

LOONSHOTS

How to Nurture the Crazy Ideas That Win Wars, Cure Diseases, and Transform Industries

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MAIN IDEA

How do you consistently come up with "loonshots" – the crazy big ideas that change the world but which most scientific and/or business leaders think won't work at first?



The most important breakthroughs in any field are almost always the ideas which challenge conventional wisdom and therefore are most likely to be shot down at first. That's because they often start on the lunatic fringe before they reach mainstream credibility. They challenge conventional wisdom and have effects that are impossible to predict or forecast. Loonshots are disruptive but that usually only becomes obvious in hindsight.

So how do you spark more loonshots? Set up a nursery and let lots of loonshots take seed and grow. Then let the best ideas take on a life of their own rather than deliberately trying to pick the winners yourself. Act more like a gardener and less like judge and jury. Also never lose sight of the fact loonshots can change the world for the better so get onboard for the ride.

"A loonshot challenges conventional wisdom. Whether a change is "disruptive" or not, on the other hand, refers to the effects of an invention on a market. Loonshots flourish in loonshot nurseries, not in empires devoted to franchises. Being good at loonshots and good at franchises are phases of an organization. That's what the science of emergence tells us."

– Safi Bahcall



Four rules for nurturing loonshots

- 1** Separate the phases
- 2** Create a dynamic equilibrium
- 3** Spread a system mindset
- 4** Create critical mass

What exactly is a loonshot? Page 2

The most important breakthroughs never come fully formed. Instead, they are typically fragile ideas which readily get dismissed as crazy. If you're not careful, you can bury them and forget them which can be a big mistake. Loonshots can change the world.

Rule #1 – Separate the phases. Page 3

People who are responsible for developing your high-risk early-stage ideas are like artists. You have to separate them from the soldiers who are responsible for the already-successful steady-growth parts of your organization. You have to create a nursery where loonshots can grow, flourish and shed their warts.

Rule #2 – Create a dynamic equilibrium. Page 4

You have to maintain a healthy balance between your artists and your soldiers. Both are important to the long-term future of your firm. Have equal-opportunity respect and provide both with the tools and resources they need to win. Focus on managing the transfer of new ideas between loonshots and franchises.

Rule #3 – Spread a system mindset. Page 5

Keep asking why your organization makes the choices it does. Analyze both your success and your failures and ask how your decision-making process can be improved in the future. Analyze the quality of decisions, not just the quality of eventual outcomes.

Rule #4 – Create critical mass. Page 6

You have to make it possible for loonshots to attract enough resources to reach critical mass. That often means getting more people involved. To bring more people onto projects successfully, you have to reduce the return on politics and increase the fit of incentives. If you can do this, you then are in position to bring a gun to a knife fight.

How to champion a loonshot. Pages 7 - 8

If you are called on to champion a loonshot, take heart from the fact loonshots always flourish in a loonshot nursery and not in empires dedicated to established franchises. Nurture your loonshots and use them to test established beliefs. Use disruptive innovation to move forward boldly into the future. It can be done.