How Do Authors Work?

Manuel Algarin

Department of Educational Technology Leadership, New Jersey City University

EDTC 803: Data Analysis and Report Writing

Dr. Tracy Amerman

August 2, 2021

How Do Authors Work?

Introduction

What can be learned about how author's work? LifeHacker's "How I Work" series explores tools, resources, and methods professionals use in their respective fields. Through an interview process, individuals share experiences, advice, and industry tips for productivity and wellness. The purposeful sample represented in this report consists of authors, specifically, Grethen Rubin, Roxane Gay, Jane McGonigal, Belle Beth Copper, WIlliam Gurstelle, John Scalzi, Walter Isaacson, Charles Duhigg, Tim Leong, and Daniel Pink. This collection of authors was selected to show a mix of genders, novelists, biographers, nonfiction writers, teachers, and entrepreneurs.

The Analysis Process

Four super categories emerged, grouping related themes. Relationships and distinctions exist across and within categories. Grounded codes were developed and refined after reading through three or four interviews at a time. Initially, patterns showed that sleep was valued, systems for organization existed, and that authors were ambitious, busy people. Codes were arranged hierarchically after a set of three or four interviews were read at a time revealing dimensions of broader categories. Finally, these associations resulted in super categories: multiple energizing sources, toolboxes, driven work ethic, and work spaces for concentration. For each super category, one topic or theme will be elaborated.

Emerging Themes

Multiple energizing sources

Authors recharge and motivate through sleep, socialization, physical activity, relaxation, or playing games. A dominant theme in this super category is sleep. It is clear that there is a common value placed on sleep among the interviewees.

Authors enjoy playing games and watching tv. For example, William Gurstelle hosts a trivia night for locals in his town while Roxane Gay plays scrabble competitively. A few authors claimed to appreciate physical activities. For instance, William Gurstelle likes to walk and build in his is workshop; Jane McGonigal runs competitively; Roxane Gay is considering adding a treadmill to her office space.

Sleep

Sleeping for at least seven hours is valued across all authors. Most prefer to sleep and wake up early to get the most out of their days. Some authors track their sleep like Daniel Pink and Grethen Rubin using technology. Jane McGonigal shares a philosophy for sleeping called "dark after dark" which basically is a commitment to not staying up when it is late. This approach is helpful especially when traveling and adjusting to different time zones. To help with falling asleep, she practices gratitude with her husband in bed before falling asleep as a way to process the day and settle into sleep. Belle Bethe Cooper also takes steps to relax and fall asleep which consists of listening to re-runs of tv shows on her IPod. Belle Bethe Cooper and Grethen Rubin both set gentle sounding alarms to support a pleasant waking from sleep.

There are some inconsistencies in how authors show their value for sleep. For example, Walter Isaacson does get his 7 hours of sleep but prefers writing from 9pm - 2am. So he goes to sleep later than the rest in this sample. Tim Leong is also a self-proclaimed night owl who has trained his body for less sleep by staying up to 3am. He stands out as an outlier when compare to how the rest of his cohort respect sleep.

Toolboxes

A range and variety of digital tools and technologies are preferred by authors. Toolboxes refers to the network and customization of devices and apps that authors use for writing, storing data, and collaboration. Commonly used digital tools and platforms among authors include Dropbox, Gmail, word, doc, google scholar, and spreadsheets. Authors favor paper and pencil for to-do lists and simpler tasks.

Paper and pencil

Nearly all authors reported using a combination of paper and pencil. Grethen Rubin claims to always have her notebook with her for jotting ideas. Tim Leong uses post-its every morning to jot all the tasks for the day. He also uses lists to brainstorm ideas for projects. His strategy is to create a list of ten in order to generate additional good ideas related to his purpose. Belle Bethe Cooper has a specific favorite notebook and pen she uses, medium (A5) size Leuchtturm1917 and Ti-Click Pro, respectively. Jane McGoniga has a collection of all her notebooks and plans to keep them for nostalgic and reflective reasons. They show personal growth.

Driven Work Ethic

Busy, ambitious, resilient, driven, competitive, self-improving, and reflective were grouped to show the qualities of character that authors demonstrated in their interviews. Roxane Gay has a list of tasks on her teaching days and switches off to a set of other errands on her non-teaching days. Charles Duhigg is hyper focused on his goals, "finding and writing great stories that (hopefully) are important enough to change the work". All authors expressed an intensity for their work. Moreover, for most authors, the best advice that they received related to doing great work and promotion in their jobs. For example, a piece of advice that resonated with Tim Leong was "if it's worth doing, it's worth doing well". Authors lead busy lives and aim to get as much out of their days as possible.

Focused on future projects

Although authors are focused on their current assignments, they have plans for future work. John Scalzi partnered with Tor Books stating that, "in one sense I know what I'll be doing for the next decade, and I will always have something 'next' to write". William Gurstelle confirmed that he is thinking about many projects all the time. The same is true for Belle Bethe Cooper who shared that, "I constantly have new projects waiting to be started and unfinished projects begging to be finished". Roxane Gay has a hard time saying not to work that comes her

way. Finally, Jane McGonigal, attempts to manifest the future by, "constantly tweeting about projects or types of work [she] would like to do some day." Authors show their driven work ethic by constantly planning on projects to work on in the future.

Work Spaces for Concentration

Several variables that authors consider in their work space include noise levels, visuals, comfortability, location, and desks. For many authors, they have multiple work spaces. This can be in different locations like how Grethen Rubin switches between both her neighborhood library and her home office. Walter Isaacson enjoys libraries too and also considers museums as work spaces. Roxane Gay, too, has multiple work spaces in her home including the comfort of her couch and the simplicity of her office. Jane McGonigal also appreciates the comfort of her home and has an office called the "The Future" that allows for more concentration. Belle Bethe Cooper works from home but moves to different rooms during different seasons to embrace warmth and more light. For example, she'll move her desk to a different room in the summer for better access to natural light.

Noise

Authors have different preferences for noise in their work space. Tim Leong connects purpose with music, playing music to match the vibe of his project. Grethen Rubin prefers silence but doesn't mind the busy sounds of people in a coffee shop. William Gustelle likes a quiet work space and has the TV on for background noise. John Scalzi, like Grethen Rubin, prefers silence on more serious projects. Daniel Pink wears ear plugs for silence.

Conclusion

Authors write. They have unique preferences and attitudes that shape their approaches to writing. Common themes based on LifeHacker's interviews of authors illuminate the powerful role of sleep, timelessness of pencil and paper, relentless work ethic, and sensitivity to noise.

References

Douglas, N. (2017). I'm Author Roxane Gay, and This is How I Work. *LifeHacker*.

https://lifehacker.com/im-author-roxane-gay-and-this-is-how-i-work-1820994345

Douglas, N. (2015). I'm Belle Beth Cooper, Writer and Entrepreneur, and This Is How I Work.

LifeHacker.

https://lifehacker.com/im-belle-beth-cooper-writer-and-entrepreneur-and-this-1729778

895

Douglas, N. (2015). I'm Jane McGonigal, Game Designer and Author, and This Is How I Work.

LifeHacker.

https://lifehacker.com/im-jane-mcgonigal-game-designer-and-author-and-this-i-17270

32851

Douglas, N. (2015). I'm John Scalzi and This Is How I Work. *LifeHacker*.

https://lifehacker.com/im-john-scalzi-and-this-is-how-i-work-1720935145

Douglas, N. (2014). I'm Charles Duhigg, and This Is How I Work. *LifeHacker*.

https://lifehacker.com/im-charles-duhigg-and-this-is-how-i-work-1511638172

Douglas, N. (2013). I'm Gretchen Rubin, and This Is How I Work. *LifeHacker*.

https://lifehacker.com/im-gretchen-rubin-and-this-is-how-i-work-1054092116

Douglas, N. (2013). I'm Daniel Pink, and This is How I Work. *LifeHacker*.

https://lifehacker.com/im-daniel-pink-and-this-is-how-i-work-509280806

Douglas, N. (2013). I'm Tim Leong, Author of Super Graphic, and This Is How I Work.

LifeHacker.

https://lifehacker.com/im-tim-leong-author-of-super-graphic-and-this-is-how-7300235

98

Douglas, N. (2014). I'm Walter Isaacson and This Is How I Work. *LifeHacker*.

    https://lifehacker.com/im-walter-isaacson-and-this-is-how-i-work-1654948434

Douglas, N. (2016). I'm William Gurstelle, Author of Backyard Ballistics, and This Is How I

    Work. *LifeHacker*.

    https://lifehacker.com/im-william-gurstelle-author-of-backyard-ballistics-an-17878974

    01