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Dear Reader,

Welcome to the April edition of **Innovation Matters.**

We have yet another in our series of top tips, just jump to the left hand side of this page to find this month's.

Our articles are once again intended to provoke some thought amongst readers. The first takes a gentle swipe at those chanting the mantras of **Open Innovation** and **Crowdsourcing** without really understanding what they are doing.

Article number two is topical right now with the focus on **change** programmes, particularly in the **public sector**.

Finally there are some useful questions that you can use within your own Innovation programmes.

If you have missed previous editions of Innovation Matters you can

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find them all at www.creative4business.co.uk/archives.html.

Happy reading,

Derek Cheshire

This month we have something better than a tip for you. You may have seen the Techniques Card kits in our eshop.

You can download a free sample from here. You will need the username **newsletter** and **password** april.

Simply print out the file onto coloured paper, laminate it and you will have cards to use in your workshops.

Innovation - forget the words Open Innovation and Crowdsourcing

Open Innovation and Crowdsourcing have become buzz words of late which is a shame as it encourages those who blindly adopt best practice to jump on the bandwagon. It is often said that to truly understand a situation you must know enough to be afraid and there are too many consultants pushing concepts on unsuspecting businesses and organisations without really understanding what they are telling organisations to do.

The thing is that Open Innovation and Crowdsourcing really are valuable tools in our question for Innovation. When innovating we have a dilemma, do we try to keep the fruits of our labours secret for as long as possible to secure as great a competitive advantage as possible, or do we throw our net outside of our organization to gather the maximum number of ideas and encourage communications/interactions with outside (and possibly competitor) organisations?

There are many issues surrounding Open Innovation, such as how to manage it, how to select the participants/collaborators and exploiting the results. Much of this is common sense if you have your wits about you. Essentially you have a choice, keep it in house or look outside, perhaps even conducting your business in public as some educational establishments do. The aim though, is to understand, not blindly follow the 'How To Innovate For Dummies' guide.

The fuel for Innovation is ideas and to generate ideas we need people to interact with each other. The more debate and creative tension, the higher the quality of ideas generated and the greater their number will be also. To get to this stage we need more bodies, a crowd. Crowdsourcing is effectively outsourcing the generation of ideas and the solution of problems to a crowd. The UK government's attempt to gather ideas for policies via their website is an example of this. Your crowd can communicate remotely or be in the same location (see the Open Space technique) and interaction fuel debate or facilitate building of ideas.

Once again there are issues such as managing your crowd and capturing ideas, but once you are aware of the principle of Innovation then everything is pretty much common sense.

So please forget the words Open Innovation and Crowdsourcing but do learn as much as possible about them, understand the concepts and employ them properly. If you really do know enough to be afraid then you understand the concepts fully enough to be able to employ them to create success for your organisation.

When is a change not a change?

This is not a trick question. Many of us have undergone change programmes over the years and many have not worked or had no effect. Why is this? The answer is quite simple, the initiatives have not been Change programmes, they have mostly been renaming exercises. The phrase 'rearranging deckchairs on the Titanic' springs to mind here and it is most unfortunate that such exercises have largely been carried out in the public sector in the UK since the economic downturn began to bite.

So what has actually been happening, particularly in our councils and Civil Service? Luckily for employees, the public sector currently has a policy of no compulsory redundancies, which means that only costs other than labour can be cut which in turn leads to the desire for greater efficiency. The desire for greater efficiency then leads to the reorganisation of people. Structures, responsibilities and titles change but job descriptions, behaviours and attitudes do not.

Why does this matter if the organisation has not had to shed employees other than through voluntary schemes, after all efficiency has been addressed and costs cut! Let us go back to the reasons for change, to alter the way in which the organisation works (effectively and efficiency) and ensure that it is fit to face the future. To do this we have:

- Shed staff, often indiscriminately
- Adopted best practice from external sources
- Changed the organisational structure chart
- Amended job titles

What we have also done is:

- Lost valuable knowledge and experience
- Failed to communicate the reasons for change and expectations
- Addressed any necessary changes in behavior
- Failed to address insecurities regarding the future

We are likely to end up with an organisation that wants to work as it has always done (but when it has let valuable employees go) but which its masters want to go in a different direction. Think of a train running on tracks with the Chief Executive running alongside shouting 'no, over here. Go this way'. Things have not really changed at all.

Many will say that this is all that can be achieved in the current climate in a short space of time. My point is that the work should have been carried out properly over a longer period of time if those in power had the skill and foresight to begin the changes a couple of years ago.

This all sound very negative but is easily sorted by:
- Ensuring a transfer of knowledge when staff leave
- Employing change agents within the organisation to help with real change
- Engage the employees at the 'coalface' - in a hierarchical organisation you could be ignoring 80% of the workforce
- Focus on required behaviours rather than simply changing job titles
- Encourage transparency wherever possible

Asking The Right Questions

Asking the right questions can often get us off to a good start when we are innovating. Below is a list of useful questions that you might like to ask yourself either as a group or as an individual. The questions might provide useful answers or lead you to explore other avenues.

1. What is the biggest (avoidable) hassle that our customers have to put up with?
2. Are there any recent changes in rules or regulations that affect our customers?
3. Who does/does not use or products/services?
4. Who is prevented from using our products/services?
5. Where do our products/services perform unexpectedly well/badly?
6. Does anyone use our products/services in ways that we never intended?
7. Who does this the best/worst? What can we learn from them?
8. How could this be improved if I had all of the resources that I needed?
9. Can we improve our products our services by changing people, materials or technology?
10. What are our top 5 sources of business?
11. What facilities are least used/most used?
12. Can we make our offerings easier to understand/buy?
13. Do we know the cost structure of our offerings?
14. Who benefits the most from our products/services?
15. Do we have all of the skills that we require?
16. Do we understand the competitive landscape?
17. Are we duplicating our efforts in any way?
18. What could we do better with more training?
19. Do we have the right resources/sufficient resources?
20. Can we bend the rules? Have we tested the rules?

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