

## WHERE DID THE INITIATIVE GO?

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**Abstract:** Initiative represents the ability to judge what needs to be done and take action, especially without suggestion from other people. There are two main types of initiative: good and bad initiative. The last one implies taking action in a selfish way, like shooting random people in a crowd because their society shares different religious or political views than yours. However, the following article explores the "good" initiative, which makes the world a better place to live in. The impact on the surrounding world tends to fade away as the society "develops" throughout the years. The article will mention a few "black holes" which absorb the effects of the initiative people (especially young adults) take. One of them is "the virtual world". People put more effort into making the world of games and social media interaction grow successful, while neglecting the real world.

**Keywords:** initiative, boredom, virtual reality, gadgets, IQ, scientists

### Introduction

Small children will never stop from amazing those around them with their curiosity. Sometimes, their question seems to be ridiculous: "Dogs have fur. Why?"; "Windows are transparent. How?"; "The water pours downwards. Why can't it pour upwards?" The truth is, they are not that ridiculous if you think deeper about them. In fact, the only awkward aspect here is that we realize children start to question things that we have always taken for what they are and never thought of them being different.

Albert Einstein, one of the greatest scientists ever, said that "the important thing is to never stop questioning". In the same manner, Barack Obama – the ex-president of the USA (2009-2017) and a skilled businessman – during an open interview, encouraged people to keep exploring, dreaming, and asking "why?": "Don't settle for what you already know".

Nowadays, a strange phenomenon has been taking over the society in the last few years. People lose interest in the world around them. They let things just be. Or worse - some individuals may immerse themselves so much in the world of games and movies, which they try to implement the things they see there in their everyday life. This leads to taking initiatives like: yelling, lying, stealing, kicking or even shooting those who don't share their political or religious views. This initiative should not exist. An example of some small initiative that needs to be revived is selflessly helping someone carry a heavy bag of groceries to their home. Or returning a lost puppy to its owners or (at least) writing down any curiosity that pops into our mind, then looking into it to find answers. It doesn't cost us much to do so, but it will surely give us a lot of pleasure.

### Loss of Initiative: Gadgets and Virtual Worlds

Following this direction, the first thing that needs to be discussed is the socially-passive state. Generally, this refers to individuals who ignore people and events around them. They also like to isolate themselves. The big question here is: how did it come to this? The 21<sup>st</sup> century is believed to have one of the most prosperous societies, with technology and research techniques developing faster than ever, why would individuals lose interest in everything around them? An easy answer to give is that technology made us so. In other words, people have become more interested in the virtual world than the real one, to the point where the first one can replace the

second. We use social media to interact with others and we call it socialization. Google has become the biggest source of information (which is not quite the root problem here). People really do have access to tons of information. Children are given gadgets that were originally designed for office work (to help with all the tasks organization and assist the everyday work).

In 2013, Daily mail reported that 29% of the toddlers can easily use the gadgets. The remaining 70% master it by primary school age. Does this not surprise you? According to the USA Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, an average child spends about 8 hours a day on gadgets [1]. As they grow older, this time increases. What impact does this have on each individual, in terms of mental impact? There are both positive and negative effects.

Talking about the positive effects, studies have shown an increase in cognitive skills in children as they grow up using gadgets. Children display improved abilities to process the information, to reason it, remember random details and relate objects with other objects, due to electronic games that they play on gadgets. These games imply: quick reaction, basic understanding of sciences and economics, creativity, adaptability etc. Not only can they jump, run, balance, shoot, construct or plan escapes. Most of the games and apps nowadays improvise an economic system, with their own money, teaching players some basic trading and plan-making skills. For instance, a 6-year old might not know how to count yet, but they may know how to talk in front of camera when making a Tik-Tok video, they may know simple ways of editing photos, converting mp4 formats to mp3 etc. Reading? A must-learn from an early age. This may count as initiative: children are interested in learning a lot as they grow up.

However, this initiative seems to fade as we go more into the real world. People enjoy living in the virtual environment so much that they deny the “first world” at some point. In children, this manifests as confusion, distress, loss of appetite, apathy towards their surroundings etc. They would rather build up an empire for their virtual pet in the “Pet Society” game than feeding and cuddling with their actual pets in their house. As children grow up, this turns into full ignorance toward the environment: problems like stray animals, deforestation, air pollution tend to get ignored when making money and trying cool apps for everyday use occupy their minds.

Taking this one step further, even when there is initiative from individuals, not many ideas are materialized into projects. Most of the time, individuals seek some sort of support from the internet community before moving further to the next step [2]. For instance, many teenagers would first express their disagreement with a certain situation on social media, instead of taking action right on the spot [3]. An example of an online post would be this: “I saw a man hitting his dog today on the street. He kept pulling on the animal’s leash, forcing it to walk. How terrible!”. And then, this post gets hundreds of likes and comments shaming that man. The author of the post gets a small dose of dopamine (the reward hormone), as they feel like they took an attitude by reporting the case online. Some may even take pictures. Still, that doesn’t mean the case was actually solved. The author would have done the animal greater favor if they have actually taken attitude on the spot, attempting to educate the “terrible man”. Internet movements may easily become worldwide, but not many of them turn into real-world movements (to help pets, wild animals, the environment etc.). As in the previous case, the true police is at the city’s police station, not online. It also has a special number anyone can call in case of emergencies. Real effects show up when taking actual initiative. So why did the initiative go online?

### **Loss of initiative: Snowflake teens and young adults**

A strange trend has been taking over the social media lately, touching the real world as well. Millennials – young adults born in early 2000’s – have broken any record at getting emotionally hurt. In 2016, the Collins English dictionary introduced a new definition for the word “snowflake”: (millennials) who tend to get easily offended, seek lots of attention and lack resilience. They often claim their uniqueness to be an excuse to their behavior. The term is often associated with “egocentrism”, “anxiety” or “depression”. Shortly, teenagers and young adults nowadays claim that the world doesn’t give them what they deserve. The fighting and initiative

spirit is being replaced by social media posts talking about things that trigger their anxiety and how people are not enough sympathetic to their suffering.

The word “snowflake” itself is partly referring to the uniqueness of each snowflake, which induces the idea that each and every one of us is special. At the same time, snowflakes are delicate and fragile – that’s why millennials are considered to embody this overly-sensitive nature. Now, how does this relate to the “leakage” of initiative spirit? “Snowflake” people are well known for their tendency of isolating themselves. They wouldn’t be the one to save the day, they wouldn’t have the courage to stand up for a cause. Most of the messages they try to send others is that they have some sort of mental illness (self-diagnosis alert here!).

A short article called “Who is the snowflake generation and why are they fun to hate?” (posted by Clotilde De Maricourt on the Oxford’s Students web page [4]) explores this phenomenon of victimization in a quite sarcastic way. The author makes acid remarks, calling the young adults out for “*whining* rather than acting”. However, she still brings up a few factors which may have created this new generation. Among them: increasing taxes, BREXIT, global warming etc. Yet, she mentions that these factors do not directly harm us. Rather than that, the cause behind these events are humans themselves. Which takes us back to the entire article’s topic: why do people complain, rather than working on the source of the problem? Start from small things – go out, explore, ask questions like “why is this happening? Where does the global heat come from? How can we reduce the cancer risks?” etc. Perhaps, there are a lot of things to learn in the beginning, before starting to work on the problem itself. But not great thing has been done in one day. Rewards will come in time, only when people keep the initiative alive.

### **Loss of Initiative: IQ**

Well, of course, schools also teach their young students things that previous generation used to learn during their college years, as a result of research advance. By this, I mean it’s not a secret that teenagers are taught Science laws, technology and social skills which our parents, grandparents and farther generations didn’t have access to or didn’t even need to learn. As a result, today’s youngsters would easily win an intelligence competition against the 1950’s adults who work in the field, for instance. And the younger may be an average student of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. In fact, a name for this phenomenon has been created – the Flynn effect. One aspect the term refers to is the fact that individuals nowadays get significantly higher IQ results than people from the previous centuries when taking the same (old) test. As an example, a study published in 2009 shows that British children’s average test scores on the Raven’s Progressive Matrices test rose by 14 IQ points from 1942 to 2008. Similar gains have been recorded for countries like Japan, South Korea and some Western European states.

Looking at this from another point of view: shouldn’t we question ourselves twice before assuming that today’s people are smarter than Einstein? We may know a lot of things from an early educational stage. However, we do not have the complex thinking to do further research and discover new things at that stage. We are served all of our ancestors’ knowledge on a plate. That doesn’t make us hunters. This is why IQ tests have to be updated periodically. Ulric Neisser – American psychologist and member of the USA National Academy of Sciences – shares his conclusions on this topic in his article, called “Rising Scores of Intelligence Tests. He estimated that, if we were to use the IQ values of 1997 on the average IQ of the US in 1932, according to the first Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scales standardization sample, we would get an average IQ of 80 for that time. Even the most intelligent people would hardly get above the average, and “nearly one-quarter would have appeared to be ‘deficient’”. However, he proceeds to state that “Test scores are certainly going up all over the world, but whether intelligence itself has risen remains controversial”. People back then did not have all the solutions to the problems they stumbled upon while experimenting, which slowed down their progress. However, to think of how few auxiliary tools they had when carrying out their research and comparing that situation to the today’s day, one may ask himself: how did they create things out of nothing, while many of us, nowadays, don’t even look around them when walking through this fantastic world? It looks like the development

process of our world is too slow for the things we've got to help us in every single way. Why don't we all become researchers? Why are there only a few people who keep the development going? During the Industrial Revolution (1760-1840), the man had gone from manual powered work to engines, from carriages to locomotives, from traditional post services to telegraphed communication, and so on. What happens nowadays? Smart gadgets have been widely used since the 1980's; new iPhone, iPod, smartphone and usual laptop models come out new year. However, taking a closer look, it's not their functionalities that evolve, it's rather their exterior appearance that's changing. And no one really seems to be bothered by that. People don't feel the need for any substantial invention – Sci-Fi movies are enough to fill in that lust for something revolutionary. Very few people take the initiative to do physical experiments. Fewer people dedicate their lives to that. Creating new apps is easier than messing up with the real world's mighty powers. Young people don't even think of challenging the Universe as much as they used to in distant centuries of the past. No flying cars? Let's make a movie about it, special effects will suffice. Curious about how our brains would function at its full capacity? Let's watch *Limitless* or let's make a movie of our own. A movie. What about experiencing this in real life? What stops every and each of us to try things in real life?

### Conclusions

If we used the time machine to bring researchers of the past into our world, they would surely use their chance to reshape this world (once again), using the “miraculous” technology we've got nowadays. They have been used to hunting for their food – getting things the hard way. They have been used to materialize their curiosities into inventions. Our brains need to be rewired. Make good use of all the tools we have on us, to experiment and explore this world. There is no bigger satisfaction, than being part of something greater than ourselves - global scale projects. Start small - Google research, then go big - find people who share your curiosities, and dream, experiment, risk, create TOGETHER. It all starts with small questions: “Why? How?”, but it never has to stop here.

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