

BIG IDEA

Intrapreneurship

Scholars can hardly agree what entrepreneurship means, and then up pops this term. How can companies, which specialise in doing things efficiently and cost-effectively, fan the spark of invention and risk appetite?

The obvious threat is that the efficiency and control-seeking immune system of the corporation treats unruly creativity as a pathogen to be neutralised by 'management', thus discouraging entrepreneurship.

One solution is to buy people in, coat them in some super-protective membrane and feed them through a hole in the roof, hoping that they will come up with the next generation of wealth-producing products or services.

Skunk works, as they have been called, have a mixed record. Lockheed gave groups of technical workers a high degree of autonomy and liked the philosophy so much it patented the term, but other companies have struggled to handle or retain people who are not subject to mainstream norms and conditions.

➔ To see Nigel Nicholson's book, *The 'I' of Leadership: Strategies for seeing, being and doing* (Jossey-Bass, £18.99), go to iofleadership.com

