



## BOOKS ON THE HORIZON

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***The Chaos Imperative: How Chance and Disruption Increase Innovation, Effectiveness, and Success* by Ori Brafman and Judah Pollack (New York: Crown Business, 2013, 240 pp.)**

In a time of near ubiquitous engagement—to work, our friends, and our families—and with the constant stream of news information available to us no matter our location, Ori Brafman might ask, where is the ‘whitespace’ in our lives? In the workplace, productivity increases by packing more tasks into less time, enabled by technologies and management structures that engage people more efficiently with their tasks and limit variation to ensure quality control. However, Brafman argues that at some point organizations need to make an important switch from managing actions to managing minds.

Ori Brafman is a consultant on organizational behavior who has worked with Fortune 500 companies as well as the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff—where he was asked to help the military rethink how it was organized to consider terrorism. An expert on chaos theory, he has written about organizational models that thrive on informal, peer-to-peer relationships rather than on traditional, hierarchical structures. In *The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations*, written with Rod A. Beckstrom, Brafman described the advantages of relatively flat, informal networks that have overcome formative, yet rigidly organized foes—such as file sharing technologies that ultimately wrecked the music industry. *The Chaos Imperative* is really a follow up to *The Starfish and the*

*Spider*, expanding on the theme that less formalized rather than top-down leadership models are necessary in order for organizations to manage knowledge work as effectively as they have managed traditional process-based work. Brafman’s co-author, Judah Pollack, is a writer, speaker, and co-founder of Riverene Leadership Institute, which lists notable companies Google, North Face, Oracle, and SAP as clients. He has worked on the same military project as Brafman as a co-designer of the Starfish Adaptive Leadership Program, which was intended to introduce leadership principles and management based on the concepts covered in *The Starfish and the Spider*. He has lectured throughout the Army and to business leaders on the subject of innovation, and is a frequent guest lecturer at the Haas School of Business, University of California at Berkeley. His TED lectures are especially engaging, ranging from the topic of liberal education to managing millennials.

In *The Chaos Imperative*, Brafman and Pollack contend that people need unstructured time in order to slip into a mental zone that allows the brain to cogitate and put puzzle pieces together in the background. The argument rests on the theory that when a mind switches from being deeply engaged into a daydreaming state, it is not really at rest but rather the brain’s ‘default mode network’—a kind of background operating system—becomes active. What it can accomplish is remarkable, and may hold a key to promoting better creativity and problem solving. It’s not a new idea; in fact, the authors argue that some of the most extraordinary breakthroughs in history have been the result of daydreaming. Einstein famously took strolls in order to seek relief from the arduous concentration of his work, and it was during these strolls that he had some of his most remarkable insights.

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Working with the U.S. military, one of the most rigidly controlled, top-down organizations in existence, Brafman was asked to help implement new organizational structures to combat the loosely organized, highly unstructured global network of clandestine terror cells. Innovative and creative thinking was required, but the military did not allow for out-of-the-box thinking. As a result of Brafman's reorganization, personnel were freed up to have more time for reflection rather than being constantly on the tasks of analysis and planning. In some sense, this is similar to Google's notion/practice of 20% Time, which has been cited as a tremendously important part of the company's innovation culture. Whereas the expectation at Google was that employees would take time to work on other projects, the idea here is to be more like Einstein: take a stroll, relax, and let the mind's default mode network kick into gear.

Facilitating innovation in the workplace does not mean just letting employees daydream all day. On the contrary, daydreaming one's way to innovation only works if the person is deeply engaged in a project or some task, like Manhattan Project-style engagement. It worked for Einstein because, well, he was Einstein. However, regular—albeit very bright—people can do this, too; it is during the period when they separate from deep engagement that breakthroughs can happen. In order to make such breakthroughs more common, Brafman and Pollack argue for more unstructured time within organizations that provides employees opportunities to reflect and allow their neural hardwiring to take over.

The authors argue that leaders should seek opinions from 'unusual suspects'; that is, people completely outside the given profession who have little familiarity with the work being done. It sounds absurd: What value could someone not well versed in a topic bring to it, especially when time is critical? Yet Brafman and Pollack say this, too, is valuable because insights can come from just about anywhere, and sometimes it takes the perspective of the uninitiated to get those close to a project to see it from a new angle. Leaders should also make organizations less formal so employees can benefit from relationships they create with co-workers outside their immediate networks. This is another concept that the technology industry has made famous—creating social areas where employees could play basketball, shoot pool together, and generally have social interactions while still at work. These workplace social hangouts create stronger relationships throughout organizations and help to establish an environment of measured and controllable chaos that fosters novel thinking and serendipity.

Brafman and Pollack make their points through storytelling—from the Black Death to Silicon Valley—and readers will enjoy the way they weave the narratives together to support the importance of disruption and chaos in organizations. The book is relatively short with lots of whitespace in the margins and between the paragraphs. It won't take much time to finish, so readers may also wish to read the equally compact *The Starfish and the Spider*.

***The End of the Suburbs: Where the American Dream is Moving* by Leigh Gallagher (New York: Portfolio, 2013, 272 pp.)**

There is a fairy tale in which a woman who lived in a vinegar bottle complained bitterly about it. One day a fairy happened to overhear her. Believing she could do the woman a favor, the fairy promised her a better house the next day. The better house materialized, yet the woman still complained. Thus it went over and over, resulting in ever bigger and better houses, but each one as unsatisfactory as the previous. Finally, the fairy grew exasperated and gave up. It's an old story, but it could easily have been a tale about the decades preceding the housing crisis in the United States and the role that policy, lenders, and consumers played in it. The housing market, and specifically Americans' seemingly insatiable desire for larger and larger houses, is the context of Leigh Gallagher's *The End of the Suburbs*—an even-handed examination of the rise of suburbia with its long commutes, large yards, endless sameness, no sidewalks, and single-use zoning and what Gallagher sees as the next wave of neighborhoods with high Walk Scores, houses with front porches, postage stamp (if any) yards, and mixed-use zoning.

The beginning, of course, is the rise of the postwar suburbs like Levittown, which were made possible by VA and FHA home loans to veterans for a fraction of what it cost to rent. The original intent was simply to speed up development and get returning veterans into affordable housing quickly; however, some FHA policies, such as the requirement that developments be single use, resulted in a monoculture of homes, cul-de-sacs, and uniformity. Developers were encouraged to build homes and nothing else so that grocery stores, the barber, the train station, and other services were no longer within a short walk. Postwar American culture also created a soup of disincentives for living in the city. It was an expansive time: the economy was booming and people wanted to spread out, away from the cities where houses were cramped, parking was scarce, and everything was old. People wanted new amenities like malls with hundreds of stores

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