

Summary

Leapfrog ideas happen in a state of extreme euphoria or utter distress. The first situation is explored by comparing innovation with sex. Valuable lessons can be learned. Many currently promoted organisational methods may lead to improvements, but do they lead to leapfrog ideas? Ownership, utter distress and knowledge of your own and many other disciplines may be the base ingredients which can bring the ultimate innovation, which potentially, is better than sex.

The Problem

Innovation often consists of small steps forward rather than of real 'leap frog ideas'. Innovating innovation is often thought of as an organizational or technological process, endorsed by management, following rational pathways and a structured approach to allow innovation to happen.

The key initiator, however; the light bulb idea or the invention, is a highly emotional 'rough and ready' idea or solution to an existing or not yet existing problem. Many business environments may encourage enthusiasm, but no leapfrog ideas.

The problem large corporations face is that the innovative spirit, the one which got them off the ground in the first place, is hard to capture again and again when the firm is organised and everything goes well.

Solution

Creating and exploring the 'Eureka' moment relies on emotional turmoil. Often only in a state of extreme euphoria or utter distress will a person experience the 'light bulb moment'.

In this hack we compare this highly emotional moment with sex; if all conditions are right, is innovation like this unique experience which supports a relationship for times to come, just like an innovative idea may support a business?

For innovation, like sex:

The environment is important

Failures happen, get over it

It is hard work

If you don't believe in it, no one will

The inspirational moment is brief

It's different for different people

It works best when doing it in a mutually respectful environment

It's difficult to find the right partner

Without it our species would die out

It's easier to copy, but less fulfilling

Let's look at these in turn.

The environment is important

For innovation to occur the innovator needs to be properly motivated, fully aware of all conditions pertaining to the situation or technology, skilled in these areas, comfortable in the knowledge her or his ideas will be accepted and last but not least believe in his/her ability to find a solution.

Leapfrog innovative ideas come out of frustration, even crisis. Think about how innovative people are during war time or during an environmental catastrophe, new ideas are generated fast and instantly implemented as not doing so may be worse than delaying while searching for something that *might be* better.

Failures happen, get over it

Not having to worry about failure brings out new ideas earlier, which has a timing advantage. In an accepting and protected environment ideas are discussed more freely, which has a quality advantage and extra input will mold the idea into something even better.

It is hard work

For it to be good; significant effort has to be put in and it needs to be worked on continuously. After the first 'light bulb stage', comparable to the 'teenage experience', significant effort has to be expended to keep innovation on track. Without having clearly visible or emotionally pleasing outcomes the innovation will fade.

If you don't believe in it, no one will

Your relationship will dwindle if you don't believe in it, and so will the innovation you aim to bring to the world.

The inspirational moment is brief

The light bulb moment is as brief as the 'ultimate moment', however in both cases the real work comes after. It can be the start of a long term commitment; baby's lead to family, being able to fly leads to an aviation industry.

It's different for different people

Nobody is the same and therefore the experience of relationships will be different for everyone. This is important to keep in mind. In the organizational setting a frequent mistake is to assume everyone will react to an innovative system with the same enthusiasm as you feel for it. You need to carefully investigate how your proposal will fall with a wide range of people, compile their potential objections and find ways around them before announcing the innovative approach

It works best when doing it in a mutually respectful environment

Working with other people, perhaps more experienced or having ideas in different fields may stimulate the formation of new ideas by amalgamating several ideas into one idea. Respect is essential to keep open dialogue flowing.

Bullying is ingrained in many cultures. It is very counterproductive as it suppresses innovation and the creation of the free flow of ideas or wishes of desires

It's difficult to find the right partner

In relationships there has to be some common ground to come to the right match. Finding an innovative concept needs the blend of different ideas often originating from a different background (science – marketing; science fiction – engineering; medicine – IT). It will be important that both partners are equally interested in making innovation work.

Without it our species would die out

Innovation is essential for 'life' of a business. If a company does not innovate it goes backward.

Don't be ashamed to copy

Introducing world shocking innovation would be great, the fulfillment of every inventor's dream. Discovering unexpected pleasure with your partner could be similarly great. However in both cases innovation often relies on trying out something which you have seen, read or heard of.

This is nothing to be embarrassed about, it can result in major improvements and often when a technique is borrowed from another discipline it can actually be regarded as a true innovation in your own field.

Practical impact

When the initiation of innovation is seen as the product of extreme emotions, an action to sometimes literally 'safe your skin', the comparison with sex in our relationship assists due to its parallels. Looking at it this way: would you consider Fridays off, or a 'sex-only week', a useful process to aid your relationship? Why then encourage similar events to pursue innovation in your business?

Wouldn't full project ownership and being burdened by all associated problems, the 'everything relies on you' feeling, as well as a potential share in the success be required to create that super emotional stress leading to innovation? Wouldn't this be the key to reigniting the entrepreneurship in the large corporations which had them started in the first place?

A 'Eureka' moment happens in one brain at a time. Group talk may be encouraging, however deeply emotional '*I have to find a solution!*' type thinking occurs only under true crisis conditions. You may be dying and want the world to remember you, is possibly at the extreme end of this, however with your family finance deeply in the red, the opportunity to earn a significant bonus, or share in the company, will trigger the core of our brain and will make you wake up in the middle of the night shouting "Eureka - This is IT!"

Challenges

To create and stimulate fully aware, knowledgeable and creative persons, submerged in that ultimate stressful situation – win or lose - ,that may lead to great success, if only will be one of the enduring challenges in large corporations and institutions.

Team work is great to develop ideas, however that ‘Eureka moment’, is only going to happen in one brain at the time. The team environment will be helpful with accepting failure as part of the innovation process, however will not in itself create the leapfrog ideas we all like to see.

This hack started with the question “Innovation – Better than Sex?”. We have to conclude that while there are many similarities and both can bring euphoria, innovation is more likely to be the escape out off utter distress and *if successful* has to be the better of the two.

First Steps

To create the ‘leapfrog idea’:

Create ownership: Even if working in a team, provide individual ownership of the problem. Innovation is not for the fainthearted; only when pushed into a corner one may discover another dimension to get out of it.

Exposure: Ensure the teams and individuals have exposure to a lot of different disciplines, so ideas and concepts may be brought into their field.

Technological: Fake it! Use a mock-up model to check if its use will take in the market; no need to spend ‘big’ on proto-types before a market is found. Most gadgets in Star Trek didn’t really work; however they inspired a generation of inventors! And of course: just try it! Don’t worry about failure.

Organisational: Pilot a new system in a section of the organisation with advanced thinkers – potential believers, preferably in the upper regions of the company. Let the advantages, ease of use, less work, etc. filter down and sideways to create a desire. Once the desire is created, start introducing in other departments.

If not yet at the leapfrog idea, encourage others to build on your ideas. For example the development of free networks on-line (like Wikipedia) – A ‘wiki-invent’ network may well work despite the conventional wisdom that all inventors would be chasing patent and copy rights.

Credits

Star Trek, wiki, Wikipedia are names and phrases invented & owned by other people

Tags

Innovation
Eureka
Leapfrog
Believe
Sex

Failure

Inspirational