

Does Curiosity kill Cats?

The Real Cost of Risk-Aversion

Executive Summary:

The proverb “*Curiosity kills the cat*” is often used to justify an overly cautious approach to innovation. In this article, Dr. Heuer of [SarJay](#) points out some of the misconceptions of Innovation Management when it comes to deliberately taking risks.

Curiosity kills the Cat

Look at that phrase! It is simple, it is to the point, and it relates to our own personal experience (ever plucked a cat from the highest branches of a tall tree?): it makes intuitive sense.

It also spells disaster when applied to the strategic environment of a business. The life source of an enterprise is its ability to sustain environmental changes. A company *needs* to be curious to survive!

So why are many owners of companies so vested in the status quo that they fail to be curious?

The Conundrum

Once a company is successful, it starts to *solidify* its own processes. This is a necessary step, a step born from the need to “automate”, **to ride up the learning curve as hard and fast as possible.**

Unfortunately, your company does not stop there. After solidification comes *calcification*,

almost naturally. What started as a vibrant cluster of new ideas is now a solid block. As you compress your organization to *reduce variability* and *increase repeatability*, you also squeeze out the very thing that made you successful in the beginning: **your room to move.**

Here comes the catch: a successful company cherishes the room to move. A sustainable successful company needs the variations, it needs the curiosity. **The absence of curiosity kills the company. The survivor needs to incorporate curiosity into the fabric of their culture.**

Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go.

T.S. Elliott

When you give additional resources to creativity, you allow for more experiments and your overall risk can decrease.

Mauzy / Harriman, in 'Creativity Inc.'



make, and what will kill it. That is very similar to a company.

Remember *Egghead*, the computer stores? They in a bold move decided in 1998 to close all their stores and move exclusively to the web. In 2001, they sold themselves to Fry's, a retailer without an online sales presence at that time. Way to go, Egghead!

When a company makes sudden moves, they are betting the farm. Just like the smart cat, they need to know how to fall back on their feet, or be wiped out. If the move is bold, don't bet the farm.

Cat's Insight: *Jump, but remember gravity.*

Incurable Appetite

When a cat sees a mouse, it will jump, instinctively. It can't help it. A company needs to know better.

Remember when AT&T bought a cable company? What were they thinking? Now they owned two pipes into the house, with vastly different business models. Just because it is in your vicinity, and it is shiny (Cable was taking off during that time), does not mean you have to act on it. A company that cannot be disciplined enough to say "No" to those exciting, shiny, and fast moving things they encounter in their world

will be one that disperses its resources too widely. Knowing what to go for is the key here.

Cat's Insight: *Remember that no mouse wore a shiny suit with blinking lights. EVER.*

Stay Cool

For a cat, coolness is more important than breathable air. Let's face it, that attitude is going to get them killed. A company cannot afford to stay cool.

Remember *Kodak*? The world leader in analog photography processing watched with smug conviction as others stole not only its lunch but also the plates, silverware and table. Instead of believing in their own invincibility, they should have

Was everyone in the group fully behind Frank's bold move to parody Sgt. Pepper's and "the summer of love?" Did anyone feel like this might backfire?

Jimmy Carl Black

moved.

A company that believes its own propaganda is already dead; lobotomized. Jack Welch said that when the rate of change inside a company is lower than the rate of change on the outside, the end is in sight. When you are too important, big, complacent or lazy to move when trouble comes a' knocking, you will find your own demise.

Cat's Insight: *Stay Cool, but that truck there isn't stopping for you.*



