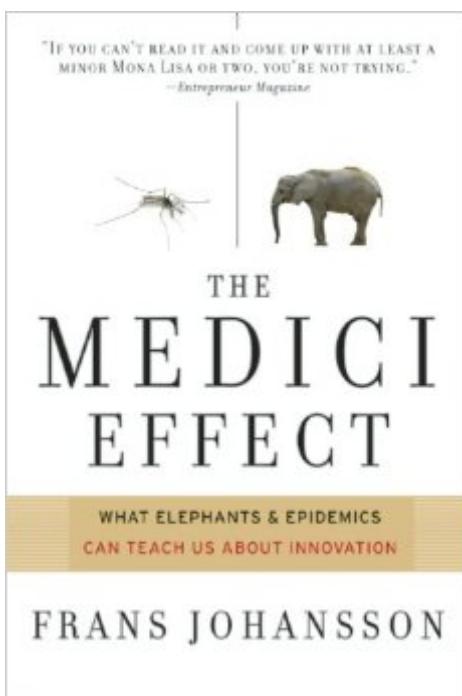


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The Medici Effect: What Elephants And Epidemics Can Teach Us About Innovation



Synopsis

Why do so many world-changing insights come from people with little or no related experience? Charles Darwin was a geologist when he proposed the theory of evolution. And it was an astronomer who finally explained what happened to the dinosaurs. Frans Johansson's The Medici Effect shows how breakthrough ideas most often occur when we bring concepts from one field into a new, unfamiliar territory, and offers examples how we can turn the ideas we discover into path-breaking innovations.

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Customer Reviews

Medici Effect opens slowly and at first I was disappointed: just another book of business successes. But as I began taking notes, I realized Frans Johansson really has a new message for all of us. I recommend skimming the first chapters to get to the second part of the book, and then going back to understand application of principles. The heart of the book is about the definition of intersectional innovation and the conditions that must exist for breakthroughs to happen -- a combination of individual qualities, environmental support, luck and perseverance. Perhaps the most helpful, most widely applicable guidelines involve planning for failure and, relatedly, moving from quantity to quality. Prolific authors, artists and business people tend to be successful. They might discard a dozen "bad" ideas to come to two or three successes. So we should reward people for actions, not just success. The only true failure is failure to act. I also liked Johansson's discussion of risk, especially the notion of "risk homeostasis." If we take risks in one area, we compensate by avoiding

risks in another. And a false sense of security can lead to senseless risk-taking. Johansson's examples make fascinating reader and probably helped sell the book. But I couldn't help thinking that he offers little hope to the majority of people who find themselves in environments where they are forced to specialize. Risk-taking and diversity of experience tend to be discouraged and in fact we tend to disparage what I call the "winding road" career path. Richard Branson is an innovator; on a lesser scale, he'd be a rolling stone. Johansson emphasizes that underlying diversity, most people have a core competence where they've developed a solid expertise.

This is not an academic book. Nonetheless, all should read it, if for no other reason then simply in order to learn why having a broad-based knowledge and curiosity are essential attributes of a person living in the post-modern world. The pattern of the book is not terribly innovative: good ideas followed by the expected examples of how sterling men and women implemented these concepts in practice and attained an even more sterling level of success. Altogether, very much in style of all other books aimed at predominantly business-oriented readers who, for whatever reason, need the examples set by (successful) luminaries in order to be converted to the creed. A more demanding reader may, upon seeing the same "follow the banality" pattern, reject the little volume as another horrid, trivial, and profoundly intellectually boring "thing." Do NOT do that: it would be a major mistake, and you would miss on a number of really important thoughts. The book has a powerful message to all members of the academe, corporate executives, human resources operators and gurus. And practically, everyone else, including high school and university students. It should also be one of the most recommended self-help books for all university leaders guilty of having produced more than three generations of super-specialized graduates with very sketchy ideas about the world outside their own field of work. Reading one of the book's chapters every morning before going to work (best over morning coffee, and instead of the sports or cooking page) should be the compulsory task for all human resources executives that may clear their persistent misconception of a "well-defined" (1.e.

The title of the book is very grand. However, the content of the book is far inferior to the title. I was expecting the concepts or ideas that would bring about splendors in philosophy, art and science in great magnitudes just like what took place in Renaissance, but instead the author just filled the pages mostly with small and insignificant examples and stories. This is just a book on creativity. Its significance is not as big as the recent book, "A whole new mind," or older books such as "At work with Edison." It would be much better if the author can focus his study on how Renaissance came

about and on how to replicate or recreate the favorable environment and fertile ground for bringing about another Renaissance on a comparable or even greater scale. The biggest flaw of this book is that even though the main thesis of the book is on many people from single-disciplinary background coming together to create something multidisciplinary, most of the examples in the book are about single individuals having multidisciplinary abilities creating something new and not at all at the scale of the Renaissance. Besides the brain-reading program and the British code-breaking group mentioned in the book, all other examples were single individuals. So, where is the Medici effect of people coming together? The second flaw of this book is the assumption that when people come together, a Renaissance will happen. The author is asserting that diversity in ethnicity, geography, age, and gender have a greater chance of coming up with unique ideas. This is wrong. What's needed is diversity of expertise, not just diversity. Diversity of mediocrity does not mean increased chance of creativity. In summary, I am very disappointed in this book.

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