

## News on Creativity and Innovation related topics

creative4business

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Chuckles From TEDGlobal 2009

### Dear Reader,

Welcome to second edition of **Innovation Matters** for 2010. It is hard to believe that we are two months into 2010 already.

If readers live in the West Country and would like to attend a reasonably priced one day seminar on using Creativity in Business at the University of Bath on March 31st, please [click here](#) for further details.

Regular readers may realise that I have a dislike of Business Process Re engineering. Here is a quote for those who constantly like to fix things. "The system is not broken - it was made that way". This reminds me of an Indian journalist who remarked that nobody knows how India works, it just does. Some systems are like that, so let them work rather than analyse them.

In this month's edition there are three more articles. The first outlines



Scottish funnyman Rory Bremner convenes a historic council on the TEDGlobal stage -- as he lampoons Gordon Brown, Barack Obama, George W. Bush and a cast of other world leaders with his hilarious impressions and biting commentary. [Click here](#) or on the image above to see Rory's one man global summit.

Are you on Twitter? If so you can [follow Derek Cheshire](#) (only if you want to of course!).

a game that you can all play to help you getting a new product or service into the market. **Only We Can ...** looks at the uniqueness of your offerings. **Innovation By Breaking The Rules** is not a call for anarchy, just a simple way of analysing the artificial boundaries that constrain us. Finally I have penned an article **Innovation In The Public Sector** which is designed to provoke thought rather than heads that nod in agreement.

Once again, if you have missed previous editions of Innovation Matters you can find them in our [newsletter archive](#).

As always, your thoughts and feedback are welcome.

Happy reading,

Derek Cheshire

## Only We Can ...

I notice that a number of people play this game in their workshops but here is my version. It can be used in a number of different ways and can also be used solo or in groups.

If you are having issues with a current product or service then you might try to produce statements such as:

- Only we can deliver product xx within 24 hours
- Only we can produce xx at a cost of less than £5
- Only we have the technology ....

This should not be too difficult, especially if you are already having some success but if you cannot find statements of the above type that describe why your products and/or services are unique then you are probably flogging a dead horse and should consider cutting your losses.

It is then time to use this technique in a different way. You might have already created some new ideas which are still in your head or are just scribbles on a piece of paper. Try the same exercise but using knowledge of your capabilities and resources create statements of the form 'Only we could ...'. This might require some knowledge of your competitors as well so some digging will be required. Once again, if your product or service ideas fail this simple test then perhaps they are not worth pursuing.

All is not lost though. One final exercise is 'If only .... then we could ...' so you might generate statements of the form:

- If only we had a new machine we could produce xx at a cost of less than £5
- If only we had a new van then we could deliver within 24 hours

So you can work out your unique advantage assuming that you can meet the conditions of your 'If only ...' statement. This is a little easier and can usually be carried out with the aid of a calculator. If you are a larger business then you might wish to involve employees from all areas and at all levels in this exercise. Be realistic



though, 'If only we had infinite resources, we could do anything' is not an option if you are trying to make a decision although it might be good for generating some wacky ideas.



## Innovation By Breaking The Rules

There are rules, and there are rules as many pioneers tend to say. Don't worry, we are not going to break any - for now!

I was reading an article recently that stated that in order to innovate we must challenge or disrupt at least one of the fundamental principles or rules that we operate by in our chosen sector. I thought about this for a while, thinking it might sound radical to some people, and then decided that the statement was perfectly

true.

If you just think for a minute or two about all of the rules that we conform to as a) individuals and b) groups then you will be surprised at how long the list is. Your list might start something like:

- I begin work at 9am and leave at 5pm
- I only work Monday to Friday
- I must get my timesheet in by 5pm on Friday
- Only senior managers can use the car park
- We must answer the telephone within 5 rings

... and the list goes on. Try creating your list and see how many are a) self imposed b) could be broken without affecting anybody else c) could be broken by everyone to make life better (or improve profitability). What could this new found freedom to act and think give you or our business? Perhaps time to create new products or services or simply improve existing ones. Don't just ask questions about how you work, ask about industry sector, materials used, supermarkets supplied etc.

We all conform to rules and create boundaries which we then become constrained by for no good reason. Try breaking some rules and see what happens, don't think of it as breaking rules, just think of it as stretching boundaries. If you are the nervous type who does not want to act and then ask for forgiveness later try telling your

boss or colleagues that 'If we broke rule x or rule y then it would be possible to ...'.

And one final thought, if you do not wish to be branded an anarchist, tell people that you are performing Boundary Analysis rather than rule breaking!

## Innovation In The Public Sector

This article is based on thoughts and observations rather than research, and is meant to stimulate some thinking on the topic. There will be some generalisations and hence some exceptions can be found also. In this context I define the Public Sector as everything that is not Private thus education and Not For Profit are included also. Innovation is taken to be some sort of system where processes and behaviours are changed to create value and improve output rather than the shiny new gadget that has just come from a high technology start up company.

The big question is 'Does the public sector innovate?' and the straight forward answer is no it does not because it cannot. I know of examples of medical innovations within the National Health Service which are exceptions to the rule but the system as a whole does not innovate.

One argument that I often encounter when challenging people on this issue is that their work is governed by rules laid down by government, both local and national. If you provide a service then those rules normally prescribe what happens or must happen at the point of service delivery not what goes on within the body providing the service. So the world is your Oyster as far as Innovation is concerned.

So what prevents Innovation? First of all there are hundreds upon hundreds of self imposed rules or boundaries (see my article on Innovation By Breaking Rules) which are justified by statements such as 'That is the way we have always done things'. Why is that? What can be changed, rearranged or replaced to improve the quality of what is being delivered? How many people challenge the boundaries?

Targets are a huge issue. I encourage readers to read 'Freedom From Command And Control' and 'Systems Thinking In The Public Sector' by John Seddon who has a lot to say on this matter. Badly formed targets only



encourage behaviour that is designed to meet targets, not to improve service delivery or create value. Many organisations (including private sector) have experienced the touch of Business Process Reengineering (BPR) gurus who have stripped down and rebuilt public sector systems that work poorly. John Seddon talks of 'value demand' (demand on a public service) and 'failure demand' (demand by way of failure such as complaints or having fragmented information). Our streamlined front/back office systems are candidates for large amounts of 'failure demand' and hence wasted energy (but they do meet their targets!!).

Another complex issue revolves around Human Resources and the Unions. I shall not blame either party but simply illustrate a situation that needs resolving. In much of the public sector, HR has been centralised as Employment Law has become more complex thus responsibility for some soft management issues has been withdrawn from the front line (and some managers may have welcomed this). HR has become more about Employment Law and not getting the best out of the workforce.

Even when an employer wishes to reorganise the workforce they come against the Union who are quiet rightfully there to protect the rights of workers. They often start their negotiations from the point of view of 'change is bad'. Another factor that does not assist is the fact that public sector recruitment and working revolves around the job description and person specification which HR would dearly love to change and the employee and the Union would not (unless there is some compensation). Why is this so? Why can't contracts of employment describe behaviours and responsibilities rather than actions and qualifications?

Currently in the UK, we are getting ready for significant cuts to spending in the public sector which should spur us on to trying something radical to maintain services to ratepayers and taxpayers. The current economic climate presents a possibly unique opportunity to sow the seeds of Innovation. The danger is that the public sector will be made weaker by simply chopping off bits and not reorganising the remnants or outsourcing to organisations that are still based on a front/back office system that has high failure demand. The justification is that this is what happens when public sector spending is cut.

The conclusion regarding the question 'does the public sector innovate' is still 'no it does not because it cannot' but also that 'it does not because those in charge (politicians and civil servants) simply will not'. We can do something about it, if somebody will let us.

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