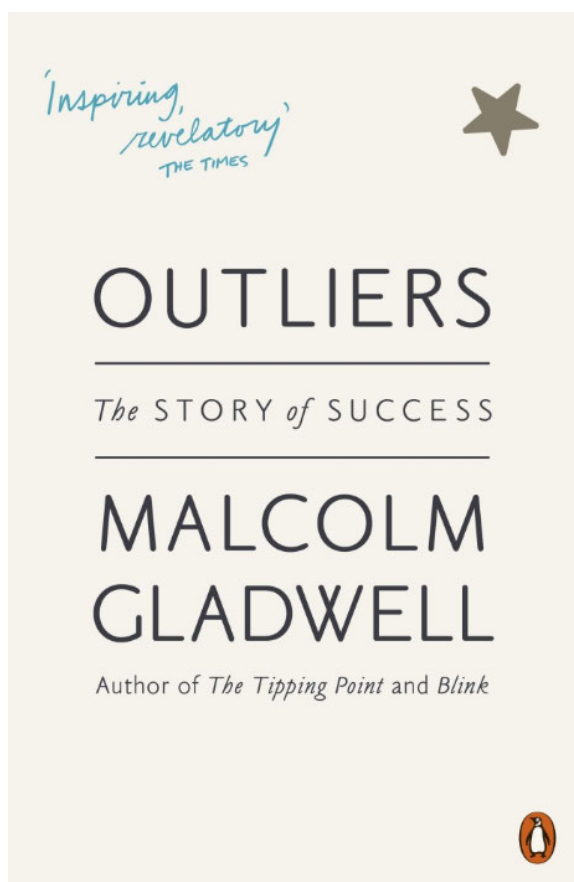
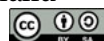


■ Book Review

Outliers: The Story of Success (by Malcolm Gladwell)Sari Siipola, ORCID: [0000-0003-1411-3121](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1411-3121)

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We all know people who are described to be “extraordinary” or “genius”. They are the top experts who seem to achieve everything imaginable in their field. What is the story behind their success? Are these individuals exceptionally skilful or just extremely lucky? In the book, “Outliers -- The story of success”, Malcolm Gladwell ponders the factors behind the possibility for people to achieve the best possible outcome and become the exceptional professionals we read about in the newspapers.

According to the book, there are numerous events and circumstances in our life, which

we never come to think of, that determine, at least in part, the direction of our lives. The usual assumption is that successful people either just work harder than others or possess some extraordinary talent. Either of these arguments is completely wrong; one has of course to work hard and have some amount of flair to be able to stand out with an exceptional performance in any field of art, science or commerce. However, this is not necessarily the whole story behind success.

Getting to the top in ice hockey is a perfect example of a career that is a result of hard practice. Ice hockey in Canada is highly competitive and requires countless hours of training. A psychologist called Roger Barnsley was the first to find a variable that is closely linked to success in ice hockey in Canada. From every age class, starting from age nine, the most promising players are selected to play in the all-stars-teams. Being in this group allows these young players to get better coaching and teammates as well as double amount of playing hours. The system guarantees that the most talented youngsters from every age group have similar possibilities to make it to the top. Or do they? When Roger Barnsley looked at the data for any elite group in Canada, he noticed that 40 percent of the players were born between January and March and, furthermore, another 30 percent between April and June. This is surprising but easily explained. The selection for the advanced players is made yearly in January. The timing of selection gives a huge advantage to those who are older in January, because at young age, a relatively small difference in age can be crucial for physical development. In the next year's round, these children in the advanced team have already been trained harder, which makes it so much easier for them to do well in the following se-

lections and develop their skills effectively.

Not only the time of the year, but also the year itself might make a difference in the opportunities available specializing in certain subjects. It seems that there is indeed a perfect time to be born to become a top level programmer or to amass a huge fortune. The main reason for this are the different periods of human or country history and how they match different phases in peoples' lives. Studying in a school where it was possible to freely practice programming at a time when most students did not have any possibilities of using computers, gave Bill Gates a good starting point to success in this area. And if you happened to be in the right age and right place when Wall Street emerged and the railroads were built in the United States, you had a fairly good change to use the opportunity and to become one of the richest people in the world's history.

Still, even the luckiest individuals need practice. Malcolm Gladwell uses a term "ten-thousand-hour rule". This particular number of hours of practice needed to really master any skill was first mentioned in a psychological test by K. Anders Ericsson. The test showed clearly that the amount of time a pianist uses for practicing correlates with his/her career success. There were no "naturals" who would develop fast without training. In the book, the histories of Bill Gates, Mozart and the Beatles are described, in order to show that all of them actually spent a long time practicing before becoming exceptionally skilled professionals.

It seems that the secrets behind success have been revealed. But the author goes further, considering how IQ tests have been designed and what type of intelligence they are able to reveal. Furthermore, he questions the benefit of an exceptionally high IQ and suggests that our background has a stronger impact to our behaviour than we tend to expect. Although partly simplified and even provocative, the examples of the book are relatively well justified. The text is entertaining and easy to read. I found myself questioning quite a few claims of the book but I do not think this is necessary a negative thing. This book is an inspiring discussion about the complexity of the impact of backgrounds in human life and the importance of the people we surround ourselves with.

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Malcom Gladwell is a Canadian writer and reporter born in England. He has belonged to the staff of the *The New Yorker* since 1996. He is well known as author of books and articles that challenge common views on management, decision making and social dynamics (Gladwell 2001, 2006).

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