minutes developing original ideas makes us more open to novelty, improving our ability to see the potential in something unusual.
- It is when people have moderate expertise in a particular domain that they are the most open to radically creative ideas.
- People who started businesses and contributed to patent applications were more likely than their peers to have leisure time hobbies that involved drawing, painting, architecture, sculpture, and literature.
- Working abroad, being actively engaged in design in a foreign country, predicted whether new creative fashion collections were hits. The most original collections came from directors who had worked in two or three different countries.
- An American gained little from working in Canada, compared to the originality dividends of a project in Korea or Japan.
- Working in multiple countries with different cultures was not enough. The highest originality occurred when directors had spent thirty-five years working abroad.
- To accurately predict the success of a novel idea, it is best to be a creator in the domain you are judging.
- When you have spent years studying handbags, intuition can beat analysis, because your unconscious mind excels at pattern recognition.
- Non-experts make sounder judgments when they conduct a thorough analysis.
- The more successful people have been in the past, the worse they perform when they enter a new environment. They become overconfident, and they are less likely to seek critical feedback even though the context is radically different.
- Great spirits have always encountered opposition from mediocre minds. Albert Einstein.
- Leaders and managers appreciate it when employees take the initiative to offer help, build networks, gather new knowledge, and seek feedback. One form of initiative gets penalized: speaking up with suggestions. The more frequently employees voiced ideas and concerns upward, the less likely they were to receive raises and promotions over a two-year period.

- Power involves exercising control or authority over others; status is being respected and admired. When people sought to exert influence but lacked respect, others perceived them as difficult, coercive, and self-serving. Since they have not earned our admiration, we do not feel they have the right to tell us what to do, and we push back.
- When we are trying to influence others and we discover that they do not respect us, it fuels a vicious cycle of resentment. In an effort to assert our own authority, we respond by resorting to increasingly disrespectful behaviors.
- Status cannot be claimed; it has to be earned or granted.
- Idiosyncrasy credits: the latitude to deviate from the group's expectations. Idiosyncrasy credits accrue through respect, not rank: they are based on contributions. We squash a low-status member who tries to challenge the status quo, but tolerate and sometimes even applaud the originality of a high-status star.
- When you are pitching a novel idea or speaking up with a suggestion for change, your audience is likely to be skeptical. Under these circumstances, it is actually more effective to adopt Griscom's form of powerless communication by accentuating the flaws in your idea. The first advantage is that leading with weaknesses disarms the audience.
- Prophets of doom and gloom appear wise and insightful, Amabile writes, while positive statements are seen as having a naïve Pollyanna quality.
- We are happier after we list three good things than twelve. The easier it is to think of something, the more common and important we assume it is. By acknowledging the most serious problems with an idea, we make it harder for others to generate their own ideas about its weaknesses.
- We often undercommunicate our ideas. They are already so familiar to us that we underestimate how much exposure an audience needs to comprehend and buy into them.
- The more often we encounter something, the more we like it (the exposure effect). One explanation for this effect is that exposure increases the ease of processing. An unfamiliar idea requires more effort to understand. The more we see, hear, and touch it, the more comfortable we become with it and the less threatening it is.
- It is best to introduce a delay between the presentation of an idea and the evaluation of it, which provides time for it to sink in.
- Whether you are unhappy with your job, your marriage, or your government, decades of research show that you have a choice between exit, voice, persistence and neglect.
- When we have a supportive boss, our bond with the organization strengthens and we feel a greater span of influence.
- As much as agreeable people may love us, they often hate conflict even more. Their desire to please others and preserve harmony makes them prone to backing down instead of sticking up for us.
- It is often the prickly people who are more comfortable taking a stand against others and against convention.
- Disagreeable managers may have a bad user interface, but a great operating system.
- Agreeable people were happiest in the moments when they doled out complements and praise, smiled and laughed with others, expressed affection, reassured others, and compromised or made concessions to please others. Disagreeable people experience the greatest joy when they were criticizing, comforting, or challenging others.
- If you are still at the bottom of a status hierarchy, you have little to lose and everything to gain by being original. But the middle segment of that hierarchy – where the majority of people in the organization are found – is dominated by insecurity. Now that you have a bit of respect, you value

your standing in the group and do not want to jeopardize it. To maintain and then gain status, you play a game of follow-the-leader, conforming to prove your worth as a group member.

- When psychologists Michelle Duguid and Jack Goncalo asked people to generate ideas, their output was 34% less original after being randomly assigned to a middle manager role than a president or assistant role. Merely thinking about a time that they were in a middle status role caused participants to generate 20-25% fewer ideas and 16% less original ideas than thinking about being in a high-status or low status role.
- Women who meet feminine standards of beauty do not experience the most harassment. Instead, it is motivated primarily by a desire to punish gender-role deviants, and therefore, is directed at women who violate feminine ideals. Women who were assertive, dominant, and independent faced the most harassment, particularly in male-dominated organizations.
- Research shows that the mistakes we regret are not errors of commission, but errors of omission. If we could do things over, most of us would censor ourselves less and express our ideas more.
- Innovators do lose their originality over time, but this decline is not inevitable. When companies run suggestion boxes, there is evidence that older employees tend to submit more ideas and higher-quality ideas than their younger colleagues, with the most valuable suggestions coming from employees older than fifty-five. In technology startups that have raised venture capital funding, the average found is thirty-eight.
- The few minutes they spent singing should not have affected their behavior, but it did. The group that sang together shared significantly more. They reported feeling more similar to each other and more like a team than participants in the other conditions. Both positive and negative experiences are amplified when we share them leading to even greater feelings of similarity.
- Even if they care about different causes, groups find affinity when they use the same methods of engagement. If you have spent the past decade taking part in protests and marches, it is easy to feel a sense of shared identity and community with another organization that operates the same way.
- Coalitions often fall apart when people refuse to moderate their radicalism.
- Negative relationships are unpleasant, but they are predictable: if a colleague consistently undermines you, you can keep your distance and expect the worst. But when you are dealing with an ambivalent relationship, you are constantly on guard, grappling with questions about when that person can actually be trusted. It takes more emotional energy and coping resources to deal with individuals who are inconsistent.
- Having more ambivalent relationships predicted higher rates of stress, depression, and dissatisfaction with life.
- Our instinct is to sever our bad relationships and salvage the ambivalent ones. But the evidence suggests we ought to do the opposite: cut our frenemies and attempt to convert our enemies.
- Our best allies are not the people who have supported us all along. They are the ones who started out against us and then came around to our side.
- While we will have an especially strong affinity toward our converted rivals, they will feel the same way toward us. To like us, they have to work especially hard to overcome their initial negative impressions, telling themselves, I must have been wrong about that person. Moving forward, to avoid the cognitive dissonance of changing their minds yet again, they will be especially motivated to maintain a positive relationship.
- It is our former adversaries who are the most effective at persuading others to join our movements. They can marshal better arguments on our behalf, because they understand the doubts and misgivings of resisters and fence-sitters.

- It is hard to change other people's ideals. It is much easier to link our agendas to familiar values that people already hold. As much as originals want to be straightforward with potential partners, it is occasionally necessary to reframe ideas to appeal to an audience.
- Conflicts between two groups are often caused and intensified by conflicts within the groups.
- To build coalitions across conflict lines, it is rarely effective to send hawks to negotiate.
- We are not our brother's keeper...in countless large and small ways we are our brother's maker. Harry and Bonaro Overstreet
- When we use the logic of consequence, we can always find reasons not to take risks. The logic of appropriateness frees us up. We think less about what will guarantee the outcome we want, and act more on a visceral sense of what someone like us ought to do. This tendency can be influenced by birth order.
- Laterborns have faster salary growth, because they are willing to switch to better paying jobs sooner and more often. Firstborns are more risk averse.
- When a younger sibling arrives, firstborns risk being dethroned and often respond by emulating their parents: they enforce rules and assert their authority over the younger sibling, which sets the stage for the younger child to rebel.
- Researchers found that from ages two to ten, children are urged by their parents to change their behavior once every six to nine minutes.
- Parents of creative children had an average of less than one rule and tended to place emphasis on moral values, rather than on specific rules.
- Parents who raised highly creative architects granted their children the autonomy to choose their own values.
- Reasoning does create a paradox: it leads both to more rule following and more rebelliousness. BY explaining moral principles, parents encourage their children to comply voluntarily with rules that align with important values and to question rules that do not.
- Affirming character appears to have the strongest effect in the critical periods when children are beginning to formulate strong identities. Praising character boosted the moral actions of eight-year-olds, but not five or ten-year olds.
- Please don't cheat is less effective than Please do not be a cheater. Being a cheater evokes a sense of self, triggering the logic of appropriateness. What kind of person am I, and who do I want to be?
- Growing up, many originals find their first heroes in their most beloved novels, where protagonists exercise their creativity in pursuit of unique accomplishments.
- Studies show that when children's stories emphasize original achievements, the next generation innovates more.
- Dissenting opinions are useful even when they are wrong.
- Social bonds do not drive groupthink; the culprits are overconfidence and reputational concerns.
- Dalio wants people who will think independently and enrich the culture. BY holding them accountable for dissenting, Dalio has fundamentally altered the way people make decisions.
- Confirmation bias: when you have a preference, you seek out information supporting it, while overlooking information that challenges it.
- While it can be appealing to assign a devil's advocate, it is much more powerful to unearth one. Dissenting for the sake of dissenting is not useful. When it is authentic, it stimulates thought; it clarifies and it emboldens. Whereas people doubt assigned dissenters, genuine dissenters challenge people to doubt themselves.

- Instead of reaching consensus because some people are overconfident or others are afraid to speak up, the staff gets on the same page by duking it out. The norm is to have strong opinions, weakly held.
- Extensive research shows that leaders do react much more positively when employees bring solutions rather than problems to the table.
- Hofmann found that a culture that focuses too heavily on solutions becomes a culture of advocacy, dampening inquiry. If you are always expected to have an answer ready, you will arrive at meetings with your diagnosis complete, missing out on the chance to learn from a broad range of perspectives.
- When every member of a group has different information, inquiry needs to precede advocacy, which means you have to raise the problems before pursuing solutions. To make sure that problems get raised, leaders need mechanisms for unearthing dissenters.
- Getting problems noted is half the battle against groupthink; the other is listening to the right opinions about how to solve them.
- Argue like you are right, and listen like you are wrong.
- By role modeling receptivity to feedback, employees across the company became more willing to challenge him and one another. I have learned to do something similar in the classroom. I collect anonymous feedback from students after the first month, focusing on constructive criticism and suggestions for improvement, and then email the full set of verbatim comments to the entire class. In the next class session, I summarize what I thought were the key suggestions, seek feedback on my interpretations and propose changes to address these issues.
- When organizations fail to prioritize principles, their performance suffers.
- Shapers are independent thinkers: curious, non-conforming, and rebellious. They practice brutal, nonhierarchical honesty. And they act in the face of risk, because their fear of not succeeding exceeds their fear of failing.
- Although defensive pessimists are more anxious and less confident in analytical, verbal, and creative tasks, they perform just as well as strategic optimists.
- When self-doubts creep in, defensive pessimists do not allow themselves to be crippled by fear. They deliberately imagine a disaster scenario to intensify their anxiety and convert it into motivation. Once they have considered the worst, they are driven to avoid it, considering every relevant detail to make sure they do not crash and burn, which enables them to feel a sense of control. Their anxiety reaches its zenith before the vent, so that when it arrives, they are ready to succeed. Their confidence springs not from ignorance or delusions about the difficulties ahead, but from a realistic appraisal and an exhaustive plan. If you want to sabotage the performance of chronic defensive pessimists, just make them happy.
- Defensive pessimism is a valuable resource when commitment to the task is steadfast, but when commitment flutters, anxiety and doubt can backfire.
- When students labeled their emotions as excitement, their speeches were rated as 17% more persuasive and 15% more confident than those of students who branded themselves calm.
- Rather than trying to suppress a strong emotion, it is easier to convert it into a different emotion – one that is equally intense, but propels us to step on the gas.
- Envisioning the worst-case scenario enables us to harness anxiety as a source of motivation to prepare and succeed. Neuroscience research suggests that when we are anxious, the unknown is more terrifying than the negative.
- People who have been recognized for making original contribution to their communities shared many more stories that started negatively but surged upward: they struggled early and triumphed

only later. Despite being confronted with more negative events, they reported greater satisfaction with their lives and a stronger sense of purpose. Originality brings more bumps in the road, yet it leaves us with more happiness and a greater sense of meaning.

- The most inspiring way to convey a vision is to outsource it to the people who are actually affected by it.
- It does not take a violent dictator to silence us through fear. Just flying solo with an opinion can make even a committed original fearful enough to conform to the majority.
- The easiest way to encourage non-conformity is to introduce a single dissenter. The first follower is what transforms a lone nut into a leader.
- If you want people to go out on a limb, you need to show them that they are not alone.
- Over 50% of leaders fell short of convincing their employees that change needed to happen, and it needed to happen now. Executives underestimate how hard it can be to drive people out of their comfort zones. Without a sense of urgency, people won't make needed sacrifices. Instead they cling to the status quo and resist.
- When we have a certain gain, we like to hold on to it and protect it. We play it safe to guarantee saving two thousand jobs instead of taking a risk that might leave us saving no jobs.
- We can dramatically shift risk preferences just by changing a few words to emphasize losses rather than gains.
- If they think the behavior is safe, we should emphasize all the good things that will happen if they do it – they will want to act immediately to obtain those certain gains. When people believe a behavior is risky, that approach does not work. They are already comfortable with the status quo, so the benefits of change are not attractive, and the stop system kicks in.

## **Actions for Impact**

### **Individual Actions**

- 1) Generating and recognizing original ideas
  - a) Question the default
  - b) Triple the number of ideas you generate
  - c) Immerse yourself in a new domain
  - d) Procrastinate strategically
  - e) Seek more feedback from peers
- 2) Voicing and championing original ideas
  - a) Balance your risk portfolio
  - b) Highlight the reasons not support your idea
  - c) Make your ideas more familiar
  - d) Speak to a different audience
  - e) Be a tempered radical
- 3) Managing emotions
  - a) Motivate yourself differently when you are committed vs. uncertain
  - b) Don't try to calm down
  - c) Focus on the victim, not the perpetrator
  - d) Realize you are not alone
  - e) Remember that if you do not take initiative, the status quo will persist.

### **Leader Actions**

- 4) Sparking Original Ideas:
  - a) Run an innovation tournament
  - b) Picture yourself as the enemy
  - c) Invite employees from different functions and levels to pitch ideas
  - d) Hold an opposite day
  - e) Ban the words like love and hate
- 5) Building cultures of originality
  - a) Hire not on cultural fit, but on cultural contributions
  - b) Shift from exit interviews to entry interviews
  - c) Ask for problems, not solutions
  - d) Stop assigning devil's advocates and start unearthing them
  - e) Welcome criticism

### **Parent and Teacher Actions**

- a) Ask children what their role models would do
- b) Link good behaviors to moral character
- c) Explain how bad behaviors have consequences for others
- d) Emphasize values over rules
- e) Create novel niches for children to pursue.