

News on Creativity and Innovation related topics

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creative4business

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Dear Reader,

Welcome to the July 2008 edition of Innovation Matters, the fourth edition of the year.

Many readers will not be at their desks when this arrives but I hope they find it worth the wait. In fact, due to modern technology, the author will not be at his desk either so any comments or suggestions will not be responded to immediately.

In this edition the musings include some thoughts on Creativity and Innovation in the public sector, calibrating your idea generation pipeline, and creating Strategy in an afternoon.

There will be a short break for Innovation Matters during August due to the mass exodus of readers but it will be back in your Inbox in September.

Happy reading and enjoy the summer holidays,

Derek Cheshire

News



Last month we revealed our brand new **Futures** programme. If you need to craft strategies that go forward 5, 10 or even 25 years into the future and have not yet been in touch then why not talk to us over the Summer?

We have been making small (and hopefully worthwhile) changes to the website over the past 2 months or so. In September we will have the first of our new series of audio podcasts for you to listen to. Don't forget that you can now look at past editions of this newsletter by visiting our [archive](#).

If you or your organisation is looking for a speaker we offer a range of Innovation related topics including **Intelligent Growth - success on a budget, The shape of the innovative organisation** and **The Future's Bright**. [Contact us](#) to find out more and make a booking.

The 'rough and ready' survey of the major barriers to creativity within organisations is still located on my [Home Page](#). If you currently work, or have worked for an organisation then I would appreciate it if you could take the time to click on two buttons.

Creativity and Innovation in the Public Sector

I imagine that there are some readers who will eagerly begin reading this article expecting me to either say how great the public sector is in this area (like steering a tanker, sterling effort, lots of good work being done) or how bad and behind the times they are (bureaucracy, bound by unions, outdated structures, jobs for life). Both groups will be disappointed I'm afraid. It would be foolish to make a sweeping statement about the performance of hundreds of thousands of people in such an article.

Just like the private sector, there are good and bad examples. The drivers and barriers are the same but the resources and tactics used may differ. What I will do is discuss these and leave it to the readers to decide what is applicable in their particular case. The only requirement on the reader is that they are not allowed to say 'we could not do that here, it just would not work'. Creativity and Innovation is for you, you just don't know how to embrace it.



First of all let us look at the overall shape of an organisation and ask the following questions:

- Are management always micromanaging staff?
- Do you work on your own or as groups of individuals?
- Is there a lack of desire to win or meet targets?
- Is there a lack of vision of what winning looks like?
- Are you inward looking?
- Do you have a relatively small number of external relationships?
- Do you have a stagnant culture with some stress and/or low morale?
- The right environment does not exist for employees to stretch themselves?
- Management do not get the best from employees?

If you answer 'yes' or agree with one or more of the above then your capacity to innovate will be hampered. Agree with them all and you need to change jobs quickly. If you are a manager in a public sector organisation and have grudgingly given 'yes' answers on the grounds that the organisation is tackling the issues in question, ask how fast are things changing, will the project ever be complete, will it make any difference?

Many public sector services have had innovation written into their service plans in the last few years and failed to deliver, mainly because those producing the plans inserted the word Innovation without understanding what it meant in a local context.

If you are intrigued by the 'finger in the air' test above then you might also like to think about the following topics - strategic barriers, organisational and corporate culture, learning, leadership and management, process and structure, collaboration and knowledge sharing. If you sense any black marks in those areas then perhaps you should start creating an action plan sooner rather than later.



Calibrating your idea generation pipeline

Most large organisations talk about their 'sales pipeline'. Without knowing all of the details we understand that a) the pipeline should produce a stream of sales b) the pipeline should ideally be full. Linked to this we also understand that to produce a certain volume of sales we need a given number of contacts, sales appointments or exhibitions to go to. To increase sales we simply tweak our pipeline and hey presto, something happens.

When it comes to ideas we are not quite so methodical. Ideas are random and come along whenever they feel like it, right? Well yes and no. A large number of random ideas will at some stage begin to feel less random but the actual ideas (or quality) might still be so.

Imagine a business based on ideas. DIY suppliers such as tool manufacturers consistently seem to be trying to catch our eyes with drills, screwdrivers, unbreakable gardening implements etc. Your sales and marketing department may tell you that to keep ahead of the competition you need to have 5 new products each year in production and ready for distribution. Now let us work from the other end. A typical idea generation session might generate say 1500 ideas of which 150 might be worth considering and 15 worth trying to mock up or create prototypes. This might lead to only 1 product. At least you know that you might need to run 4 such sessions or create over 6000 wacky ideas.

Then you must allow for some sort of customer feedback, production set up etc which means that your year timeframe has now become 6 months! At least if you can calibrate your processes you can actually plan getting an idea from conception to customer, and with feedback built into the system you will get better at it. Then, when your Sales Director says 'we need a new product for this market, now' you can estimate the effort and cost required and tell him how long he will have to wait. Remember, miracles we can cope with but the impossible takes a little longer!

The same concept can be applied to services although the ratio of wacky ideas to actual services will be different. Also, because there is little manufacturing involved, services can be brought to the market place quicker.

An afternoon of Strategy

Can Strategy really be put into the same category as a good book, your favourite CD or a celebrity chef? Can you really do it justice in an afternoon? The answer is most definitely yes and you can make it just as pleasurable with or without a teapot and a plate of custard creams.



No, I have not lost my marbles, I just believe that many organisations spend too much time sitting around a polished table poring over management accounts, making poor decisions and crafting strategies that they are unable to communicate to their workforces. And what is the result, a thick document that ends up in the shredder, and even worse does not help the organisation in any way at all.

So how is this feat to be achieved, read on.

First of all we have to make an assumption that those running the organisation are at least technically competent, even if their management and leadership styles are less than ideal. They should have a good idea of the state of the company, the competition, the environment and of course the employees.

Step 1, stare hard at your organisation and look at all aspects of it, not just the balance sheet or profit and loss account. How adaptable is it, have you got the right skills, is it too big or too small or perhaps suited for other markets? Record this information in a suitable fashion, maybe using sketches, mindmaps or pictures (you will see why shortly).

Step 2, gaze into the future (how far in advance is up to you) and create a really good idea of what the organisation needs to be like in order to fend off the competition, where it will be, how it will work, what markets it will be in. If your time horizon is short then you can simply extrapolate from existing data. If you have a long time horizon then you may need to consider scenario planning or some sort of Futures Programme. Don't be influenced too much by the present, your organisation should be succeeding on its own a point in the future.

Step 3, create a storyboard. A simple version may consist of 6 boxes on a sheet of flip chart paper. Number the boxes 1 to 6 and put the output from Step 1 into box 1 and the output from Step 2 into box 6. This is easier if you use visual items such as pictures but adapt everything to suit yourselves. You can even add or remove boxes if you wish. By now you will have guessed that the **Step 4** is to fill in the intermediate steps but going backwards from the future to the present, by asking 'how did we get here?' rather than 'how do we get there?'. This way you will always get to your desired end point!

The results of steps 1 to 4 is a storyboard that many in the creative industries will be familiar with. It tells a story which is how we prefer to take in information. It also allows others to add their own perspective without actually changing the story (try doing that with a strategy document). This raw document can also be used immediately by Human Resources and Marketing to communicate this strategy to employees and other stakeholders and it can be updated regularly.

This method really does work, why not give it a try?

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