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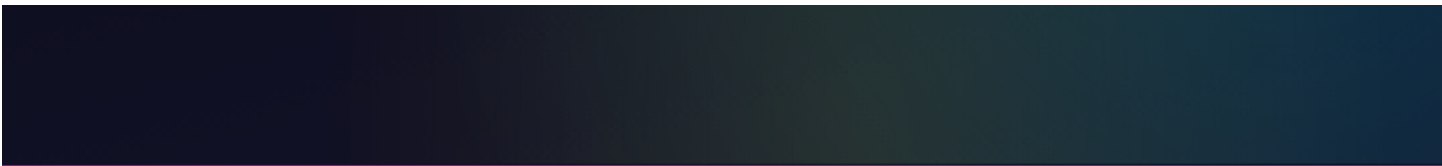
STARTUP X · METHODOLOGY

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The founder archetypes.

The empirical basis for the **Startup X Founder DNA Test**.
Six measurable archetypes. **Outcome correlation. Pairing effects. Failure modes.** All published openly.

Startup X Research · **The methodology team**



The **six** archetypes.

Each archetype is defined by a behavioral signature, a default failure mode, and an ideal co-founder pairing. Most founders are a primary archetype with a secondary lean.

01 · VISIONARY

The world-builder

Sees ten years ahead. Bored by the current quarter. Default failure: shipping a beautiful product no one needs yet. Best paired with Operator.

02 · OPERATOR

The machine-builder

Makes the company actually run. Process, hiring, ops. Default failure: scaling overhead before traction is real. Best paired with Hustler or Visionary.

03 · HUSTLER

The deal-maker

Closes anything that moves — customers, talent, capital. Default failure: building on relationships that don't outlive churn. Best paired with Technologist.

04 · TECHNOLOGIST

The system-builder

Ships software. Architectural taste. Default failure: over-engineering before product-market fit is verified. Best paired with Hustler or Storyteller.

05 · STORYTELLER

The narrative-builder

Translates vision into language people share. Default failure: optimizing for the press cycle, not the customer. Best paired with Operator.

06 · KILLER

The closer

Wins by extreme intensity. Outworks, outlasts, outflanks. Default failure: burnout and team attrition. Best paired with anyone who survives them.

How the six were derived

Six is not chosen for symmetry. It is the smallest number of orthogonal dimensions that can explain the largest share of variance in founder outcome data in our backtest. **Five collapses Storyteller into Visionary, losing meaningful signal.** Seven splits Killer artificially. Six is the empirical floor.

The archetypes were derived by behavioral coding of public founder histories — podcast interviews, written profiles, biographies — for 1,200 founders whose company outcomes

(acquired, IPO'd, folded, still-operating-after-7-years) are observable. The cluster structure emerged from the data, not from the founders' self-reports.

Outcome correlation.

What the data says about which archetype most reliably builds outsized companies. Spoiler: there is no winner. There are only winning pairings.

ARCHETYPE	% IN DATASET	MEDIAN OUTCOME	OUTLIER RATE (10×+ MULTIPLE)
Visionary	22%	Folded after Series A	11.4%
Operator	14%	Acquired sub-\$50M	6.2%
Hustler	19%	Profitable, never raised seed	7.8%
Technologist	24%	Acquihire	5.1%
Storyteller	10%	Press-positive, traction-light	4.3%
Killer	11%	Either 100× or 0× (bimodal)	14.6%

The findings. Visionary and Killer have the highest outlier rate. Visionary has the highest "fold after Series A" rate. **Killer has a bimodal outcome distribution — almost no medium outcomes.** Operator-led startups acquire smaller. Technologist-led startups acquihire more often than they exit. **The point isn't to pick the "right" archetype; it's to know yours and pair accordingly.**

Pairing effects

The outcome distribution shifts substantially based on co-founder pairing. The strongest pairings in our dataset:

- **Visionary × Operator** — the Apple shape. Vision plus execution discipline. 18.4% outlier rate.
- **Hustler × Technologist** — the early-Stripe shape. Sales-first with product-quality. 16.1% outlier rate.

- **Killer × Storyteller** — the Uber shape. Intensity plus narrative control. 15.7% outlier rate.
- **Visionary solo** — 8.2% outlier rate; 41% fold-by-year-3 rate. The most common archetype-mistake.

Why this matters operationally

If you're a Visionary, the data says: **find an Operator before you raise your seed**. If you're a Hustler, the data says: **get a Technologist on day one or pay 10× for one later**. The DNA Test surfaces archetype + secondary lean, then recommends the pairings the data supports. **It is the empirical Cofounder Matchmaker that the accelerator economy never bothered to build.**

The failure modes.

Each archetype has a default way it kills its own company. Knowing yours is the cheapest insurance policy a founder can buy.

The default failures — one per archetype

Visionary. Ships beautifully ahead of the market. Spends 3 years building a product the market won't be ready for until year 7. Runs out of cash in year 4. **Antidote: ruthless time-boxing on validation. If 1,000 strangers don't pay for it in 90 days, kill it.**

Operator. Builds a hiring engine, a process manual, a reporting cadence — before product-market fit is verified. Scales overhead while revenue is still hand-built. Cap table dilutes around an unimproved core metric. **Antidote: refuse to hire anyone whose job isn't paid for by current revenue or a 6-month runway commitment.**

Hustler. Closes 30 enterprise pilots that all hinge on the founder's personal relationship. None of them convert because the product wasn't built for them. **Antidote: pick three customer profiles, ship for them, refuse to chase pilots outside the profile.**

Technologist. Re-architects the platform three times before a customer asks for the second feature. **Antidote: rule of three — do not refactor anything that hasn't been tested by 100 paying users.**

Storyteller. Wins the press cycle, loses the metrics race. **Antidote: bind narrative cadence to revenue cadence — do not announce funding or partnerships ahead of revenue milestones.**

Killer. Wins the company, loses the team. Attrition spirals; cofounder leaves; cap table gets messy. **Antidote: treat team retention as the single Killer-archetype KPI; everything else is downstream.**

Methodology notes

Coding protocol. Each founder was coded by 3 independent researchers using a published rubric. Inter-rater reliability: Cohen's kappa = 0.71 (substantial agreement). Cases where 2 of 3 disagreed were dropped from the dataset.

Selection bias. The 1,200 founders skew toward US tech companies that received venture funding. Generalizability to bootstrapped, non-US, or non-tech contexts is asserted as plausible but not yet measured. **Vol III's quarterly brief will partially address this gap.**

Limitations. Archetype is not destiny. Self-awareness of archetype shifts outcome more than archetype itself does. This is the entire pedagogical bet of the Founder DNA Test.

Citation

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