creative4business

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Dear Reader,

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

The reason for the picture of a daffodil is that today is March 1st, St David's day and the daffodil is one of the national emblems of **Wales**.

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 intended to provoke some thought amongst our readers. The first gives some tips about **avoiding pitfalls** that may hinder your Innovation efforts.

Article number two is topical right now with the focus on **cutting costs** within the **UK public sector**. Is the desire to monitor eveything actually costing us money? Is it time to find a innovative new way of
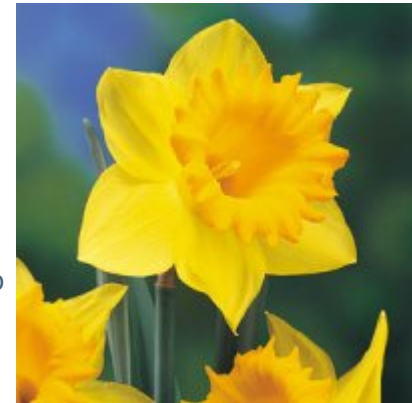
Reward and **celebrate** incremental successes... not just the attainment of a big goal. Unless the project/goal will be completed within in a short space of time you need to acknowledge progress toward it to keep people motivated. Establish incremental milestones and have small celebrations for passing them.

This monthwe have a book recommendation for you, **R&D Creativity and Innovation Handbook by Edward Glassman.** It is available from Amazon and you can read sample chapters and purchase at http://www.r-and-d-creativity-innovation.com/index.html

managing within the public sector?

Finally there are some thoughts on **Social Innovation**.

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

Happy reading,
Derek Cheshire

Avoid These Pitfalls To Ensure Innovation Success

In many organisations there can be tension between those promoting creativity, design and user centred approaches to Innovation and those who are bound entirely by procedures, plans and spreadsheets.

I have often remarked that many people think of Innovation as a machine where you turn a handle after feeding in your ingredients, and a nice new Innovation will pop out. This is not the case! We should be focusing on the process of innovating (the people) rather than the end product. But what could be going wrong? Well here is a short list of things to beware of:

1. **Being unrealistic** Innovation takes time, often more than we allocate for it. The results can also not be what we are expecting. Unrealistic (or irrelevant) objectives and timescales will kill . Try to think of the impact of your Innovation project rather than listing the results in a table. You should be explicit though!

2. **Protecting ego** If you're scared to be wrong, you won't be able to lead innovation or lead the innovation process. Since Innovation is all about discussing new ideas you have to be prepared to be wrong or immerse yourself in completely alien concepts. If you are not doing this you are just reworking old stuff, not innovating.

3. **Believing process will save you** Innovation processes are not what Innovation is about. They provide a framework within which leaders and facilitators work their magic. They also provide a sort of 'incubator' within which anything can happen and which is allowed to flourish when it does. Beware of allowing everything to happen though! You are in business to make money.

4. **Varied backgrounds and experience are not the same as cross functional teams** In a bid to be innovative, many companies have put together cross functional teams. Such teams are a good idea since your project teams are liberated from the silos (departments) that may make up your business. However, what you are really looking for are different perspectives and experiences. It's the people you must mix, not the functions.

5. **Believing that we know everything** We often do know most things about our markets and customers

BUT what we do not seem to be able to do is get started. We believe that we have all of the motivation and inspiration that we need. We sit at our desks and pore over emails but very few answers arrive that way. Go outside for inspiration, take your camera (or mobile phone) and see what is going on in the world. Drop in on an old lady for a cup of tea and ask her opinion. Do anything but sit on your chair all day!

6. **Talking rather than doing** We often like to rubbish the ideas of others and try to make sure we have a complete solution before trying anything. Get prototyping (or playing) early on and get feedback and gather more ideas. We cannot learn by doing nothing, and hence we cannot innovate either.

7. **Converging (executing) rather than diverging (exploring)** 'Cycle often and close late' is one of the main precepts of creativity in business. Too often we wish to nail everything down. The CEO wishes to know who is doing what and what the timescales are before we have finished exploring all of the possibilities. Senior managers must learn to live with a little ambiguity.

Should The Public Sector Be Quite So Public?

Is transparency costing us dearly? I was speaking to [Dr Paul Thomas](#) (of BBC's Ban The Boss programme) and something that he said stuck in my mind. He stated that 'monitoring costs'. This is so obvious but I had never heard anybody say this before. Each time that we want to monitor something we have to define a process or assign someone to keep a look out. In many cases we might have to create a job for someone to oversee this. Thus a seemingly simple act might cost say £15,000 to £20,000 per year minimum. Why do we need to do this at all?

All across the country there are groups of people who are demanding to know how much their local council is spending on paperclips and they are justifying it by saying that if waste is eliminated our council tax will go down. Similar arguments are put forward for the Health Service and other public sector bodies. Why not simply say to the nosey parkers that the records are there for them to look at if they wish to fish in the filing cabinets and let our public sector workers do the work that they should be doing?

Isn't it about time that we began to trust each other again? So what if my local council spends an extra £100 on

paperclips as long as they deliver the service that they should? On the flip side, public sector employees and managers must understand that they are required to do their jobs as efficiently and effectively as possible. £100 on paperclips or £20,000 to monitor the stationery budget? It is a no brainer.

Recently I have spoken with many public sector managers, and budgets are being cut but the demands for accountability are increasing which are pushing up costs!! Since this is a zero sum game, something somewhere is suffering. It is, spending on actually delivering services is being reduced.

Let us trust one another a little more and reduce the bureaucracy and overheads associated with monitoring and accountability. Let us reduce the number of managers, and learn to manage our public sector in a different and more effective manner. We really could reduce costs and maintain the standard of our services for long as possible. Let us be a little less public!

Social Innovation- is this the way forward?

Being an advocate of social innovation I would say 'of course' but it depends on your definition and what your own particular situation is. I will start by making things complicated and offering two not entirely unconnected definitions.

Forget the use of the word 'social' to mean outside work and think of what it could mean. When we are being social we are interacting, sharing, caring and even building. We are essentially social beings (although some do like being alone) so why not focus on a type of innovation that makes use of our social characteristics?

In simple terms, think of innovation as a 'people thing' rather than a 'gadget thing'. That is not to say we cannot have shiny gadgets, but that we should focus on how they got to be there (innovating rather than the innovation). This then leads to the possibility of innovating even when the output is not an innovation (perhaps a process innovation). Such a type of innovation is thus appropriate both inside and outside of the workplace.

So what about the other kind of 'social innovation'? This is most definitely linked to the community/region/country as a whole. You should be thinking of innovation in community projects, healthcare, employment opportunities, arts etc. A good example might be the micro finance initiatives that have sprung up in many developing countries.

We need this kind of innovation too.

Many countries are in a mess (the recession) and are cutting costs (in the public sector). We need to revert to being social creatures again or there will not be any people with any money to buy the shiny gadgets that we used to think of as innovation output. Businesses producing shiny gadgets will go bust leading to more misery. The UK government's idea of 'The Big Society' to counterbalance the public sector cuts will fail dismally without a modicum of social innovation.

So the answer is that YES we most definitely need social innovation however you define it.

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