

The Surprising Reason New Ideas Face Criticism And Rejection (M)

The world is full of new ideas, it is getting people to accept them that is the problem.

New ideas often do not get off the ground because of the disagreement they create among people, an insightful study of creativity finds.

Indeed, the greater an idea's novelty, the wider the spectrum of opinions it engenders.

Because new ideas are by definition unfamiliar (see: [neophobia](#)), they create mixed reactions, both positive and negative, which is why they take so long to spread, if they ever do.

However, mixed reactions are exactly what one should expect from new ideas and are not necessarily a sign of a flaw.

Dr Wayne Johnson, the study's first author, explained:

"The problem is people see mixed reviews, interpret that as a bad sign, and then reduce their support or interest.

People don't realize that mixed reviews are to be expected when an idea is new."

Where creativity goes to die

The researchers conducted five studies, analysing evaluations of films shown at the Sundance film festival and products pitched on Shark Tank, an American television show in which ideas are sold to investors.

The results showed that more unconventional films and ventures generated the most diverse opinions, which reduced support for them.

Mixed reviews, typical for novel ideas, are misinterpreted as negative signals, impeding innovation.

Evaluators' differing reference points contribute to varied assessments of novel concepts.

Dr Johnson said:

“The creativity research has been overwhelmingly focused on how you generate an idea.

But from my perspective, lack of ideas often isn't the right problem to solve.

There are endless ideas out there.

The difficulty is getting people to support and approve those ideas.

In businesses, the bottleneck is very often the middle manager who rejects new ideas employees have.

The idea is there, but it doesn't get past a desk or a committee.

That's where creativity goes to die.”

Sundance

One of the studies analysed the reactions of over 500 professional critics to films premiering at the Sundance film festival across seven years.

While one might expect that industry insiders and connoisseurs would agree on the value of the most novel movies, the reality was that these created the highly diverse reviews.

In contrast, conventional movies were assessed in more similar ways by trained critics.

Dr Johnson said:

“The conclusion here is that the newer the idea is, the more even the experts are going to disagree about its value.

And so we actually can’t count on experts to agree about whether something’s creative because newness makes them disagree about value.”

Rather than seeing mixed reactions as problematic, they can be signs of a creative idea, said Dr Johnson:

“People interpret disagreement as risk.

The fact that disagreement increases with greater idea newness makes creative ideas seem less valuable.

That throws sand in the gears of innovation.”