

Through the Eye of an Iconoclast

The real voyage of discovery lies not in seeking
new landscapes but in seeing with new eyes.

—Marcel Proust

GLASS DEFIES DEFINITION. At room temperature, glass takes the form of a solid, hard enough to hold its own weight, and when appropriately shaped into a container, strong enough to support other substances. But this is an illusion. It is not really solid. Chemists say that glass is a liquid but with a viscosity so high that it behaves like a solid. Raise the temperature a little bit, and its liquid nature reasserts itself. And that is where the art comes in . . .

Stepping into the hotshop is like entering a carnival funhouse. Completely disorienting. Before you even see what's going on, the roar of the furnaces sounds like a jet engine on full throttle in the moments before

if the idea is successful, then he's going to be the one working on that technology," Lavoie says. This is a nice perk especially if it's a particularly hot technology that people are dying to work on.

Lavoie and Marino came up with a novel solution to the problem of social fear and how this fear stifles innovation. To be sure, it doesn't remove all of the fear of sharing one's ideas publicly, but it attempts to take some of the drama out of it. It also has another, unanticipated benefit in terms of transparency. The market makes it clear to everyone in the company what everyone else is working on, in essence providing a big picture for everyone who wants to know how their work fits into the company as a whole. Lavoie and Marino didn't design the market to address the problem of secrecy in organizations, but the market has turned out to help decrease a third common fear that gets in the way of iconoclasm: the fear of the unknown.

Fear of the Unknown: A Biological View of Uncertainty

Although fear of the unknown is an entirely different type of phobia from the fear of failure, it is also processed through the amygdala. This is actually good news, because it means that the pathways by which fear inhibits behavior flow through this one structure. We have learned a great deal about the amygdala in the last several years, and this knowledge can be applied to ameliorate this particular roadblock to iconoclasm.

Fear of the unknown, or ambiguity, is a funny thing. It is not a specific event such as an electric shock or the pain experienced from the criticism of an unempathetic supervisor. Ambiguity stems from a lack of knowledge. It looms over the psyche like a dark cloud on the horizon. The brain constantly tries to predict what's going to happen next, and when it can't, a sense of foreboding ensues. Some people are better at dealing with ambiguous situations than others, but when fear of ambiguity bubbles to the surface, it is universally experienced the same way.

Recent advances in neuroeconomics offer clues about heading off this demon before it inhibits behavior. Consider a classic conundrum, known as the Ellsberg paradox.¹⁴ There are two large urns placed in front of you (see figure 3-1). The urns are completely opaque, so you cannot see their contents. The urn on the left contains ten black marbles and ten white ones. The urn on the right contains twenty marbles, but you do not know the proportion of black to white. Now, the game is to draw a black marble from one of the urns. If you are successful, you win \$100. You only have one chance, so which urn will you draw from? Keep the answer in your mind.

Let's play again. Now, the game is to draw a white marble. Again, you only have one chance, so which urn will it be?

Most people when confronted with these choices choose the urn on the left—the one with the known proportions of black and white

FIGURE 3-1

The Ellsberg paradox

The urn on the left contains ten black marbles and ten white marbles. The urn on the right contains twenty marbles of an unknown ratio of black to white. Draw a black marble to win \$100. Which urn do you choose to draw from?

