

# ***Change the World through IDEAS***

***By Kaihan Krippendorff***

A few years ago, while doing research for my third book "The Way of Innovation," I interviewed Elon Musk, who made his riches helping to build PayPal and is now CEO of Space X and Tesla Motors, the electric car company that went public on June 29. It was a successful [IPO](#) and the first American car company to go public since Ford (F) in 1956.



Musk is a fellow Wharton Business School grad. My meeting with him shaped the overall theme of my book and I was struck by the same thing the NYT article covered: does Musk twist reality?

The answer, I believe, is yes. He twists reality. But so does Steve Jobs, Richard Branson, and any highly successful entrepreneur. Indeed anyone who has significantly impacted the world - from Gandhi to Martin Luther King Jr - does the same thing that the press and analysts are faulting Musk for.

You should learn their trick too.

In a recent New York Times article, Darryl Siry Tesla's former VP for sales and marketing says of Musk, "It's a reality distortion field and it's a powerful one. He gives the facts to fit the narrative he wants out there." Another detractor, Ray Wert, editor in chief of [Jalopnik](#) about the auto industry, says, "I don't believe him ... I don't think he is lying. I actually believe that he believes what he is saying. But I just think it's nowhere near what the reality is."

These complaints, I believe, come from a fundamental difference in the way that most of us think about reality. You see, most of us view language as a way of describing what is - describing a fixed, already existing reality. But those who really impact the world view language as a tool for changing reality. Reality adapts to fit our words as much as our words adapt to fit reality. This is not an ivory tower philosophical point. It is a practical and critical principle that anyone who wants to create change - build a business, launch a product, or get a park built in their neighborhood - needs to embrace.

Consider that those who work with Steve Jobs describe the same "reality distortion field" that Tesla's former VP describes follows Musk around. Consider that Mohammad Yunus, who I also interviewed for the same book, a Nobel Peace Prize winner and creator of "microcredit," says that his greatest challenge has been "to change the mindsets of people." Or consider Donny Deutsch's (<http://www.cnbc.com/id/15838512/>) deceptively simple but profound suggestion that entrepreneurs need to "fake it till you make it."

They all point to the same thing: to change the world you need to change reality, and to change reality you need to change perception, which you engineer with creative language. Here are the five steps to begin changing the world – just follow your IDEAS:

1. **Idealize:** define an ideal future state of the system
2. **Diagnose:** identify the key issues that must be addressed to achieve this ideal state
3. **Explore:** brainstorm creative, out-of-the-box strategies for addressing the issues identified
4. **Assess and analyze:** evaluate potential strategies to isolate those with the highest potential and then test their value with fact-based analysis
5. **Story:** wrap the resulting solution into a story that wins the interest and support of the key stakeholders needed to bring the idea to fruition

**1) Create a compelling idea:** when I spoke to Musk about Space X and asked why he wanted to create a private space company, he said something like, "Because a future in which everyone can get into space is more exciting than one in which only the government can."

Therefore, you need to describe an ideal situation that appeals to people's common sense. And keep it really simple. If your description of this ideal future is too complex, then you won't be able to understand nor explain your project well enough.

**2) Diagnose the changes that need to take place:** for mankind to evolve from hunting and gathering societies to agricultural ones required two major innovations to occur: 1. the invention of the scratch plough and 2. the domestication of the ox. If we did not have both, we would either be riding oxen to hunt or sweating under the hot sun as we scratched lines too short to plant seeds in. For bold ideas to be realized, it usually requires that multiple parts of the system undergo radical change.

Musk's vision of an electric car that could travel halfway across the country on one charge between breakfast and bedtime requires not only breakthroughs in battery technology but also the creation of a system of "gas stations" at which drivers can stop to swap out batteries. It requires the passing of new laws and regulations to encourage electric vehicles. It's a multifaceted problem that seems impossible if you view these challenges as reasons the idea won't work. However, if you view them as variables in the system that you can influence, then they become simply part of the puzzle.

**3) Explore possible solutions:** having identified the various interconnected elements that need to change, you must now explore never-before-tried solutions. The breakthrough usually occurs through an analogy or metaphor. Yunus, for example, banged his head against the banking sector, which refused to accept his idea of microcredit. His dream became reality when he stopped viewing his project as a social plan but rather as a bank for the poor. Then all of the previously insurmountable problems revealed simple solutions.

A key difference between innovative companies and less innovative ones is defined by what they decide to do with seemingly improbable ideas. It makes sense to focus your attention only on the ideas that are feasible and, indeed, this is what most companies do. But more innovative companies keep “crazy” ideas on the table. They invest time exploring whether these ideas may become feasible.

To avoid your team’s tendency to discard ideas that seem initially “crazy,” it helps to break down your process of choosing from the ideas you generated during the “Exploration” phase into two steps, carefully managing each to give truly innovative solutions a chance.

**4) Assess the benefits and consequences:** Since you do not have time to test all of your ideas with rigorous analysis, you must first conduct an initial assessment to decide which are worth the effort. Many great ideas die at this early phase, because, upon initial assessment, the team rules them out. Why did it take HP decades to adopt a version of Dell’s “go direct” model? Why did it take American Airlines, Delta, and other traditional airlines 30 years to mount a meaningful counter to Southwest’s budget airline model?

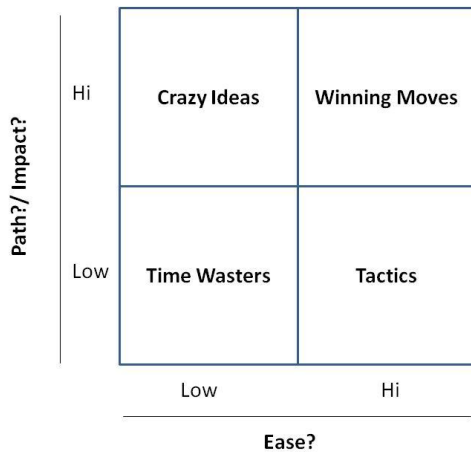
Great companies fail to adopt great ideas because, initially at least, they fail to recognize an innovative idea as holding strategic value. They are not even willing to invest the time to measure the idea’s risks and reward potential.

To help your group avoid its natural tendency to rule out ideas that initially appear “crazy,” it helps to assess your ideas across two unrelated dimensions. I call these the “path” and the “ease.” The goal is to find a way to win with the least amount of effort and find the path of greatest ease.

The **Path** is defined by the impact the idea would have on achieving your goals. If you had a magic wand with which you could achieve every idea you conceived, which ones would prove to be the most impactful and profitable? Judge those ideas using a scale of high, medium, and low to the impact they can have on your organization’s path.

Then assess the **Ease** with which you could realize each idea. Consider how little it will cost, how quickly it can be implemented, if your organization has the capabilities or knowledge to do so, and how complex execution will be. Again judge the achievability of each idea as high (low cost, quickly implemented, and leverages our capabilities), medium, or low.

Assess



This exercise will result in four types of ideas:

1. “Winning moves” – high impact (or “path”) and high “ease” ideas that you should probably begin acting on immediately
2. “Tactics” – ideas that are easy to execute, but that will not significantly improve your situation. You may want to execute these but do not prioritize them as strategic
3. “Time wasters” – low impact and difficult-to-achieve ideas that are probably wasting resources. We often find that through this exercise companies identify many initiatives that are time-wasters. Remove these from your agenda to focus on higher-return efforts
4. “Crazy” – these are ideas that appear difficult to achieve but that could lead to significant strides to you advancing along the path. Innovative companies tend to keep these ideas alive. They continue to discuss such ideas, looking for ways to improve their achievability. Most companies, however, have no room for such ideas and risk being surprised later, but the creative competitor finds a way to make the idea work

By jointly classifying each idea into these four quadrants, you and your team have to consider every idea. You remove completely your company’s tendency to kill off ideas by refusing to consider them. To complete the process, remove “time wasters” and “tactics” from discussion, and focus your time discussing how you can turn “crazy” ideas into “winning moves.” The magic is in the “crazy ideas.” These are ideas with true innovative potential.

**5) Craft a compelling story:** You have devised a brilliant strategic idea. You’ve asked the right questions, diagnosed the critical issues, conceived a set of unorthodox solutions to address the key issues, narrowed down your ideas into an actionable set of priorities, and now you feel confident in your idea.

Everything is in line and ready to go, but many great ideas fail despite the above efforts because the person who presents them cannot sell them effectively into their organization, investors, employees, etc. You must now think strategically about how you will communicate so that your idea builds support.

Here is where the “S” in my IDEAS framework comes into play: **you must be able to tell a memorable story.**

### **The Influence “GAME”**

Influence is fundamental to your ability to lead and impact your organization. It is a skill we exercise every day, whether consciously or not, to shape our environments and get things done. Increasing the effectiveness of your influence relies on your ability to tell a memorable story and get people to be committed to that idea.

My way of teaching the effectiveness of influence is to break it down into a four-component GAME:

1. **Goal:** what do you want to achieve?
2. **Audience:** whom do you need to influence or get input from?
3. **Message:** what do you want to say?
4. **Expression:** how will you deliver the message?

### **Goal**

Before you launch into your pitch, you need to take the time to really understand who you are seeking to influence. Your first goal is not always to convince. There are generally three types of outcomes you will want to achieve through your communication:

1. **To understand:** you may not yet be sure what position someone holds or what role they play. So you are often seeking simply to better understand their view and role.
2. **To loosen:** when someone is in strong opposition and/or when you have multiple opportunities to engage with someone, you may only need to move them toward being open to another point of view. If you can get them to say, “I’m willing to consider alternatives” or, “OK, I’m willing to hear more,” that may be all you need to produce agreement.
3. **To convince:** your goal may be to convince someone of something and have them take action on that conviction.

### **Audience**

Having defined the goal, the next step is to understand the person or people you are seeking to influence. To do this effectively, put yourself into their shoes and ask the following questions:

1. How aware are they of the issue or idea?
2. If they are aware of the issue, how well do they understand it (e.g., are they already experts or do I need to educate them)?
3. Do they already hold a strong point of view about the issue and, if so, what is that view (positive or negative)?
4. Why do they hold this view?

### **Message**

After analyzing the audience, you want to now craft the message that is most likely to achieve your desired outcome. Studies have shown logic is a relatively ineffective approach to changing minds. Rather, people use non-logical approaches to make up their minds and only thereafter use logic to support their decision. You must therefore use something other than logic to convince someone to consider your position and then use logic to lock in their new conviction.

Here are some questions you might ask in deciding how to structure your message:

- How can I open my presentation to engage others? A good framework to consider is: situation, complication, question, answer.
- What metaphor do I want to use to frame my idea?
- How can I frame the past facts related to this issue in a way that tells a helpful story (i.e., tells a story that leads people to see the action you are suggesting is a natural next step)?

### **Expression**

With message in hand, informed by an analysis of your goal and audience, you are now ready to decide how to “express” your message. Before you jump immediately into planning a presentation, ask some of the following questions:

- Is it better to do this by phone than in person?
- Is it better to circulate a report than give a presentation?
- Should we meet at work (e.g., on campus) or somewhere else?
- If at work, should we meet in their office, my office, or somewhere else (e.g., a site visit)?
- Is better for us to stand and present with PowerPoint or to sit down and talk in a small group?
- Should we use any props?

By using simple frameworks like IDEAS and GAME, you can truly clarify your priorities, strategies and effectiveness. Good leaders understand the power of influence, and great leaders understand how to back up that influence with a compelling idea and necessary research. Take the time now to go through these processes in order to save yourself time and money by following the profitable, and sometimes crazy, ideas.

*This article was originally published in Kaihan Krippendorff's expert blog on Fastcompany.com.*