

# 'Ideactionaries': Those Who Imagine Anything and Create the Impossible

Piero Formica

Volume 26, Number 1, 2023

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1102126ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55482/jcim.2023.33540>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Management Futures

ISSN

1481-0468 (print)

1718-0864 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this document

Formica, P. (2023). 'Ideactionaries': Those Who Imagine Anything and Create the Impossible. *Journal of Comparative International Management*, 26(1), 140–143. <https://doi.org/10.55482/jcim.2023.33540>

## **‘Ideactionaries’: Those Who Imagine Anything and Create the Impossible**

*Their unleashed power change the modes of thinking about entrepreneurship*

**Piero Formica<sup>1</sup>**

*Maynooth University, Ireland*

The purpose of this paper is to make the reader reflect on the transition from working to ideating. Working leads people to forget themselves and bury their heads in the sand, wrote the humanist Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) in 1928. In 1936, the writer and poet Cesare Pavese (1908-1950) advised in his collection of poems *Lavorare stanca* (*Hard Labor*) to take a closer look at the representations of men at work. Huxley and Pavese have led us forward to when ideactionaries will succeed workers. These translate ideas into action, devising revolutionary ways of designing and operating to deliver products and services and seeing the world. Theirs is meant to be a liveable, collective, co-creative (they transfer thoughts from one mind to another), constructive, transdisciplinary human experience. It must enrich the culture of intuition and imagination, of empathy towards society and the planet. It must educate young people to be guided by the good and to incorporate communication into action through vision, design of lived experience, mental models and meaningful metaphors.

It is up to scholars to take charge of this vision, even critically, so that the new generations can attend classrooms and research workshops modelled as a Renaissance Bottega (workshop). There, pupils were co-creators rather than mere executors of tasks assigned from above and generators of cognitive conflicts that do much to abrogate entrenched rules.

### **Let us enter the Mind Gallery**

'Ideactionaries', the ideators who revolutionarily put ideas into action ('ideaction'), are the transformers who reject the standards of today's society, believing that imposed social norms and cultivated expectations have become obsolete. One could call them Dadaists. Among them, some represent transformation from multiple points of view to frame it in a broader context. They can be likened to the 'cubists'. Others, like the 'surrealists', draw the transformation with

---

<sup>1</sup> Piero Formica, the winner of the Innovation Luminary Award under the aegis of the European Union is Thought Leader and Senior Research Fellow at the Innovation Value Institute, Maynooth University, Ireland.

Professor and Mentor, Contamination Lab and MOIM (Master Open Innovation Management) at the University of Padua. Advisor, Cambridge Learning Gateway, UK. *Ideators: Their Words and Voices* (2022), *One Health: Transformative Enterprises, Wellbeing and Education in the Knowledge Economy* (2023) and *Sciencepreneurship: Science, Entrepreneurship and Sustainable Economic Growth* (2023) are his most recent books published by Emerald Publishing Group.

illogical scenes, strange creatures, surprising elements and unexpected juxtapositions; thus, divergent ways of thinking and acting.

Let us enter the Mind Gallery, where we encounter the Ideactionaries – the ultimate athletes of mental gymnastics and social progress fuelled by sustainable and environmentally friendly economic development in the current time of certainty of uncertainty about revolutionary changes. Over and above, they are path creators who explore virgin and unknown cognitive territories to create ideas and funnel them into novel channels of knowledge that they map out ex nihilo. Those ideas are rapidly scalable by moving along these paths, and their entrepreneurial transformation is accessible and inclusive. A new and better time and space open up on the horizon. Cognition, the search for a new perception, and conation, the passage to action, strengthen the mind's power of Ideactionaries. They are connected to buyers to co-ideate products and services – a whole different scenario from what the Fordist factory has designed, zeroing out the employee's entrepreneurial potential. With the digital revolution underway, not from the separation but the interweaving between the human mind and artificial intelligence, Ideactionaries get superior performance, acquiring new knowledge that would otherwise not be obtainable. They found transformative enterprises, those companies that make leaps to avoid the stalemate caused by rules dictated by custom and knowledge so rigid as to be dogmatic. The most challenging jump is the transition of people from resources to be exploited by adapting them to the workplace to human beings whose associations of ideas, the fruit of their imagination, are valued. Adept at tapping into the global talent pool, Ideactionaries contribute to raising and crossing cultural integration and creative entrepreneurship in the shape of knowledge-intensive businesses unbounded by geography and culture.

### **Transformative enterprises to win together**

For a long time now, entrepreneurship games have been played according to a set of quibbling rules. They have made the game lose its artistic sense and spontaneity, neglecting the value of the players' human qualities and mutual esteem.

The digital and cognitive revolution opens new entrepreneurial perspectives beyond sustaining and regenerating existing business models. It is a renaissance that heralds an intellectual surge, a paradigm shift – the transformation of entrepreneurship. Cloud computing, e-commerce, the mobile Internet, the Internet of Things, AI, machine learning, genomics, nanotechnology and the scientific method are challenging entrepreneurship. Technology is also available at a low cost. What is high is the cultural risk when enterprises and other institutions have old and perished roots, while new roots are not there or are shallow. Therefore, entrepreneurship is in full transition mode, from productive activities to thought activities – the spawn of restless spirits who leave the field of knowledge scattered with many wells of fractionated, super-specialised knowledge. Restless spirits are at the crossroads between the Republic of Letters and the Republic of Sciences, drawing on those golden resources that are fresh insights and new understanding.

To believe that the spontaneity of surprise on the journey into the new digital world can be designed according to specific rules is tantamount to losing serendipity, the art of chance discovery whose sensations and emotions foster the imagination needed to solve the problems posed by the transformation. Think of the gravitational force exerted by existing capabilities, such as old technologies and employed staff. Rather than ignoring them, the question is how to use them to turn what would otherwise be an opposing force into an assist. In particular, the attitudes of employees are at stake. Anguished by the uncertainty of their future, they question the transformation, fearing that the conceptual age may lead to the brain's automation in the

same way that the first industrial revolution automated the muscles. With a detective's eye, it is up to the evangelists of transformative entrepreneurship to open up uncertainty paths and get the people involved in change accustomed to following them. Ideactionaries strive to achieve transformative entrepreneurship by experimenting with an elusive rather than precise path. New cognitive skills will accompany them on the journey from a culture of 'we win, they lose' to one of interdependence, of 'we all win together – we humans and all other living species'. 'Winning against' may bring short-term productivity gains to the winner, but that victory will, in the long run, cause fragility and lack of vitality. The balance of damage is even graver if we add the unintended consequences of extracting nature's resources faster than they can regenerate.

### **Knowledgification, Transformers and Transdisciplinarity. The trident that causes mutations in entrepreneurship**

Knowledgification is the 21st-century equivalent of the combination of electricity and mass manufacturing, which transformed the 20th century. Father Nicholas Joseph Callan (1799–1864), professor of natural philosophy at St Patrick's College in Maynooth, Ireland, demonstrated the transmission and reception of electricity without wires with a device known today as an electric transformer. His work contributed to entrepreneurial fertility during the first Industrial Revolution. Today, in analogy with the electrical transformer, 'Ideactionaries' are the transformers who move energies from ideation towards utilisation.

Knowledgification is the name we give to the flow of knowledge that arouses transformative enterprises. That is a return to Renaissance humanism after mass production reduced human beings to act like machines, and from when artificial intelligence 'humanising' machines challenged their acting. The culture of entrepreneurialism imbued with a passion for ideating should be equipped with an ideal furnace that heats insights, inspirations and mental representations and then submits them to the entrepreneurial process. That is how the Renaissance bottega forged innovative ventures.

Ideactionaries, the transformers, build bridges between different disciplines so that the results of discoveries that would otherwise remain confined to the narrow world of specialisation can be grasped. Transformers possess two doors. The primary winding door gives access to the results to those who can apprehend them, and the secondary winding door gives access to others who can extend the significance of the scope of the results. These are two vital doors. Suffice it to say that an entire generation missed Mendel's concept of the laws of genetics because his publication did not reach those capable of understanding and extending it. That is how new entrepreneurial species appear that challenge the 'divine right' of the ancestral species. The journey of intellectual creativity of enterprise towards transmutation is thus an odyssey.

When culture yearns to be the engine of evolution, it goes around new experiences; it runs 'all the orb of science', as the philosopher Giambattista Vico (1668–1744) would say. He recommended young people compare all ideas "because the variety of doctrines helps discoveries and advises the right choice" (Tommaseo, 1985). Transdisciplinarity is a polychromatic culture the Ideactionaries cultivate with care. It can break down the many insurmountable barriers that separate disciplines, languages, countries and ethnicities. Such a culture must go hand in hand with sympathy – in other words, with an inclination and instinctive attraction towards people, things and ideas – to counterbalance those human attitudes that relate more to personal interest than the common good. Francis Bacon wrote that it is not enough to embellish and cultivate the things we already know. It is necessary to extend their reach by generating a tension between education that loves order and innovation that relies

on disorder. That happens when students break out of disciplinary silos. Entering a well of knowledge, one wants the student to descend it to the bottom, evolving into a specialist who knows more and more about less and less until he knows everything about nothing as the world has changed. Every specialisation is a repository of knowledge, better known as a 'knowledge map'. Students do not learn that mastering that map can end up being wrong.

**The curtain does not come down on the Ideactionaries. In the Mind Gallery, the time is theirs**

Ideactionaries focus on intelligent disagreement rather than passive consensus, and constructive contrarianism results in an agreement that is a vehicle for transformation. Designed for the subjective and qualitative world of possibility, not the mathematical and statistical world of probability, the shared language of uncertainty facilitates consensus. New technologies and metrics, learning and experimenting with the art of transformation: Ideactionaries can use the former and be valued with the latter to arrest thinking resembling the parasitic plant of morbid habit. There is no other alternative to regression towards mediocrity.

What one must grasp from this exposition is that the brain is a vast and deep sea of memory. By sailing in that sea, the ideactionaries remember what happened in the past when disruptive innovations appear. They have in mind the power of *Robur the Conqueror*, a character from the imagination of Jules Verne. Robur is the engineer-builder of a flying machine of an unprecedented type. Robur is ambitious, overbearing, and heedless of the freedom of others. Is today's Robur artificial intelligence conceived as a technique that must work, regardless of its consequences? The state, market forces and the social context regulate human activity. The worry of losing control of the digital systems we have developed is growing in our minds. The consequence would be the rise of a surveillance state with AI as the regulator of our lives. To prevent this from happening, the conversation proposed here needs to be extended and deepened.

**Readings**

- Bush, V. (1945). *As We May Think*. The Atlantic.
- Formica, P. (2016). "The Innovative Coworking Spaces of 15th-Century", Harvard Business Review, April 27.
- Formica, P. (2022). *Ideators: Their Words and Voices*. Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing.
- Huxley, A. (1928). *Point counter Point*. Seattle, WA: Avon.
- Pavese, C. (1986). *Hard Labor*, in: *The selected works of Cesare Pavese*, New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Original Edition: *Lavorare stanca*. Firenze: Edizioni di Solaria, 1936.
- Verne, J. (1887). *Robur the Conqueror* (also known as *The Clipper of the Clouds*). New York, NY: Gilberton. Original Edition: *Robur le Conquérant*. Paris: Hetzel, 1886.
- Tommaseo, N. (1985). *Giovan Battista Vico e il suo secolo*, Palermo: Sellerio. Torino: Loescher.