

News on Creativity and Innovation related topics

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Tip: Experiment constantly. Visit new places, try new activities, seek new information, and experiment to learn new things.

*I haven't failed, I've just found
10,000 ways that do not
work* **Thomas Edison**

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the final edition of **Innovation Matters** for 2011. We are at the end of a year that has seen many changes, both within the UK and throughout the world as a whole. The business environment is more challenging and Creativity and Innovation are the tools that can help us all to ride out the storm.

With this in mind, all of this month's articles are 'remixes' of articles that were published a few years ago and which seem more relevant today than ever before.

The first article **Christmas Elf and Safety Issues** is more than a bit of festive fun. It illustrates what could happen to Christmas if we applied the same rules and boundaries that exist in the workplace. Why do we do this?

The remaining articles examine the shifts in the balance of leaders vs also rans followers in the **innovation race** and also the need for alternative thinking (or **Unreason**) to assist in finding solutions.

If you have missed previous editions of Innovation Matters you can find them all at www.creative4business.co.uk/archives.html.

Innovation Matters will return to your Inbox in February 2012 and we also hope to be able to show you the new website that Santa is bringing us.

Wishing you all a Peaceful Festive Season and a Prosperous New Year,

Derek Cheshire



Christmas Elf and Safety Issues

Do you think that we should consider cancelling Christmas?

No this is not a manifesto from a fringe group who are avoiding the frayed nerves and expense associated with Christmas Shopping, cooking, boisterous children and upset tummies. Christmas is a time where a million and one things must happen and be in place (more or less) by the time presents are unwrapped on Christmas day.

To be honest most of us manage it. We enjoy (or tolerate) the influx of friends and family and for once we seem capable of multi tasking i.e. having a drink, fixing the tree, carving the turkey. Using Christmas as a metaphor, why can't we do all these things in the workplace? Why can't we encourage diversity, set objectives, plan and execute strategies?



A subtle clue might be in where the focus lies. As individuals, who do we focus on at work, who do we focus on at home (especially at Christmas)? Now think about where the most dramatic results are achieved!

So far we have considered taking Christmas to work, but what if it were to be the other way around? Just think of all of the rules which we tolerate at work, or at least put up with because it suits us. Here are just a few of the issues that might surface during the festive season:

- Tall object with pine needles - removed for health and safety reasons
- Three Wise Men - disbanded because of contravention of equal opportunities policy
- Baby in a stable - social services involved, baby now in care, animal rights protesters angry because of displaced donkeys
- Larger house needed - health and safety dictate that there is not enough floor space per human/animal/present
- Christmas dinner cancelled - no proper workstation assessment carried out on dining table and various rickety items of furniture that we use
- No presents - Santa has not been on a manual handling course

The list could be endless. There is a serious point to be made though. Yes we do need some frameworks to work within, and for someone to look out for the less fortunate and disadvantaged, but too many rules and too many people saying NO is stifling. In the current economic climate we need to bend or even break the rules where necessary.

So its time to decide whether in 2012 you wish to embrace a more creative and productive way of working or wither away under a pile of rules and red tape. Remember, if Christmas really was like work, it would be cancelled. Long live Creativity and Christmas!



Innovation - A Human Race

This article is perhaps more relevant now than when it was originally written. The balance seems to be shifting rapidly and those who once led the world in terms of Innovation are struggling a little and those who considered themselves to be lagging behind are feeling the wind in their sails.

I often get asked about the pace of innovation in different countries or their ability to innovate. Many such questions come from people whose awareness of global issues is sadly lacking and who represent so called developed countries. The answer I give to them is the same as the one I give to those in less developed countries who are seeking inspiration and motivation for their efforts.

My own personal definition of Innovation is purely based on Human Capital so I choose a metaphor that involves people. Think of Innovation as a race, but with a difference. Some runners have an advantage in that they start further ahead, perhaps because of a time or resource advantage and some start with varying degrees of disadvantage.

Those initially at the front may be well trained and have the latest sparkly gear but they are running almost as fast as they can - improvements being measured only in small amounts. Our runners at the rear will acquire the trappings of leading athletes such as running gear, coaches etc in due course.

There are still two very important factors to consider. How long is the race and how fast can those at the back run? The race we are in is, I believe, a long one with sustainability and resilience to crises being key. So, the longer race will provide greater opportunity for less developed countries to narrow the gap. If their natural talent is greater than developed countries, the race could be close.

My word of warning to those in the lead currently is never underestimate the opposition and look over your shoulder once in a while. My words of encouragement to those at the rear is to believe in your talent.

Creativity Through Unreason

If you have not read Charles Handy's book 'The Age of Unreason' then I heavily recommend it. In a nutshell it turns things upside down and tries to change our perspective on situations. One situation that Handy writes about is the issue of Consultants in our National Health Service. As most people realise, these are the most skilled and highly paid professionals. They often like to have time away from work, sometimes on holiday, sometimes playing golf and sometimes in lucrative private practice. Problems arise with their ever rising salaries.



Handy's solution is to keep paying them the same salary but allow them to work less time for the NHS. Their hourly or daily rate thus rises but the cost to the taxpayer does not. This leaves our consultants free to play golf (not earning any further money) or work in private practice and earn even more money.

Now this solution may not be ideal but it is a possible solution and it comes about by turning the situation upside down i.e. by not sticking to reason, hence the idea of Unreason. In the current world economic situation many rules have been discarded and hence reason has gone or been suspended. There is a new world order (possibly devoid of bankers) where new rules apply, or possibly where no rules apply. The

situation is ripe for people with a fertile imagination and brimming with confidence to make an impact.

First of all let us ask some questions:

- Is the aim to increase the cost of consultants to the NHS?
- Do we actually have to pay them more?
- How might consultants like to spend their time?
- Are there other ways for consultants to earn more?
- Can we still make use of consultants for teaching training purposes?

Probing problem boundaries often reveals previously hidden courses of action. Some of these may be conditional e.g. we can have consultants working less time but only if we safeguard some teaching time. OK, so lets do that.

A company supplying parts to the automotive industry was having a tough time. They did not like spending money on repairing equipment but needed to do something. Faults were usually reported to the factory manager who either did something about it or not (the more likely scenario). Control was taken away from the production line workers.

Luckily Unreason prevailed and the workers were empowered (grudgingly at first). So what happened?

- Leaks were fixed in air hoses
- Less leaks meant not running all of the air compressors
- Air compressor running could be alternated this decreasing service bills
- A total annual saving in running costs of £10,000 per annum

An the improvements did not stop there. Their colleagues who worked on an electro plating line began experimenting and found ways to double the throughput of the plating process simply by reorganising the positioning of components on the hangers that immersed them in the plating baths.

This is not quite so dramatic as Handy's NHS solution but is a practical illustration of a burst of Unreason helping. Next time you get stuck, try asking 'why do we have to do it this way?' or 'can we try doing it this way?' and see what happens. You'll be surprised.

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