

Ministry Innovation Requires a Bias Toward Action

Dwight Towers [wrote a post last week](#) reminding us that a lot of people have their ideas rejected not because everyone else is stupid, but because their ideas aren't actually very good. He was basically taking on the commonly used Galileo's Gambit, which goes like this:

*They made fun of Galileo, and he was right.
They make fun of me, therefore I am right.*

This is [obviously a logical fallacy](#). Carl Sagan's response to this idea was:

But the fact that some geniuses were laughed at does not imply that all who are laughed at are geniuses. They laughed at Columbus, they laughed at Fulton, they laughed at the Wright brothers. But they also laughed at Bozo the Clown.

It's easiest to hold this view when your idea is just an idea – the best way to work around it is to try your idea out. This is because the value of an idea is often only found once we try to use it.

There is often a huge lag between when we first see a new idea and when we really find out what it is good for – this is when we are [working through business model innovation](#). In his great book [Pasteur's Quadrant](#), Donald Stokes says this:

...the notable examples from the annals of technology, detailed by Rosenberg and others, in which it took many years for a new technology to find its most important commercial uses. The steam engine was initially seen as a device for pumping water from mines and only later as a power plant for movable ships or carriages. The railroad was initially seen as a feeder of good for canal transport and only later as a fully articulated system of transportation in its own right. The radio was initially seen as a "wireless" substitute for the electric telegraph for communicating between two points that could not be connected by wire, such as ship to shore, and only later as a means of "broadcasting" communication to a mass audience. Indeed, this is an almost universal phenomenon in the evolution of technology. New technological paradigms seldom spring full-blown from the minds of their inventors, and when they do, as in the case of Arthur Clarke's vision of communications satellites, the visionary is unlikely to be the person who makes the technological dream come true.

Stokes is arguing in the book for a reconceptualisation of research. For quite a while now we have tended to view research as either basic – concerned with discovering new knowledge, but not with use – from applied – concerned only with use. Stokes instead argues that a great deal of important research comes from work that considers both knowledge discovery **and** use.

There are a couple of important points here.

First, **it's not enough to have a great idea – you have to actually try it out to find out if it's any good.** That is how you avoid the Galileo Gambit.

Second, even if the idea works, we often don't know what it's actually good for. To discover this, **we have to put it into use.**

Consequently, the best innovation comes when we are concerned with both discovery and use.

Put it all together, and it means that **innovation requires a bias towards action.**

Read more from Tim [here](#).