News on Creativity and Innovation related topics

creative**4**business

May 2010

In This Issue ...

News

Creativity - don't copy the UK Foreign Office

Is nothing changing?

Removing the 'In' from Innovation

Quick Links

News

There have been some formatting changes to our website which make things look a little crisper. You will also find a new short **promotional**

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the May edition of **Innovation Matters**, the fourth of 2010. Depending on how long it takes for you to open this, we may have a new government in charge here in the UK. There will be interesting times ahead as whoever comes to power attempts to curtail public sector spending. We have also witnessed troubles with the economies of Greece, Spain and Portugal so maybe now is the time for a little Creativity and Innovation?

Don't forget the one day seminar on using Creativity in Business at the University of Bath on June 9th, please click here for further details.

The first of this month's articles contains some lessons to be learned following the well publicised brainstorming event that took place at the UK's **Foreign Office** in the build up to the forthcoming visit by the Pope. Next there is a brief look at some possible **barriers to creativity** and how (or not) they are changing as the economic climate changes. Finally there is a swipe at those who are treating **Innovation** as a word that is **'cool'** or **'in'**.

video on the home page and and interview with Derek on [GuruView.tv](). To take a look [click here]().

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

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

Creativity - don't copy the UK Foreign Office

Recently a huge story hit the news stands here in the UK. Within the Foreign Office a brainstorming session was held to do some 'blue sky thinking' around things that should form part of the Pope's forthcoming visit to the UK.

As with all good idea generation sessions everything was recorded and the results marked not to be distributed externally. Of course, some of the ideas upset one or two people who took it upon themselves to make the document public. The BBC article can be read in its entirety by [clicking here]().

This whole sorry episode highlights some DOs and DON'Ts for generating ideas:

- DO make sure that your objectives are clear at the start, that way you will not be left defending your motives afterwards.
- DON'T use any form of censorship, not even telling people to keep quiet. They won't. Get people to buy in to secrecy if this is needed in a commercial environment. If they spill the beans they are breaking the confidence of their peers and colleagues.
- DO invite appropriate people.
- DO make sure that brainstorming is not the whole process, some filtering has to take place to weed out the wacky ideas.
- DO publish the results yourself, others may well try to take things out of context.

- DON'T be naive. In any political (in the true sense, not just government) environment there will be points scoring. Some people will go to extreme efforts to sabotage yours!

... and finally please do persevere. I'm sure that the Junior Official within the Foreign Office who has now 'been moved to other duties' did a good job and once the wacky ideas had been thrown away the Pope may very well have had some great events organised to complement the obligatory masses and baby blessings. A great opportunity missed perhaps? In the future people will be afraid to try new things so it could be a case of 'If you do what you have always done, then you will get what you have always got'.

So please try and be a little different, but be careful!

Is nothing changing?

For the past few years I have had a survey on the front page of my website. I ask one simple question 'What is the MAJOR factor that hinders creativity within your organisation? The options available are strategic barriers, organisational culture, corporate culture, process/structure, learning capacity, leadership/management.

Apart from the early days when the sample size was not large enough, the results have changed very little. At the time of writing the results are as follows:

- Strategic barriers   **6.36%**
- Organisational culture   **28.18%**
- Corporate culture   **13.64%**
- Process/structure   **12.73%**
- Learning capacity   **4.55%**
- Leadership/management **34.55%**

In my view, the two interesting points are the extremes. Very few people were highlighting strategic barriers (filtering, mindsets, risk profile etc) or the ability for their organisations to learn when these are potentially huge

issues for an organisation embracing Creativity and/or Innovation. Also, since we have seen a global recession and financial crises, I would have expected these percentage figures to change as a result of 'digging in' during a crisis or through loss of capacity due to downsizing.

It is not a surprise that over 34% of respondents blame Leadership and Management. Whether or not senior figures really are to blame, they are always likely to be a scapegoat. Once again I would have expected the results to change in troubled times. The biggest surprise of all is the number of people who selected organisational culture as the major factor that hinders creativity.

Organisational culture is organic and is largely down to the employees. Even when a company is strict rather than benevolent, organisational culture tends to triumph. Have we not all heard of people banding together in the face of adversity? People are not saying that the culture is bad, just that it hinders creativity! Puzzling, so what does this mean? Without asking more searching questions (find out about our [Innovation toolkit](#) to get this information) we can't really say why these results are not changing when we expect them to, although one possibility is that the reasons behind the figures have changed.

Finally, as well as being blamed directly, senior managers are also indirectly responsible for culture and structure. If your company had figures such as this and had troubles with creativity and innovation related issues then I would definitely want to do some digging. The chances are, a change of personnel is required somewhere!!

Removing the 'In' from Innovation

There have been many articles recently that have focused on putting the 'Lead' back into Leadership or the 'Man' back into Management. But what about Innovation, I thought, what does that need that it doesn't already have? One of my recent articles focused on Slow Innovation, going back to basics and making sure that everyone understands the concept, the parts that they play and the overall objectives.

This is, however, an internal issue for organisations. What is happening in the external environment that is helping or hindering Innovation? One possible problem is 'spin'. Innovation as a word is incredibly fashionable and sexy. To coin a phrase, it is 'in'. Unfortunately to take the 'in' out would take quite a bit of work, the best we can do is warn the

participants in this fashion game.

Who is taking part and what is the problem here? First of all we have a message that 'Innovation is good' from governments, with grant funding for the wrong things, targeted at the wrong organisations, with advice from the wrong people! At a slightly lower level, Innovation is seen as a panacea for all ills. Wrong! If you hear this, an out of touch consultant is trying to sell you a 'thinly disguised' change program. Embedded within organisations are people jumping up and down shouting 'eureka' and wanting to set up innovation projects. Some may be well intentioned but they want to play with pet projects in their spare time.

This is making some very sweeping statements but next time someone in your organisation mentions innovation, think about what it is intended to do, and that everyone is speaking the same language. Ensure that Innovation is not just a fashion accessory, but an essential part of being a successful organisation.

eBooks and Workshop Resources

Innovation Measurement and Audit | About Creative Business Solutions

Creativity Seminars and Workshops| Our Partners | Creativity and Innovation blog

Constant Contact - try the same emailer we use and get a $30 credit if you decide to use it