



Kauffman Thoughtbook 2007

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This is the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation's third Thoughtbook. Instead of summarizing the past year's activities like an annual report, we use this format to try to convey how we are thinking about our work. The practice began because during Tony's chairmanship-which ran from 2003 through September 2006-the Kauffman Foundation embarked on a fundamental rethinking of all of its operations.

That was an unusual step to take, and a courageous one. The Kauffman Foundation was (and is) still quite young, and there did not seem to be an urgent need for profound change. By most standards, the Kauffman Foundation had been doing good and doing well. Tony Mayer's contribution was to believe that good isn't good enough. He also had the vision to see that a window of opportunity was open. The ideal time for any organization to embark on a course of keeping itself young and vital is when it is, in fact, young-before institutional habits become entrenched, before "turnaround" becomes a truly difficult and painful task.

The rethinking that Tony and the Board nurtured-and that our chief executive officer, Carl Schramm, led-has resulted in some significant changes in practice. For example, rather than making many small grants in response to near-term or ongoing needs, we now tend to have fewer and larger initiatives that have the potential of significantly and positively transforming a field of endeavor. We also are taking a more unified, systematic approach to philanthropy. Given that our two fields of interest, entrepreneurship and youth education, are crucial to American society, we try to discern how people and institutions in these fields are working together (or failing to). We develop sets of programs with a strong chance of triggering cross-the-board leverage and benefits that grow.

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Vincent Johnson:

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