

## Originals: How Non-Conformists Change the World

Adam Grant  
(WH Allen, 2016)

Review by **Neil Gallagher**  
College President  
College of Computing Technology (CCT)  
Dublin, Ireland

*Originals*, by Wharton School professor Adam Grant, struck a chord with me as it reaffirmed many of the values and ideals that I respect in both my personal and professional life. With an abundance of insights and compelling anecdotes from some well-known innovators, all of whom are 'originals' or non-conformists, the author emphasises the importance of originality: that it is okay to challenge conventional thought. It could be argued that the author has in fact provided too many brief examples rather than choosing the best ideas and discussing them in greater detail. This wealth of ideas occasionally produced themes that didn't flow coherently, requiring the reader to question their relevance. Again, focusing on fewer examples with more detail would have created more robust themes throughout the book. The book is underpinned by solid research. However it also has a 'pop psychology' or self-help feel which undoubtedly makes it attractive to the general reader. Although it could be improved by better references and by the use of charts, diagrams and other supplementary materials, the positives of this book far outweigh the weaknesses.

In themed chapters Grant explores topics such as how to recognise a good idea; speak up; gain support; choose the right time to act; manage fear and self-doubt; how to nurture originality in children; and how leaders can build cultures that welcome criticism. The reader is drawn in by picturing himself in the text: *How does birth order affect me? What does my browser choice say about me? Am I a procrastinator?* Grant makes his points by choosing ideas that will resonate with most people, such as:

- Question the default, which can often serve as the 'eureka moment' in creating an idea
- Seek more feedback from peers, particularly one's best allies
- Highlight the reasons why not to support your idea, i.e. the weaknesses of your idea, when trying to gain support
- Welcome criticism as too many leaders only seek feedback from people they consider supportive
- Emphasise values over rules
- The larger the numbers of ideas, projects and failures, the higher the chance of originality

- View procrastination as an incubation period to develop and work through your ideas
- The concept of pioneers and settlers. Grant speaks of pioneers having to fight an uphill battle to create the market, whereas the settlers, the second or third movers, have to make the product better. As a timing issue, this can account for 42% of the difference between success and failure
- Good lessons on parenting and the balance between disciplining bad behaviour, praising good behaviour, and managing an environment which fosters freedom to motivate children to be original without being destructive or antisocial.

Grant pulls together the ideas and themes in a final chapter called *Actions for Impact*. This useful summary of the practical actions along with a call to action for leaders provides valuable tips that are a final gift from the author.

*Originals* is worth the read and will challenge you to question your thinking and seek new ways to bring creativity into your life.