

# Here's to the non-conformists

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So one of football's managerial greats has gone. Ferguson's era is finally over.

The BBC's chief football writer Phil McNulty sums him up in three words [here](#) "Charismatic, explosive, contrary". It is the latter that explains his brilliance for me. Sir Alex has never acted as he was "supposed to". When Wayne Rooney first threatened to quit, back in 2010, Ferguson created a reality-changing "Truth Turning Point" (a pivotal moment in communications that "defies every convention .. and gets the audience to the truth quickly and easily"), which I examined in detail in my [book](#). McNulty goes on: "Love him or hate him, football in general and Man United in particular will be poorer for his

departure." Of course he is hated as well as loved. Which is characteristic for non-conformists and explains why there isn't a richer pool of non-conformists out there.

This matters.

According to [Professor Costis Markides](#), speaking at a Deloitte [breakfast](#) in early May, non-conformity is the key ingredient to innovation and creativity. Yet learning to conform is almost unavoidable. Markides cited the landmark survey developed by George [Land](#) as a test of creativity. Land ran his test with a set of kids over their childhood and adolescence. Aged five 98% of the kids qualified as "creative geniuses". When those same kids were tested at age ten 30% were at genius level. Aged fifteen : 12%. That longitudinal test then ended (Land quips "because everyone got depressed.."). But when over 1m adults were given the same test the result was 2%.

Land concluded that "non-creative behaviour is learned". Or, put it another way, we learn to conform. Most of us like to conform. Resisting conformity can be a lonely road. Most people don't manage it - even when conforming clearly doesn't make any sense, as this famous [Candid Camera](#) sketch clip shows clearly.

So here's to the non-conformists. To those who reject conformity, because they don't think it's right for them. (Not the ones who are outside the law, that's not what this is about). To the people who zig when everyone else zags. Who stay mute when everyone else is singing along. Who won't take part in communal games and who absent themselves just as the drinking is gaining momentum.

The owners of the banged up Citroen in a carpark full of BMWs. The ones with the unusual dress sense and unpopular tastes in music. Who don't automatically do as they are told, and yet have a good reason. They should be cherished and they should be encouraged. If you can make room for them within your organisation - and research shows that they're few and far between - they may be the ones that make the real difference in sustained innovation, creativity and competitive advantage.

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