

# NEOs are the new movers and shakers

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**Presenter:** Helena Webb

They drink bottled water, prefer organic food and won't go near instant coffee. They belong to a group described as NEOs by consumer behaviourist, Ross Honeywill.

The New Economic Order is a large group worldwide, says Ross. About 4 million people in Australia would fall into the category and about 59 million in the US. NEOs are also creative and politically multifaceted.

Ross and social scientist co-author Verity Byth spent five years researching the type. interviewing around half and million round the world. They discovered a group who are individualists, love design, have a passion for the path less-travelled and are not the type to be found on group tours. "They cherish the handmade, as opposed to the Traditionals who are more interested in the deal and the price," says Ross.

The NEO type is not age defined, says Ross. "(This is a) much richer understanding of the psychology underpinning all of our behaviour, our attitudes and values

Traditionals, to use Ross' term, are seemingly the opposites of the NEOs. For example, both might buy a BMW, but for very different reasons, he says. The Traditionals want the badge and the cache; what the car would say about them. To NEO, the purchase would be a secret for themselves, "them saying something to themselves about the car".

NEOs are the ones who are changing the way we think

Again, explains Ross, NEOs are very different from another well known social type, the yuppies. Yuppies were a self-centred group, he says, part of the me generation, into conspicuous consumption. "Doing it in public to show how terribly well off you were."

NEOs are not shallow or snobbish. Rather, they have strong ethical values. "They have very well defined and progressive social attitudes," says Ross. "They look for quality and the quality of the experience in everything they do." Wonderful coffee is not about the coffee itself, instead it's about the senses and sensations. Traditionals on the other hand, see food as fuelling up for the day.

NEOs at work are creative and entrepreneurial. They can be difficult to manage though, says Ross, especially by Traditionals. NEOs are easily bored, and can be disruptive. Yet, if that energy can be harnessed, they can turn an organisation into something dynamic, he adds.

Ross agrees that it's extremely common to have a Traditional type manager in charge of NEOs. It's also common to have a NEO leave a job if they're not happy. They leave easily and they do it quickly, says Ross. "Traditionals define themselves by their job whereas NEOs define themselves by what they think, feel and who they are."

Managers are often Traditionals who like to stick to the rules, they don't mind repetition, notes Ross. But he is not disparaging of the kind. "Traditionals are a critical cog in our society. It's just that NEOs are the ones who are changing the way we think; they are changing the politics and they are changing the workplace."

NEOs are active in everything they do, says Ross and that includes politics. They may lean to the left in the US but in Australia, they're more likely to vote for John Howard, he says. But they're not unthinking followers of a political creed. "They dislike intensely the coalition's social policies. They much prefer the social policies of the Labor party."

So it's difficult for one political party to deliver everything that a NEO wants, Ross believes. However, he adds that they are life's economic rationalists and so are more likely to vote for the party that will deliver the economic stability they believe in.

For Ross, not surprisingly, these typologies are of much more use to corporations and others who want to understand consumer behaviour than the "life stage tags" such as baby boomer or gen X. The latter describe age and not what people do, he maintains.

To understand and then using the information about the NEOs, it is also necessary to understand how they are different from the Traditionals, he says.

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