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Innovative Imitation

Theodore Levitt, Harvard Business Review, 1966

Why copying well can be worth more than being first.

The big idea

Levitt challenged the assumption that innovation is always the route to success. He pointed out that most of what businesses launch isn't truly new, it's an imitation of something a competitor has already done. Rather than treating that as second best, he argued companies should get deliberately good at it.

The famous example

Levitt's point was that imitation is far more common than true innovation, so it deserves a strategy of its own.

INNOVATION
Rare
Genuinely new to the market

IMITATION
Common
How most growth happens

LEVITT'S ANSWER
Plan for it
Copy deliberately, and quickly

Being first to market often means paying for everyone else's lessons. A smart imitator learns from them instead.

Why it matters

LIV Golf didn't invent anything new. The question was whether it copied the right things, and whether it left behind what made golf work in the first place.

Featured in
LIV Golf: The Strategy of Knowing What to Copy

Read the original
Levitt, T. (1966). Innovative Imitation. *Harvard Business Review*, September–October 1966.

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