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THE INNOVATION PRACTICE
TEAM BRINGS YOU BEST
PRACTICES IN INNOVATION—
SHOWCASED AT THE 12TH
ANNUAL INNOVATION
IMMERSION CONFERENCE
IN LA JOLLA, CALIFORNIA

Create New Experiences That Drive Innovation

The commonly accepted definition of **INSANITY** is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different outcome. Yet many organizations approach innovation and growth initiatives with the same set of tools they use going about their daily business. **Successful innovators are good at changing things up.** They are challenging the status quo. They are telling stories. They are playing with ideas. They are experimenting. They are valuing the differences in people. They are, in effect, **creating a different experience within their organization.**

Our conclusion: if you want to be successful in the future, create some new experiences today.

HERE ARE **5** WAYS OF CHANGING YOUR EMPLOYEES' EXPERIENCES IN ORDER TO IMPROVE YOUR INNOVATION SUCCESS.

These ideas were all reflected in the presentations from the Conference's impressive speakers including Daniel Pink, author of "A Whole New Mind", Alan Webber, co-founder of *Fast Company*, Jim Garrity, Chief Marketing Officer of Wachovia, Carol Pletcher, Chief Innovation Officer for Cargill, BJ McCabe, Krys Moskal of Pearson Educational Publishing, Kathie Thomas of Fleishman Hillard, and many more.

SCROLL DOWN . . .

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heard any good ones?

What are the current stories in your organization? How are those stories translating into the environment you create for your employees and your customers?

1 Tell Stories A good story delivers facts with feeling and context; good stories engage us, define us, and motivate us to action. A good story affects change by challenging our thinking and providing new perspectives.

Story telling can be delivered through words or experience. James Damian, who believes all retailing is story-telling, creates a story at Best Buy from the space layout and design. Target tells its story of “Mass with class” by using world class designers, like Michael Graves, to make every day things. Walk inside a Hollister’s and you are transported from the mall to a Huntington Beach surf shop.

Daniel Pink engaged us with his story of what the future will look like—routine jobs will be moved to areas of the world with cheaper labor. To succeed in the “new” US economy will require a “Whole Brain Focus” and 6 six specific capabilities: design, storytelling, synthesis of ideas, empathy, play and meaning.

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How do you determine style?

There are several good style tests available but one quick way is to ask people to describe their greatest high school accomplishment. Did it involve improving something—or fundamentally changing something? That may give you a clue to their particular innovative strength.

2 Embrace differences Your workforce is made up of different kinds of people with different skills and styles. Some are inherently drawn to improving or perfecting the system, adaptive innovators—while others want to make fundamental changes, radical innovators.

Thomas Edison was the quintessential adaptive innovator. With 1093 patents to his name, his focus was on perfecting existing technology. Some professions are particularly welcoming to adaptive innovators . . . Engineers, accountants, and sales people are often great adaptive innovators.

Albert Einstein was a model of the quintessential radical innovator. He believed that we need to look at problems from new angles, seeking radical change. Marketing people, inventors, and writers often tend to be people who want to break the mold and do things totally differently.

Both types of innovators are necessary in your organization. Teams that combine people of all styles and skills will create the most effective results; they will come up with more ideas and more creative ideas than those whose styles are similar. While they may take longer to work through conflicts, they will be more productive to the organization.

As employers, match people to their natural styles. Allowing people to work within their style frees them to maximize their potential. Keep in mind that someone who enjoys process will be uncomfortable in environments completely devoid of structure; someone who challenges conventional wisdom will be uncomfortable in a highly structured position.

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Ready?

Write down your current corporate values—now rewrite them to fit your vision of the future. By doing this, you will optimize your chance of being alive in the new world that begins today.

3 **look at your values** Climate and values count! What does your organization value? What are the stories around the values and culture? What ones are still serving you and which ones should be replaced? Are they consistent with what you see for the company's future?

If you are trying to drive innovation at your company, here are values that contribute to it:

Play. Yes play. Play is the underpinning of new discoveries. Play teaches us how to find new pathways. Play frees up the brain to think great thoughts.

Learn from failure. There is no success—or learning—without failure. This theme was articulated by nearly every speaker, from every venue.

Use imagination to solve problems. There is a growing recognition that creative thinking skills can and must be applied in complex situations that require new ideas, new solutions, decisions that require judgment.

Experiment courageously. Innovation requires “putting your toes in the water” and trying new things—even if they are unproven; even if you aren't absolutely positive they aren't “the best.” Take a tip from science—try things many, many ways.



Sacred Cows

One effective way to demonstrate that the organization will write a new future is to take a piece of paper, write down one of the sacred cows that restrict innovative thinking, then symbolically cut it up and throw it away. In fact, do this exercise at a staff meeting—because alignment and shared experience are the critical ingredients to facilitate change.

4 Create a new future by experimenting with new approaches.

Innovation leadership starts at the top with Management embracing innovation and the change that follows. As Marshall McLuhan told us, *“It is experience, not understanding, that guides behavior.”* Begin by creating some new experiences for employees as well as customers.

Wachovia gave some employees video ipods and asked them to produce a video about innovation. Pearson Educational Publishing established a committee to seed new ideas from employees. P&G launched the Clay Project, a new center that challenges groups to solve a big problem and supports them with tools and techniques.

Other organizational leaders have their people take “learning journeys.” Learning journeys allow employees to stretch their thinking by looking at a problem from different perspectives. Others may need to take “unlearning journeys”—reviewing and possibly smashing the “sacred cows” and organizational belief systems that get in the way of new thinking.

Demonstrate that the organization is committed to a new future. Take a piece of paper, write down one of the sacred cows that restrict innovative thinking, then symbolically cut it up and throw it away. In fact, do this exercise at a staff meeting—because alignment and shared experience are the critical ingredients to facilitate change.

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The lesson?

Measure, measure, measure. Organizations need to show success along the way and the impact of a new idea in the marketplace can take time – sometimes years. In the meantime, the process itself produces results that can be tangible, motivating and helpful in making decisions.

5 Celebrate! Celebrate the successes and the learning from the failures. Edison had 1600 failures before he reached success . . . how do we know? He counted.

Be thoughtful, strategic and creative about what you consider counting . . . things like . . . the number of people trained in creative thinking; the number of new ideas catalogued in a year; the number of marketplace experiments; the dollars invested in experiments; the impact of participating in innovation initiatives on employee commitment; how many lives your innovations have impacted; the list can go on.

Then celebrate those successes, and the people involved with them, on a regular basis.

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We can help

The Innovation Practice will help you assess your skills and capabilities through our Innovation Aptitude™ Audit; we can train you in how to think more creatively; we can work with you to develop more authentic insights.

How to contact us:

Conclusion Innovation isn't magical; it doesn't "just happen." It requires a new set of experiences for all those involved. Large, complex organizations need to define what innovation means to them—and then they need to define how they want to approach it. Some organizations, like GE, take a very comprehensive and holistic approach, while others are more decentralized and have separate teams driving innovation. Some, like Colgate, use very deliberate creativity/creative problem solving techniques spending tremendous resources on training employees in the process. Others work in a more ad-hoc matter.

Whatever process you use, make sure you create experiences that support your goals. And be flexible enough to make changes as you learn what works for you and what doesn't.

tell us what you think

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