

Free Book Excerpt

CYCLES: The simplest, proven method to innovate faster while reducing risks
A work from Bryan Cassady and 22 Innovation Experts

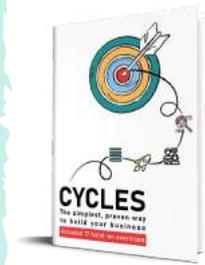
CHAPTER 14 THE POWER OF PERSISTENCE: WHY YOU MUST KEEP MOVING FORWARD WHILE BEING PREPARED TO CHANGE DIRECTION

“Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.”

STOYAN YANKOV

CO-AUTHOR OF THE BOOK CYCLES





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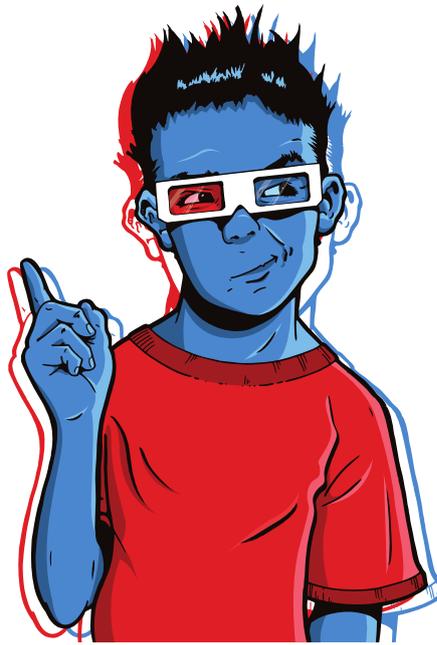
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SERGIO PEREIRA

CO-AUTHOR OF THE BOOK CYCLES





WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN THE CHAPTER

KEY TAKE-AWAYS

- **Being persistent doesn't mean being unwilling to change direction** – Successful innovators don't give up even in the face of setbacks, but they are willing to make changes if feedback tells them that is needed.
- **Overnight success takes time** – innovation is the result of a systematic process, not the outcome of a sudden burst of creativity. Recognize this before you start.
- **The best big ideas begin as small ideas** – don't waste time waiting for the one big idea that will transform your business. Take the small ideas you already have and work on developing them now.
- **Innovation isn't just about ideas** – it's a process designed to turn ideas into practical applications and a step on the way towards a viable product that meets a real need.
- **Focus is the heart of innovation** – don't move from idea to idea and project to project. Keep focused on what matters right now and see it through before moving to the next thing.
- **Failures can be successes** – feedback is essential to the process of developing ideas into products. Negative feedback is just as valuable as positive in keeping the process on track.
- **Don't give up – persistence is the key difference between successful and unsuccessful innovators.** Every successful innovation involves overcoming adversity and setback. To succeed, you must keep going!

CHAPTER FROM THE BOOK CYCLES

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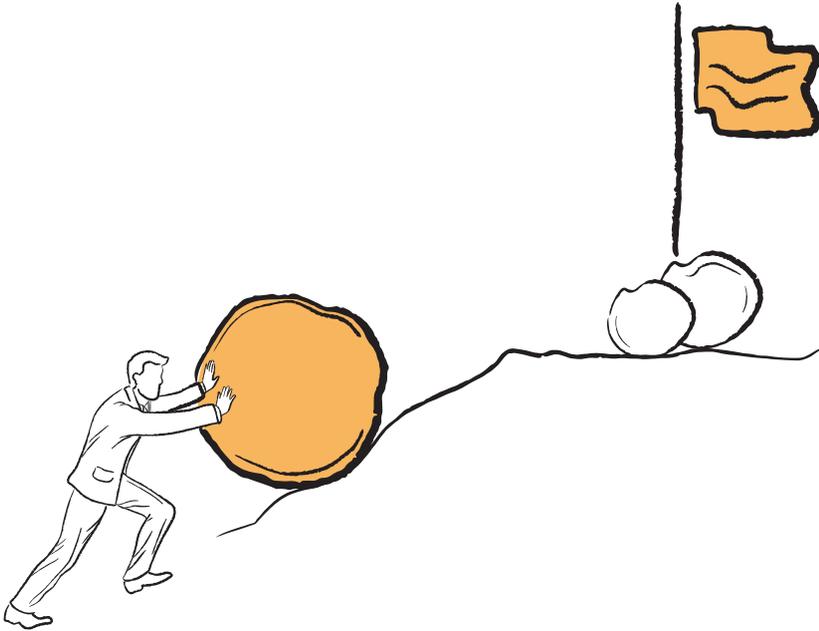
PART 5: LEARNING SYSTEMS

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- Chapter 24: Systems Thinking and Profound Innovation: Getting to the Heart of Innovation
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CHAPTER 14:
**THE POWER OF PERSISTENCE:
WHY YOU MUST KEEP MOVING
FORWARD WHILE BEING
PREPARED TO CHANGE DIRECTION**



"Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent."

US PRESIDENT CALVIN COOLIDGE

This chapter was co-written with Sergio Pereira and Stoyan Yankov.

Learn from the Godfather of Gadgets, James Dyson.

He had dust in his hair and his eyes, but he was smiling. After fifteen hundred prototypes, James Dyson finally had a vacuum cleaner design that did what he wanted. Dyson hated vacuuming and especially loathed the dust-filled bags of conventional vacuum cleaners. He looked for a solution by working on a design for the first bag-less vacuum cleaner.

Dyson is often cited as an exemplar of innovation success, and the bag-less vacuum cleaner is probably his best-known creation. However, most people do not realize that Dyson produced more than five thousand prototypes and spent fifteen years refining his idea before being satisfied that he had a product ready for the market.

Today Dyson Ltd is a hugely successful global company that brings in \$3 billion a year. The success of the radical vacuum cleaner and the company created to sell it are largely due to sheer persistence. Dyson succeeded because he was willing to keep going where others might have given up.

**“Everyone gets knocked back;
no-one rises smoothly to the top
without hindrance. The ones who
succeed are those who say,
right, let’s give it another go.”**

SIR JAMES DYSON

There is an invaluable innovation lesson here; persistence, a willingness to listen to and learn from feedback, and a long-term vision will always win against instant success expectations. You will find perseverance and a single-minded commitment to the continuous innovation and development of an idea behind every significant innovation.

Innovation Is Seldom About Epiphany.

We tend to think of innovation in terms of a big idea, a single magical moment when something new is created. Of course, innovation involves creativity and new ideas, but that is only part of the process. Think of James Dyson; his big idea was using a cyclone to extract dust particles from the air in a vacuum cleaner. That was certainly a novel idea back in 1978, but it took almost fifteen years of application and hard work to turn this idea into a viable product.

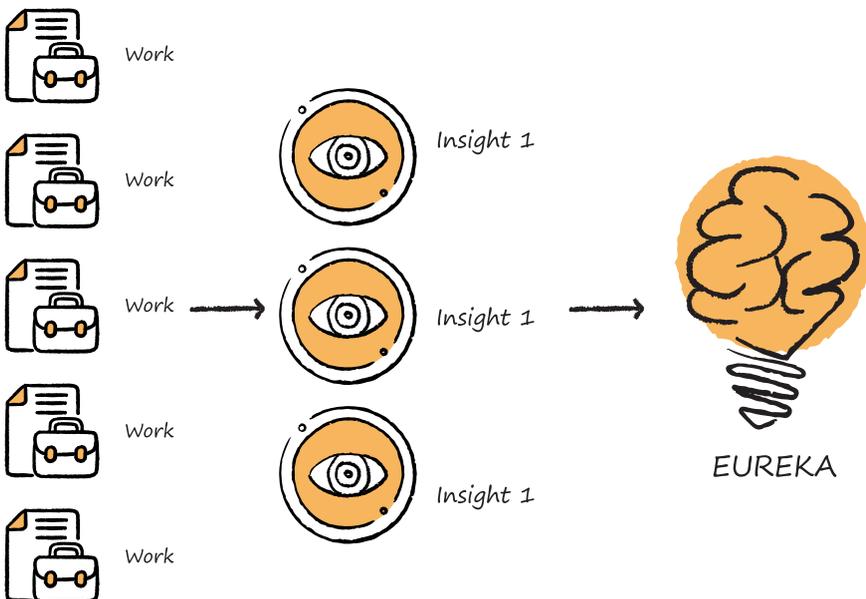
Most real innovation is like that. When we hear about successful innovation, we are often aware of the big idea, but we rarely understand all the work that leads to it. Take the best known big idea in history; Archimedes’ Eureka moment.

Archimedes was a Greek scientist and mathematician living on the island of Sicily around two thousand years ago. King Hieron set Archimedes a seemingly simple task; how to tell whether a new royal crown was made of pure gold without damaging it.

While thinking about the problem, Archimedes took a bath. When he climbed in, the water rose and slopped over the side, giving the scientist the notion that he could measure the density of something by seeing how much water it displaced. He could use this principle to tell if the crown was pure gold. According to legend, he was so excited by this realization that he leapt out of his bath and ran naked into the streets of Syracuse, shouting, "Eureka!" (I have it!).

That image has become the archetype of the big idea, and we now often describe a sudden epiphany as a "Eureka moment". The thing is; this story completely ignores the fact that Archimedes had been methodically working on the problem for some time. He had tried all sorts of ideas that did not work before he climbed into the bath. His Eureka moment only arrived because he had already tried and discarded several other approaches.

Most innovation works the same way. There is not generally a single lightbulb moment when everything becomes clear. Instead, there are many smaller insights gained over time through refinement and sheer hard work. In retrospect, it is often possible to identify a particular idea or piece of work that is particularly significant, but few genuine Eureka moments. Big ideas do not generally arrive out of the blue; they are a culmination of small ideas built into something substantial over time through a systematic process.



Continually Searching for New Ideas Can Lead Nowhere.

The search for new ideas can be exciting, but there is a danger that you can become fixated on thinking instead of doing. Companies are not built on ideas; they are built on the practical development of those ideas into business opportunities.

There is also a danger that searching for new ideas can become an excuse for doing nothing. Waiting for inspiration to strike can make you feel as if you are doing something useful, but is not a recipe for successful innovation. You need to be working now on refining the ideas you already have, not hoping for the arrival of the one big idea that will transform everything.

**“Ideas won’t keep.
Something must be done about them.”**

ALFRED NORTH WHITEHEAD

The notion that one big idea will transform your business without effort is a fallacy. Innovation is taking small ideas and refining them relentlessly until they develop into practical applications. It is this that separates those who succeed from those who fail.

Consider writing; how many times have you heard someone say that they have an excellent idea for a book or that they have a “*book inside them*”. The truth is that great writing does not just come from having an idea; it is a craft, something that is learned and refined through working at it every day. You may have the best story idea in the world, but if you do not sit down and write, it will never become a book.

For example, take the creator of the fantastically successful *Game of Thrones* series of books and television screenplays, George R. R. Martin. Martin began writing professionally in 1970, at the age of twenty-one. He published novels, novellas, screenplays, and short stories for twenty-five years without achieving notable commercial success. Some of his early books were so badly received that he considered dropping writing and becoming a realtor instead.

In 1996 he published *A Game of Thrones*, the first book in the *Song of Ice and Fire* series. It seemed that Martin had achieved overnight success with this novel, but the truth is that this success only arrived after many years of developing his ideas and learning his craft.

Creativity is part of the reason for George R. R. Martin’s success but, without his willingness to persevere in the face of adversity, George Martin would be a realtor, and none of us would have enjoyed *Game of Thrones*. The same thing applies to innovation. If you spend time continually looking for the one big innovation idea, you may be wasting your time. That idea may never turn up and, even if it does, you must be prepared to spend time refining it into something worthwhile.

The point I want to make is that creativity is part of innovation, but it is not the whole process or even the most important part of that process. Sometimes, creativity and inactivity can amount to the same thing, especially if you are willing to wait for inspiration to arrive. If you pursue innovation through creativity without acknowledging the persistence and traction needed to drive the process forward, you may just be spinning your wheels.

Five Steps to Building Your Ideas.

New prospects are exciting! You are positive that your idea is the next big thing, and it is normal to want to rush towards the shiny stuff. But, when we jump in without a plan, the odds of hitting the target are dramatically reduced. There is a reason why “*Ready, Steady, Go*” is in that particular order!

In innovation, the challenge is how to build an idea into a practical application that provides a solid business solution. Rather than trying to achieve this in a single, mighty bound, it is much better to break things down into a series of steps and accept that these will take time to accomplish. Each step can then be defined by milestones, and progress can be measured in incremental stages. Using this systematic, step-by-step approach promotes the long-term strategy you need to cultivate. The steps I recommend are:

1. Embrace innovation as a long-term process.
2. Learn to love your failures.
3. Aim for progress, not perfection.
4. Focus on idea building.
5. Act until Echo. (until you get feedback)

Every successful innovation idea is developed by following these systematic steps to adapt and evolve to changing dynamics.

Embrace Innovation as a Long-Term Process.

Overnight success is almost always an illusion or the result of a carefully developed marketing narrative. What may appear to be a sudden success is usually just the tip of the iceberg, the visible part of a much larger development process. Virtually every product that the market suddenly becomes aware of is the outcome of a long period of hard work, refinement, disappointment, and overcoming setbacks.

Even the search for new ideas is a long-term process, not done only during occasional brainstorming sessions. Looking for new ideas must become part of the day-to-day operation of a business. It is also notable that most of the best ideas do not seem to emerge during brain-storming sessions; but rather as part of the on-going development process that follows. When you find new ideas, you must recognize that those will not transform into a practical solution without focused effort, and there will always be a development process.

These things mean that you have to be patient and recognize that innovation success will take time from the outset. You cannot afford to sit back and just wait for it to happen; you must keep working, looking for new ideas, and refining them when you do find them.

Learn to Love Your Failures.

“Success is stumbling from failure to failure with no loss of enthusiasm.”

WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

The most important thing you need to do while developing innovation is to check your ideas continuously. The best way is to seek feedback. Not all of that feedback will be positive, but you must not make the mistake of ignoring negative reactions; on the contrary, negative feedback can provide valuable information from a different perspective.

A series of studies, including one by Stacey Finkelstein and Ayelet Fishbach, highlighted that while novice developers focused on positive feedback, experts sought and responded better to negative feedback. Negative feedback can be extremely instructive and can help keep development on-track towards creating a viable end result.

The CEO of Anheuser-Busch was in Asia when he noticed people pouring beer over ice. Was that a new trend the company could exploit? At that point, he could have called in consultants and started long-term studies. Instead, the company started serving beer over ice to people taking the tour of the Anheuser-Busch plant in St. Louis. The result; everyone hated it, and the company abandoned this as a potential marketing strategy. It is possible to waste a great deal of time on complex testing and evaluation when a simple test like this can provide a quick answer, avoiding an unnecessary waste of time and resources.

The best way of testing your idea is by making (or faking) a prototype of your product. Trying out something real and tangible helps potential customers to understand your vision. The better they understand, the more useful their feedback will be. Some of that feedback may be negative but do not be tempted to discard it. All feedback is useful because it helps to refine your idea into a viable product.

Learn to accept and learn from your failures because they are an essential step toward improvement. Get feedback as early in the innovation process as possible; the faster you fail, the faster you learn!

Aim for Progress, not Perfection.

The theory of evolution tells us that over time organisms gradually adapt to their environment. Organisms that are better adapted to deal with their surroundings survive while those that don't become extinct. No organism starts perfectly adapted; slowly and gradually, organisms become better equipped to face whatever nature throws at them over many generations.

Innovation follows a similar pattern. Like organisms, processes, products, and services tend to evolve steadily, adapting to perform better. Ineffective processes and products tend to be replaced by better options. Innovation is more often the result of evolution than revolution.

Most innovation ideas are not wholly new; they are built on existing ideas, processes, and products. A common mistake is to focus only on the big breakthrough. No matter how revolutionary an idea is, it must adapt to create a lasting impact and value.

Even when you think your idea is perfect, it is not, as refinement and improvement are always possible. Innovation is not about producing perfect, fully-formed products that need no further work. Realistically, it is an iterative process, a series of cycles aimed at gradually developing an idea over time. If your goal is perfection, you will fail.

If you aim for progressive improvement, you stand a much better chance of success. Peter J. Williamson and Eden Yin have studied how successful Chinese companies are tackling innovation in a fundamentally unusual way. These companies aim at faster development cycles leading to gradual improvement rather than major breakthroughs.

They studied more than twenty Chinese companies in several industries, discovering that, by breaking the innovation process into smaller steps, they could complete projects and deliver results faster. In most cases, each step produced an incremental improvement rather than a significant change, but products and processes benefitted hugely from this cycle of progressive improvement.

Perfection should never be a goal for innovation because it implies something that cannot ever be improved. In the business world, that just is not realistic; *everything* can be improved. Successful innovators aim for continual, iterative improvement, which leads to the evolution of an idea.

Focus on Idea Building.

Idea building is at the heart of innovation. However, there is a common misconception that this is something done only during short brainstorming sessions. Instead, the search for new ideas is something that your organization should be doing every day of the year.

Brainstorming can be an invaluable tool in the innovation process, but you have to use it carefully. You must be ready and willing to use the output of brainstorming to make effective change. How many times have you attended brainstorming sessions where great ideas are tossed around, and then everyone goes back to doing things in precisely the same way they always have? Instead, these ideas must become part of the innovation process, where they will be refined and developed.

Experience also shows that the best ideas do not emerge during brainstorming sessions but during the development process that follows. New ideas will also emerge outside the brainstorming process, with the people involved in your

business's day-to-day operations who see improvement potential. Your job is to capture these ideas for refinement and development. Brainstorming is a useful innovation tool, but it is not the only or even the best way to build ideas.

“Focus is a muscle, and you can build it.”

ELIE VENEZKY, AUTHOR OF *HACK YOUR BRAIN*

Focus is an essential element of idea building. Successful innovators focus relentlessly on refining ideas into viable business opportunities. That can be difficult because, according to many studies, our ability to focus is reducing. The many distractions of the modern world encourage a short attention span and moving rapidly from one thing to the next. However, focus is an essential part of the journey towards innovation.

The amount of work that can be accomplished by a small, focused team is incredible. As an innovation leader, you need to decide how to use that focus. You need to be clear about what needs to be focused on now, in the next week, the next month, and the next year. You will be amazed at how productive a team can be when they have a single challenge to focus on and clearly defined steps to follow.

This process is called a “*sprint*”. A team comprising people from different parts of an organization being given the task of refining and developing an idea in a fixed (and usually short) timescale. Sprints can be satisfying for participants because they produce results more quickly than a typical long-term project. They must also be flexible, allowing the team to change course if development suggests a new and more productive direction.

Sprints are an important element of focused idea building. They are an excellent way of quickly identifying ideas with business potential and ruling out those that do not. They also provide intangible business benefits in terms of employee enthusiasm and engagement and breaking down boundaries between different organization areas.

New ideas do not just come from brainstorming. As an innovation leader, part of your role is to ensure that idea building is part of your business every day. Once ideas emerge, they must be captured, and you must ensure focus on their development and refinement, using sprints where appropriate.

Act Until Echo. (Until You Get Feedback)

Too many people fail at innovation because it does not produce instant results. The last step is the culmination of everything discussed in the previous steps. The message is straightforward; you must persist in idea development until you get useful feedback; the echo.

Whether it is positive or negative, feedback ensures there is discussion of your product and that prospective customers test it and give their opinion. Whether you use traditional research methods or opt for a quick test, you must keep working until you get feedback.

You can introduce a prototype or create a survey to get the product into the target audience's hands. It will provide the feedback you need to facilitate the continuing refinement process and ensure your new idea does what it is intended to do. After all, what is the point of building a product that customers do not want?

Whatever your goal might be, you must be prepared to act until echo. Work methodically until you are ready to get feedback. Do this as early in the development process as possible and use this feedback to help define what to do next.

Closing the Knowing-Doing Gap.

All successful business innovation results from refinement and improvement of building ideas over time into viable products. Successful innovation is always about evolution, not revolution.

Persistence is an essential part of this process. There are no magic shortcuts to innovation, no big ideas that arrive fully-formed and ready to sell. Ideas are turned into business opportunities through a process of refinement and development. But persistence must not be confused with a stubborn unwillingness to change course. You need to keep going in the face of setbacks, but feedback may tell you that you need to change direction to meet market needs and expectations.

“Persistence doesn’t mean marching on the same program, against the same hill, with the same sledgehammer. Persistence means you keep trying, but you change your tactics. You modify your strategy, you think differently about how to solve the problem, and you don’t give up.”

ERIC SCHMIDT, EX CEO OF GOOGLE AND CURRENT
CHAIRMAN OF THE US DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE *INNOVATION BOARD*

Successful innovators combine focus and persistence with flexibility, adaptability, and a willingness to listen to and learn from feedback, even negative feedback. If you can do this, you will dramatically increase your chances of innovation success.

Overnight success takes time and effort; understand this before you begin, manage your expectations, and those of others accordingly, and you will set the stage for successful innovation. Be relentless in your efforts to build ideas and maintain focus on what really matters and use feedback to make sure you are headed in the right direction. But whatever you do, don't give up!

Key Take-Aways



- **Being persistent doesn't mean being unwilling to change direction** – Successful innovators don't give up even in the face of setbacks, but they are willing to make changes if feedback tells them that is needed.
- **Overnight success takes time** – innovation is the result of a systematic process, not the outcome of a sudden burst of creativity. Recognize this before you start.
- **The best big ideas begin as small ideas** – don't waste time waiting for the one big idea that will transform your business. Take the small ideas you already have and work on developing them now.
- **Innovation isn't just about ideas** – it's a process designed to turn ideas into practical applications and a step on the way towards a viable product that meets a real need.
- **Focus is the heart of innovation** – don't move from idea to idea and project to project. Keep focused on what matters right now and see it through before moving to the next thing.
- **Failures can be successes** – feedback is essential to the process of developing ideas into products. Negative feedback is just as valuable as positive in keeping the process on track.
- **Don't give up** – persistence is the key difference between successful and unsuccessful innovators. Every successful innovation involves overcoming adversity and setback. To succeed, you must keep going!



Next Steps: This is the only chapter with no canvas. Before you move forward, talk to some people about the ideas. Identify action steps you could take to get useful feedback, then, as described in this chapter, “act until echo”, then improve. (again and again)

What idea do you need an ECHO for?



Next Up: If you’ve gone through all the idea building steps, you’re probably pretty chuffed by your ideas. The bad news is your ideas are probably not as clear as you think they are or, unfortunately, as good as you think they are. In the communicate and check section, the rubber is going to hit the road. You’ll learn better ways to communicate your ideas, get real feedback, and evaluate if any idea is really worth pursuing.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Stoyan has 9 years of experience as an entrepreneur with a background in the video and movie production, premium event experiences and building business networks. Currently, Stoyan is a productivity and performance coach, and a global speaker. He has personally worked with over 200 entrepreneurial teams in 20 plus countries, helping them to boost their performance by applying The PERFORM Methodology. Stoyan is also a co-author of the book: "PERFORM: The Unsexy Truth about (Startup) Success", managing partner at Samodiva Masterminds, and a host of Productivity Mastery podcast.



CO-AUTHOR

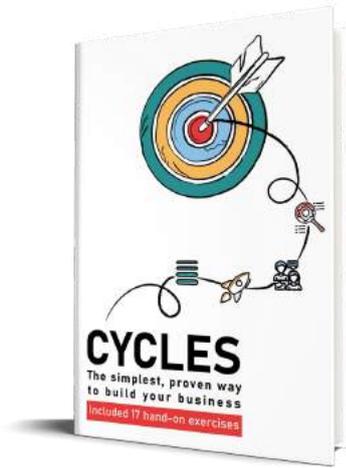
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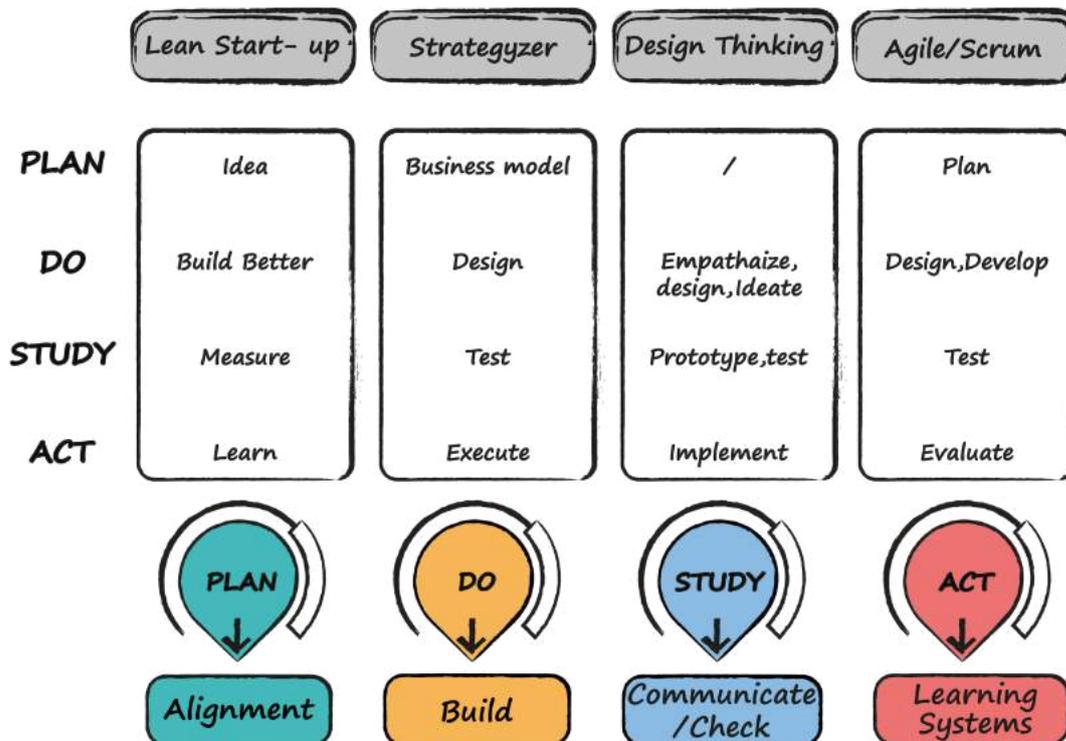
Standing on the shoulders of giants...

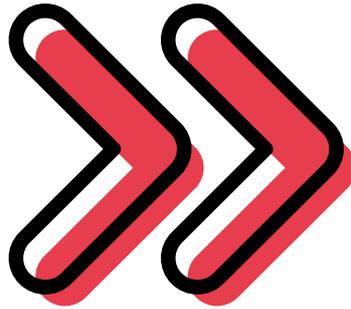
Many of the leading methods- lean start up, scrum, agile are built around the ideas of PDSA (Plan, do , study, act)

This book builds on these ideas, but thanks to the expertise of 22 co-authors, goes one step further.

CYCLES doesn't just tell you what to do, but shows you how to do things step by step.

All the leading methods are Plan, Do, Study, Act and Cycles brings it all together





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HELP GROW LITTLE IDEAS INTO BIG IDEAS.**

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