

Bridging the gap



## Givers and takers in science: thriving through genuine collaboration and lasting success

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**ABSTRACT:** Scientific progress hinges on collaboration, trust, and the exchange of ideas. This essay explores the roles of "Givers" and "Takers" within the scientific community, emphasizing how behaviors focused on collective advancement drive innovation and enduring success. Givers foster environments of mutual respect and sustainable partnerships, while Takers, prioritizing short-term gains, risk undermining the collaborative fabric of science. Through a conceptual analysis, the manuscript highlights the importance of strategic generosity in overcoming challenges posed by Takers and underscores the necessity of institutional support for a culture of giving. The discussion concludes with a call to embrace collaborative values as a pathway to meaningful and lasting contributions in science.

**KEYWORDS:** Psychology. Science. Soft Skills. Collaboration. Career.



In the realm of science, individuals often navigate between behaviors that can broadly be characterized as giving or taking. These tendencies profoundly shape the dynamics of collaboration, the quality of scientific output, and the sustainability of success in academia and beyond. The conceptual framework of “Givers” and “Takers,” as explored in Adam Grant’s influential work<sup>1</sup>, resonates strongly with the experiences of many within the scientific community, providing valuable insights into how these roles influence the advancement of knowledge and innovation.

### **The role of givers in fostering scientific progress**

Scientific progress relies on collaboration and the exchange of ideas. Givers, who prioritize the collective good over individual gain, contribute to a culture of trust and mutual respect. These individuals facilitate progress by mentoring colleagues, sharing resources, and engaging in transparent and constructive dialogue. Their approach transforms science into a cooperative endeavor where success is viewed as a shared achievement rather than a competition.

The actions of Givers often ripple across institutions and research networks. For example, mentoring relationships create opportunities for early-career scientists, while collaborative projects across disciplines and countries expand the horizons of discovery. These behaviors are not merely altruistic; they reflect a strategic understanding of how collective success enhances individual contributions. The ethos of giving is a cornerstone for fostering innovation and cultivating environments where scientific inquiry thrives.

### **Collaboration: the cornerstone of innovation**

The complexity of modern science necessitates collaboration. No single researcher or institution can tackle global challenges in isolation. Effective collaborations integrate diverse perspectives, skill

sets, and resources, creating a fertile ground for breakthroughs. Givers play a pivotal role in this ecosystem by enabling these synergies. Their willingness to share knowledge and align efforts with broader goals creates a foundation for sustainable partnerships.

Consider the global efforts to address infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and HIV. These endeavors exemplify how shared goals and cooperative efforts lead to meaningful advancements. Multinational collaborations have demonstrated that progress is accelerated when researchers contribute openly, pooling expertise and resources. Such efforts underscore the importance of cultivating a collaborative mindset and highlight the challenges posed by individuals who prioritize personal gain over collective impact.

### **The challenges posed by takers in science**

In contrast, Takers often approach science with a transactional mindset, prioritizing short-term personal gains over long-term contributions to the field. While they may achieve momentary recognition, their lack of investment in collective progress often undermines the potential for sustainable success. This behavior can erode trust, hinder collaboration, and disrupt the progress of research teams.

The impact of Takers is particularly evident in scenarios where their actions deplete the resources and energy of their collaborators. Whether through withholding critical data, exploiting shared efforts for individual recognition, or failing to reciprocate in partnerships, Takers compromise the integrity of the scientific process. Addressing these challenges requires a strategic approach that balances generosity with discernment, ensuring that collaborative efforts remain productive and equitable.

## Strategic generosity: navigating challenges with intelligence

Being a Giver in science demands more than altruism; it requires strategic intelligence. Effective Givers recognize the importance of setting boundaries and aligning their contributions with the broader goals of their teams. By doing so, they create an environment where generosity fuels innovation without being exploited.

When faced with Takers, strategic Givers adopt approaches that channel ambition into constructive outcomes. For instance, aligning individual goals with team objectives can encourage Takers to contribute meaningfully. In cases where such alignment is not possible, Givers must prioritize the sustainability of their efforts, redirecting their energy toward collaborations that uphold the principles of trust and reciprocity.

## Recognizing the spectrum: beyond a dichotomy

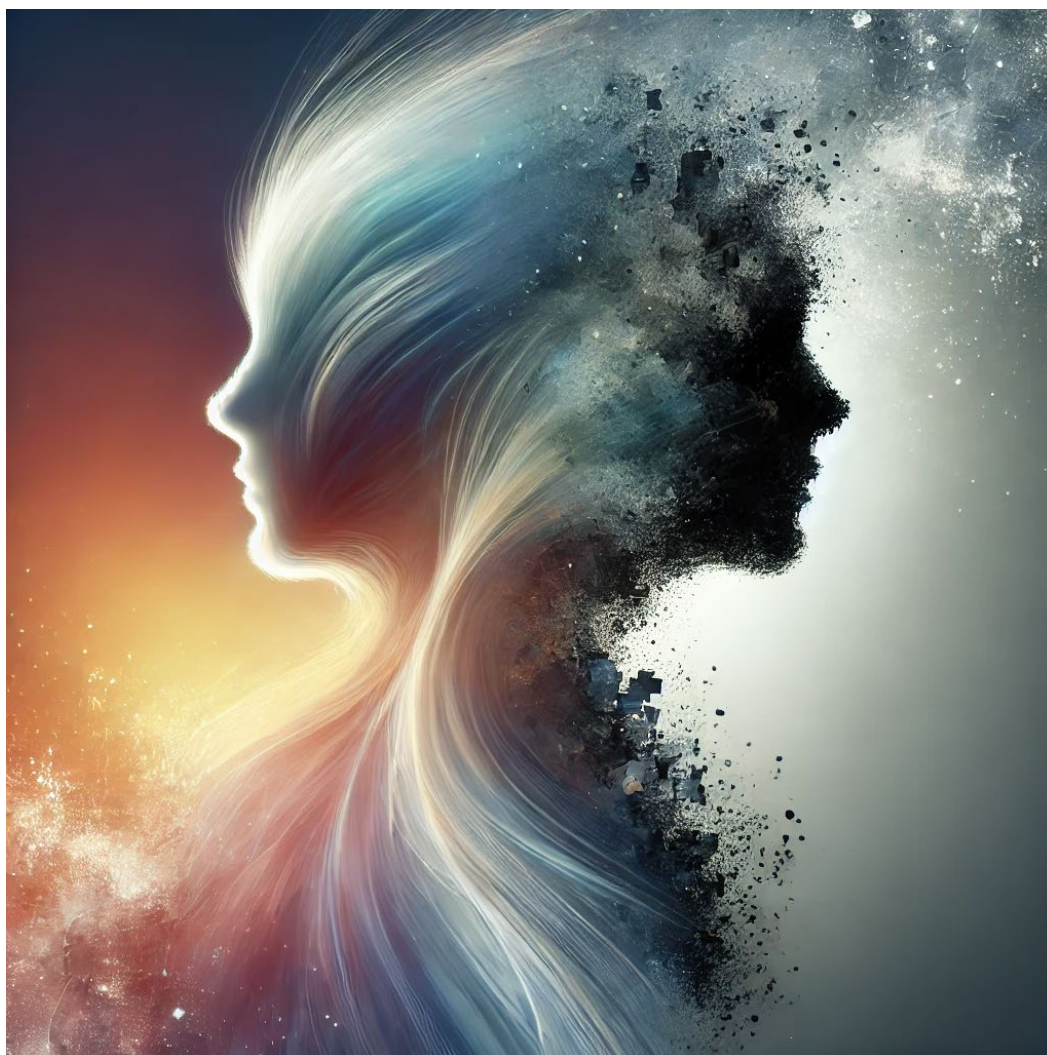
The distinction between Givers and Takers is not absolute. Individuals often exhibit behaviors that fall along a spectrum, displaying tendencies of both giving and taking in different contexts or phases of their lives. This fluidity underscores the complexity of human behavior and the interplay of personal, professional, and situational factors.

For instance, Adam Grant highlights in his book *Give and Take*<sup>1</sup> that many individuals act as “Matchers,” balancing their giving and taking tendencies by seeking reciprocity. Matchers aim to create equilibrium in their interactions, contributing generously in some scenarios while ensuring their efforts are reciprocated in others. This middle ground reflects a pragmatic approach to collaboration and resource-sharing.

Real-life examples also illustrate this spectrum. A renowned scientist may be a Giver when mentoring junior colleagues, investing time and energy to nurture their careers. However, the same individual might adopt a Taker’s mindset when competing for limited funding opportunities, prioritizing their own project over collaborative efforts. Similarly, a researcher might alternate between these roles depending on the pressures and rewards of specific environments, such as academia versus industry.

The multifaceted nature of these roles suggests that the dichotomy of Givers and Takers should be viewed as a continuum rather than a binary division. Acknowledging this complexity enables a more nuanced understanding of collaboration and fosters strategies that align individual goals with collective success (Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Abstract representation of the dichotomy between Givers and Takers in science



Caption: The silhouette on the left, soft and radiant, symbolizes the Giver, embodying collaboration, generosity, and collective growth. The silhouette on the right, sharp and fragmented, represents the Taker, reflecting isolation, individualism, and self-interest. The gradient background illustrates the continuum between these roles, highlighting that individuals can embody traits of both Givers and Takers depending on the context.  
Source: originally created by the author using Adobe Illustrator and refined using GPT4o (2025).

### **Building a culture of giving in science**

Creating a culture that values giving requires systemic changes within academic and research institutions. Recognition and reward systems should emphasize collaborative achievements and contributions to the scientific community. Mentorship programs, resource-sharing initiatives, and cross-institutional partnerships can reinforce the values of giving and enhance the overall impact of research efforts.

Moreover, fostering a culture of giving extends beyond professional settings. It involves cultivating intellectual curiosity, encouraging open dialogue, and valuing the development of future generations of scientists. These practices advance scientific knowledge and contribute to the personal and professional growth of individuals within the community.

## Conclusion: the enduring impact of giving

The distinction between Givers and Takers in science is not merely theoretical; it has profound implications for the progress and sustainability of scientific endeavors. Givers, by fostering collaboration and prioritizing the collective good, create environments where innovation thrives and contributions endure. Their approach builds networks of trust and lays the groundwork for breakthroughs that transcend individual efforts.

As the scientific community faces increasingly complex challenges, embracing a culture of giving becomes imperative. By recognizing the value of collective success and investing in the growth of others, researchers can ensure that their contributions leave a lasting legacy. This philosophy, grounded in generosity and strategic collaboration, offers a pathway to enduring success in science and a meaningful impact on the world.

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1. Grant A. Give and Take: Why Helping Others Drives Our Success. New York: Viking; 2013.