

The Business Case for Leadership of Organizations to increase their involvement in Innovation

Exploring ways leadership can become more
deeply engaged

By providing a more integrated innovation
framework concept



Contributing articles to stimulate discussions

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Content Included in this short booklet

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These short articles have been taken from the blog www.paul4innovating.com and offer a personal view of innovation and areas that need much deeper thinking through at all levels, especially the leadership level within organizations.

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The essential innovation vision

In a recent leadership study on innovation by Cap Gemini Consulting, one of the studies top line concerns was the lack of a well-articulated innovation strategy, and then beyond this, a lack of organizational understanding of the linkages required.

It is amazing how many organizations lack a clear innovation vision and an explicit set of statements from the Chief Executive or their designated C-Level Officer on innovation.

One great visual paints a thousand words

This visual I came across some years back, and for me, it is outstanding in providing the feedback loops that go into developing the right innovation vision. To get to a definitive end point of having an innovation vision you are faced with some complex challenges. These are well shown here. Each influences the other and constantly loop back, making hopefully an improving vision success.

The critical need for Innovation to be correctly embedded



Leaders need to plan and manage this effectively

The critical feedback needs for constructing an innovation vision

The different challenges seen in this terrific depiction provide the sort of dialogue and efforts that needs to go into 'crafting' the innovation vision. It is hard, thoughtful work. Let's look at each of these a little more.

The Time Challenge

We get caught in annual planning cycles that often leave little time for 'considered' opinion and debate. The annual plans all come in a deluge and this is plainly wrong. Creating a vision needs a lot of time to consider all the aspects. The 'time gap' seriously impacts the visions success and clarity of purpose

The Diversity Challenge

Not only within the same board room do you have a diversity of opinion, you have that up and down any organization. Getting the views first out in the open, then managing the conflicting aspects and dealing with the 'polarization effects' all is difficult. This is where a dedicated focus, a Chief Innovation Officer, can really make a difference. To get people to talk about the vision, what it should stand for, what needs to happen leads eventually to a greater clarity.

The Relationship Challenge

Managing the relationships both within and outside the organization when it comes to the right thinking on innovation is hard, converting doubters, drawing out differences, improving the quality of any conversations around innovation (ideally with facts not conjecture) and raising the enthusiasm to engage is crucial to moving towards the right vision

The Vision Cap Challenge

There is a reality to what and where you are and the perceived gap that need addressing honestly. This is something we tend to be very poor at, is, holding a 'creative' tension that can stimulate and create a vibrant and exciting innovation vision. We try to dampen the divergence in opinions far too early so we can (quickly) got to convergence. This 'keenness' to take away the 'creative' tension tends to replace it with potential set of 'destructive' ones and this often creates much of the beginnings of the barriers to innovation. People resent not being well listened too or allowed time to develop their arguments.

The Vision and its Success

If you get people to 'freely' talk about innovation, its importance, its impact and can 'paint' the future in broad brush strokes, they achieve a growing clarity and enthusiasm and that often missing critical component a sense of shared identity.

Innovation is complex; it deals with formal and informal mechanisms. There is an awful lot to constructing a solid innovation vision but believe me, it is even harder to understand the right components that make up the innovation strategy, so it does eventually become a well-articulated innovation strategy.

From a buzzword to the imperative

I keep coming back to the leadership of innovation; we need to move it from the peripheral to a more central one. This is not so much in a leader's desire and need for innovation, which always seems well stated, but in their ability to lead it, to have it not just in their mind but in their real follow-through, in action and attitude, in their deepening engagement and involvement to it.

"Leadership for innovation can't simply be delegated", so tell me how many times have you heard that one? Yet it always seems to be pushed down the organization when you look a little closer. Running a day-to-day business, reacting to the events, achieving the performance to maintain the momentum, planning the future is demanding but innovation is absolutely central to sustaining and securing the future but does it really get enough of the CEO's time? I think it should figure more in their time but how can this be achieved?

I certainly don't envy global leaders in trying to balance all that is crowding in on them, that is making up their daily, weekly and monthly agenda's. Something always has to give and innovation is one of those malleable parts whereas other more pressing 'demands' are more real, tangible and definitive and innovation gets constantly squeezed out at the top. Regretfully for many it does seem innovation ends up as important but not urgent for them to focus upon.

The management of innovation is *the management of attention*.

I find this an interesting observation. Achieving the management of innovation requires the *management of attention* was a view outlined by Andrew H. Van, a Professor of Organizational Innovation and Change back in 1986, where it was suggested for management that "*the awareness of need* deteriorates and their *action thresholds* reach a level where only crisis can stimulate action as they gradually adapt to the environment."

I interpret this as Innovation does seem to get gradually pushed back, on the agendas of the CEO and perhaps even the organizations, if the leader is not being actively engaged consistently in it. Nothing has changed today; we still are not achieving this innovation attention. It slips down their crowded agenda's as they deal with countless issues running a business. If their organization is in that crisis then innovation will have certainly have grabbed the CEO's attention but by then it is often too late. We do need to manage innovation more strategically.

How can we change this?

Clearly what comes towards the CEO in on-going issues does not go away, it only seems to increase in pace and complexity. Of course, we can call for the CEO to clear the decks and embrace innovation as central in everything they do. I think this call for his attention is not wrong but possibly naïve with what is on their plate to manage.

Where we can demand in their attention is in providing a deeper personal commitment and clearer insight into their understanding of the need to structure innovation to all its necessary alignment points, so it can deeply integrated with the strategic goals looked for. For that to happen it needs articulating somehow.

Influencing and shaping innovation

What I'd like to see is a way where the leader can influence and shape the core structures required for innovation and provide the building blocks for the organization to work within. Something that sets out expectations of where innovation fits within the growth plans and defines critical areas that are essential for innovation to link into the strategy and organizations vision.

Perhaps you can call this an innovation foundation document; perhaps you can take this even further and shape it in a more exciting, compelling format that frames the linkages and synergies between strategy and innovation, between innovation and capabilities, between culture, the environment, the process, routines and how it should all be governed.

How about a leadership alignment framework that articulates where innovation fits?

Something that addresses the critical aspects of innovation to gain a crucial alignment across the organization that provides the strategic underpinning to performance. Its aim is to promote the freeing up of people by taking away many of the debating points around innovation and replace these with a strategic framing recipe, one that looks for the organization to use it, work *within* it and operationalize it. This can be dynamic in that it 'cascades' up and down the organization as a communicating tool, it also becomes the meeting point to work through, the common language mediation that innovation so desperately needs for all to identify with, as well as the place to offer improving and *evolving* leadership engagement and guidance.

Can we ask for more?

The leader's role is to provide guidance, strategic guidance, as well as to offer inspiration and clarity to capture the real essence of an organizations desire to innovation. If we can secure their attention through this strategic framework then it becomes *their* commitment document towards innovation.

If we can find a clear way for them to combine both the articulating and nurturing they believe is desired for innovation, so it can flourish, as well as offer specific ways to drive and measure this, we are heading in the right direction. Then I think we achieve something important. We draw the organization in and build the innovation activities around common and essential focal points. As we 'grow' the CEO's involvement and attention through this suggested mechanism, this will have a significant impact on identification, commitment and understanding that will resonate throughout the organization and perhaps become more empowering to all.

A goal and its realization

Achieving a framework that builds structure, outlines both the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects and offers the overarching common communicating language is certainly achievable. Something that is clearly articulated from the top, then cascaded down the organization for it to be further 'fleshed out' within the organization, would immeasurably help innovation in the alignment to strategic goals and *required* attention.

If we can provide a framework that can align, that can engage, and can offer a common set of references to refer too, clearly provided by the CEO and his team, then this surely would be a valuable contribution? It would bridge that often missing element of conveying the top managements desire and commitment to innovation's momentum. This will work down the organization to plug into and generate that much-needed identification, to energize innovation as the 'force' essential for growth.

I want to discuss this further in the weeks ahead as I feel we can gain some much-needed traction on this as there is a clear leadership gap on innovation, no question. I think there is a good solution. Innovation does require a constant communicating and guidance from the top and in providing an innovation alignment framework of how this all is interrelated, we can achieve the attention of management strategically and that could be a huge thing.

Fitting existing culture and innovation- no chance!

“Culture is something we can’t touch but we can feel”

All around us we have culture. Where we live, how we see ourselves against others, who we identify with and how we react when ‘our’ culture gets threatened. We become comfortable, sometimes complacent and treat ‘our’ culture as something that is just there, just around us, wrapping us up in a warm blanket.

Every now and again we get confronted. It can be within the community we live, it can be within our organizations. Innovation is one of those confronting points that challenge our accepted culture.

Organizational culture forms an integral part of our general functioning. A strong culture tends to indicate a set of shared values that move the ‘whole’ along we then get that feeling we are on the same track. The more we integrate, the more we coordinate, the more we socialize we eventually create the accepted boundaries, that feeling of growing identity among ourselves that seems to signal a similar commitment to the organization.

The sudden demand for innovation needs managing thoughtfully

Then along comes this demand for more innovation, think differently, speed up, we need to outsource, to open up and suddenly our world gets challenged. We become defensive. Unless this is handled carefully and thoughtfully we lose our shared meaning, the social glue becomes less binding and actually the very opposite happens, culture begins to significantly reduce our efficiency within our organization. We start freezing, the very opposite of what innovation is asking of us.

Rational tools and processes only go part of the way in unfreezing this. We need to find more ‘expressive ways’ to show why, what and how innovation needs to be brought in and allowed to alter and shape our existing culture and practices.

The critical enablers

Of course we need to often go back to the drawing board, when we are shaping a new culture based on innovation. We need to craft a new mission and vision; we need to explain the realities of the external environment and why innovation is important, we need to offer the means to meet our new aims of becoming more innovative. Then, with a deeper breath we need to fashion a new image of the organization, offer new processes, structures and tools to enable and work with innovation. Most importantly we need to consider employee needs and their objectives and identification with why we want innovation to take hold, we need to change around the interpersonal relationships through teams, through networking, through exploring outside the present environment and lastly we need lots of leadership.

It is often not appreciated how much an existing culture can hinder innovation, it can stop creativity. The very behaviours you previously valued for efficiency and effectiveness now

become the ones you want to change as they have suddenly become the roadblocks, and so these must become the critical focal point to address.

One great description of successful innovation I like was from a research paper by Judge, back in 1997, that suggests “innovation as chaos within guidelines”.

Top management prescribes a set of goals but simply allow its personnel greater freedom within the context of these goals, perhaps it permits more time to explore and experiment and works on trying to stay out of the way on how it is pursued. I like that, some are actually encouraging that already as part of their accepted culture. I'd add top management needs to clarify priorities, where it places the emphasis on new values that might shift, for example, into quality and growth impact potential rather than effectiveness and delivering quantity.

Equally there is a real need to explain any new attributes like agility, flexibility, freedom and cooperative teamwork. This goes well beyond just announcing changes through offering flatter structures, greater autonomy and work team environments, but explaining clearly what it gives both the organization and the individual affected. People need to hear and understand the reasons and rationale for why it sometimes needs radically altering the existing culture, maybe because of the profound changes in the market environment that this is required. Treat people as adults and they might behave more rational and ‘move’ to change because it is somewhere they would prefer to be.

Setting sail is different from being on a long journey

Many organizations certainly attempt to set this momentum in place but do they go far enough? Does the more established culture strike back in unseen ways? Organizations have ‘host’ systems that release the ‘antibodies’ to counter the new attempts to alter it. It simply resists and as I said earlier, might shut down in many ways.

Managing culture that promotes innovation is complex; it is often left to chance, left to experiment, far too ad hoc in design and just exploring. We need to commit to a deeper approach, if we want to really change our culture to innovate. Unless the values, norms and beliefs are not clearly thought through and consistently reinforced initiatives to change simply die. The question for management wanting innovation is that they need to work through the determinants that encourage innovation and then set about communicating these and making them happen but this takes a lot of time and dedicated commitment. Maybe we need an Innovation Culture Officer, certainly for a given time perhaps.

Where I think we need to change the game is thinking through three dimensions for shifting our thinking about culture and place the emphasis on building the needed competences of an organization in this century. These come more from an Eastern view of the world to connect them but one has been discussed throughout the centuries.

Culture needs to think through three perspectives

The Outer Game: As open innovation gains more momentum for seeking value creation we are seeking more and more through external networks and relationships. This is changing and sometimes challenging culture within organizations. We need to figure out the outer game from the cultural perspective to enable innovation

The Inner Game: The more recognized place, within organizations. The interpersonal relationships are the place to look and build from. We need far more synergies, more dialogues beyond our normal ones. How do we place a growing emphasis on these?

The Secret Game: We are taught much in moral behaviours, about human nature that are partly inherent in our personal values. Today, in organizations we are sometimes confronted because these are often in conflict with different understandings of performance, more for ourselves as individuals, less for the community yet we still chose to live in but with growing reluctance. We are often keeping our true emotions hidden.

Many of our core values are not as 'grounded' as they use to be, we have allowed them to fray at the edges. Those values, norms and beliefs do need to be spelled out within organizations really well and followed through in the behaviour that mirrors them. Otherwise we do have secret games and in the long-term collective performance suffers. We do need to reduce the secret games that go on quietly within organizations.

Leadership is vital to managing cultural change.

Leaders who want innovation need to offer a positive, supportive environment where the attitudes, perspectives and beliefs are well articulated and communicated. Organization culture is a barrier or the enabler to innovation. Asking people to change is not a one-off event, it is a constant, daily 'grind' but if you provide the right environment and enablers that innovation requires you can get a positive reaction and you then raise the cultural expectations that eventually makes the change needed for creating a culture for innovation.

Culture reflects the sum total of a way of life. It provides the patterns, the values, the traits and behaviours shared within an organization that can make or break innovation. These cannot be touched but they can be felt. Culture has a profound influence on innovation's success, it can't be left to chance, it needs carefully designing and nourishing and this can only come from the top allowing it to grow in well thought-through and designed ways.

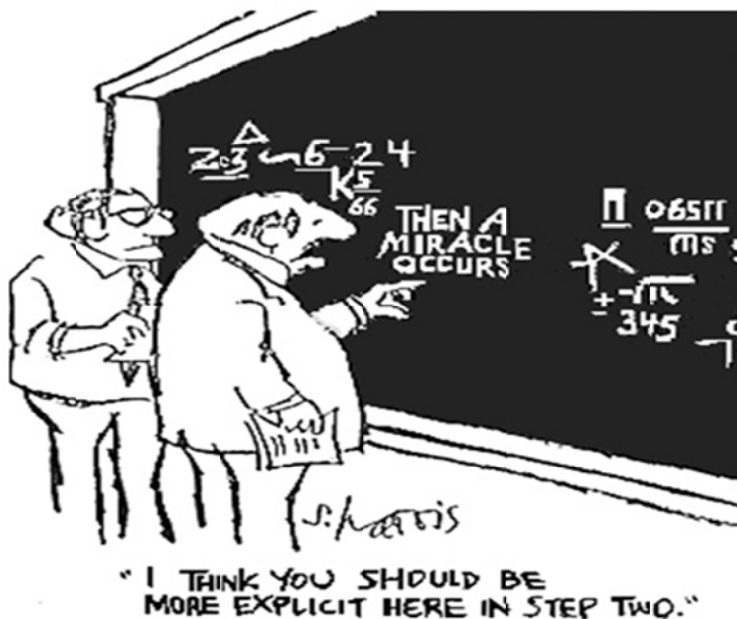
Two sides of an equation for shaping innovation.

To manage innovation you have to move across a broad spectrum of activities. You need to think through Structure, Strategy, Processes, Culture, Metrics and a host of other aspects to support a robust innovation management system.

When it comes to fostering innovation we do get more into the fuzzy part that for many is made up of more the intangibles that covers culture, climate and conditions to innovate. These increasingly make up the environment for innovation. There is another side of the equation, less fuzzy if you determine its parts well, and that is its governance.

For me, the environment and governance make up the formal and informal part of fostering innovation. I'd like to touch on both here in this blog.

There are clear correlations between having formalized innovation governance and structuring your environment both well and thoughtfully. Then you perhaps don't need to rely on miracles



The two sides of the equation environment & governance for innovation

There is, I feel, much to be gained by managing both sides of a formal and informal set of innovation approaches, made of both offering guidance and setting the tone and atmosphere that make up the environment and governance of innovation. One side is more specified, considered and driving innovation, the other is more articulating, nurturing and encouraging.

The Environment for Innovation

There is always far more written about the culture of innovation than the environment for it. Why is that?

The fostering of the environment to pursue innovation means different things to different people. An innovation environment is made up of creating the atmosphere to encourage and nurture, it needs a vision which totally connects innovation in people's minds. It could translate in its meaning for many just being in 'an amazing place to work' or it means creating and encouraging new spaces to stimulate different thinking. It might encourage through simply providing the space to stimulate; the generation of ideas, a place that fosters interaction and collaboration. The environment offers the place and space to chase after those challenges, to be somewhere that inspires, to be pushed and stretched, both in minds and bodies, to achieve new and great innovation.

Changing the environment by encouraging certain attributes does change people's behaviour and beliefs. In thinking through the environment you wish to achieve, you are just not looking to sow the seeds for the new that is about to happen but to harvest the crop that is often simply residing. You want the current box to get bigger and you seek others to push out its sides but in realistic and managed ways, that meet the organizations objectives but give them growing pride and satisfaction.

To achieve this you need to link this and communicate it in ways that resonate, that become the common language of the organization and this also partly comes through the other side, the Governance of Innovation. This needs thinking through well, articulating and ensuring it is in place, each day on a consistent basis. Getting the right environment in place for innovation needs to be pursued and worked upon at all levels but the leadership must set the tone, the vision and provide the means to achieve this.

The Governance for Innovation

Governance sets out different procedures to capture and translate an array of diverse thinking and interactions, to make innovation effective in providing that right environment. Establishing a more formal innovation governance structure that deals with issues surrounding funding, balancing short and long-term objectives, seeking alignment and allocating clear responsibilities all can fall under this. It can also be the decision-making point of reference.

Recently there has been a great series on Governance by Jean-Philippe Deschamps, professor of technology and innovation management at IMD Lausanne, Switzerland. the first in a series of articles is here <http://tinyurl.com/d698jd5>

Governance is often about struggling to obtain consistency, to balance demands; the environment is about pushing the bounds of stimulating and promoting fresh thinking. This stimulating environment needs its evaluation and how it sets about how 'it' fosters interactions and collaboration. It is the atmosphere and conditions put in place as the environment that seeks to achieve out of the ordinary, great innovation, it is the governance that tries to make this orderly and fitting. This is a constant 'dance' and you need the environment and governance to tango to make this happen.

Complexity in Degrees

As innovation increases in complexity, you can get a decrease in the effectiveness of the innovation function. You need to constantly balance between freedom to explore and experiment and achieving accountability and control. This is the 'dance' between managing the environment for allowing innovation to flourish with the guidelines to shape this.

Managing both does take a certain amount of creativity, especially when you are working on those big bets. As you work across functions, across boundaries and sometimes across known, established categories you need that governance to revert too. If you don't have clear governance you can quickly poison the atmosphere and create a negative environment.

Within this balance you do need to seek alignment to have available intervention tools but keep checking against innovation ambitions. If you don't know what the environmental conditions should be and how people should behave and you fail to provide the formal mechanisms you can end up with a unhealthy innovation environment, even though some of the other innovation factors are in place.

The Meeting in the Middle

To orchestrate both a thriving environment for innovation and being able to provide the guidelines of the governance, needs to meet in the middle. The two sides within this equation need to find common cause, a common language, develop the protocols and appropriate communication methods. Openness and trust fosters innovation and the environment so that can have a consistent flow of internal communications across the organization that promotes. Putting openness and trust into the heart of innovation you encourage and infuse the environment and in so doing, help the governance.

"Working innovation well" needs a focus on relationships so each person can relate to each other and seek other out in a collaborating atmosphere built on trust and openness. It needs constant information sharing in feedback and more structured ways. It needs clear decision-making, built up around ground rules that are both formal and informal that sets the tone but does not suppress innovation. Finally, you need innovation leadership effectiveness that encourages certain behaviours, sets the standards and norms and constantly talks about the vision and mission that innovation is set around.

Achieving Balance

Balancing the two sides, of building the environment to promote innovation and the governance to formulate and guide you, enable you to get far closer to successful work execution. By setting about in constructing the rules, offering guidelines, promoting norms and values, along with encouraging openness and trust you can transform your innovation efforts. By supporting and promoting certain behaviours and skills that build upon knowing what capabilities and competencies can promote innovation, you do actually get a lot closer to the contextualize of the innovation framework in all these combined efforts. This more integrated approach gives organizational intent, commitment and growing fit.

To offer both clear boundaries and freedom needs the environment and governance to dance in tandem for great innovation. Are you taking innovation dancing lessons?

People, motivations and a well-designed innovation framework

We still do not seem to understand all the linkages that make up innovation. We just continue to struggle because we don't connect all the essential parts together. We need too. I think there are different components that when combined can form the innovation 'glue.'

Let me suggest *some* that can be combined well within a broader framework I think is emerging from work I'm currently working upon and being conducted in a collaborative effort showing increasing promise.

People are the last great innovation frontier and great connectors

People are essential across all of innovation and its *useful* production; innovation does not work unless you have full engagement, commitment and desire from the people involved. Everything else we provide in tools, techniques and methods only enables and supports that one vital cog in the need to turn the innovation wheel, our people, and their commitment to 'generate to innovate'.

Innovation is the last people-centric process. While many other business processes or functions have changed consistently over the decades, innovation has been placing more demands on its people than any other business process or function and as yet, we cannot automate this. We rely on engagement, on relying on people wanting to be involved, sometimes we simply just seem to hope with the lack of support or encouragement they often seem to get!

How do we make this happen?

We do try to support our innovating people through attempting to automate the innovation idea process as we require them to generate ideas, to evaluate ideas, to judge ideas, to select ideas and to develop new products and services from the original mass and deluge of idea generation, that can seemingly be kicked out from a plethora of search options. How we then set about managing these through the innovation process always does need a lot of human intervention and sorting.

Automating the process can only go so far.

We must provide real, powerful linkages that associate what we see with what is needed to be achieved. Alignment to organization goals can be terribly illusive if we don't have really good innovation frameworks and understandings. We often generate innovation just for the 'sake of it' and this is a real pity and can produce gross under utilization of the assets we have available, to make our innovation efforts really count.

Little of the work associated with innovation can be truly automated, and much of it requires active, engaged, trained people in order to do the work effectively, otherwise it labours and dies in the back of some research lab, or buried in some files held on a marketing person's computer

So are we providing motivations enough?

Innovation, however, should ultimately result in benefits to the organization and this is where we often get a little caught up. We focus on the organization not the people who make it up. We tie metrics and measures to broad organization goals and let's be totally honest, do those buried in the boiler room relate, honestly?

Of course offering benefits or incentives should align to strategic goals, and therefore can be measured in terms like revenue growth, share growth, market awareness, clear differentiation from competitors' products and services, recognized leadership position in a market place and many other factors. Yet it is of more importance to establish clear innovation goals that are far more touchable, and pertinent to *our* own working domain. We need to work far more on constantly evaluate innovation returns on each persons contribution within their immediate space, using measures and metrics that are attuned to *their* innovation activities, certainly beyond the 'simple' ROI, as many roles don't get measured this way.

You need to measure their progress and equally drive corrective actions on their contributions that are, perhaps very granular but where the individual involved can have measured their personal contribution. We simply don't work hard enough at this defining, refining and realizing for their personal advancement and identification in innovation activities enough. We always seem to seek to consolidate the bigger picture, not break it down into the minuscule parts that contribute to the whole and really work at cascading this back up, is it so difficult?

We measure innovation in different ways, through hard, quantifiable targets but also in how we influence and make things happen. Executives need to shape innovation through a mix of incentives that promote inspiration, offer motivation and generate excitement. Highly extrinsic transactional drivers must be combined with more intrinsic transformational aspects.

Executives must also establish timely, appropriate innovation milestones and measurements based on metrics defined by that person's contribution. Of course innovation metrics must align to corporate goals and expected outcomes but the intrinsic nature of innovation is far more relevant to the individual and these often motivate them far more, than 'hard' measures. These hard measures are often based on, for the individual, nebulous goals set high in the clouds of the organization. We need to find out what would work on the ground, at the grass root level, to engage *each* person and motivate them to contribute to innovation that does delivers into the need of the organization that is well-articulated, crafted, connected and understood for them.

Innovation that is well designed can achieve Strategic Alignment

Executives need to consciously work daily for alignment of their agreed goals, so as to fit resources and activities together in novel ways so as to ensure all the assets that can be deployed are well deployed, to their most productive use for innovation. There is for many, a lot of effort going into this already but it often without a cohesive innovation framework. We need to look at this comprehensive approach far more. I seriously doubt that many managers can claim they are in possession of such a comprehensive framework today that constructs innovation and fully aligns its constituent parts.

We get caught up in politics, compromise, unhealthy alliances, ambition, silos and greed all seem too often kick in, I'm sure we all could name a few others. We struggle all the time for alignment, yet it is critical for on-going success, yet many firms lack really well thought through innovation strategies or linkages between it, and connect to the overarching strategy of our organizations. Then we begin the chase, like the dog getting more frantic in trying to chase its own tail while going round in faster circles until it simply gives up. The smart move is simply sitting down, so we all can achieve the end result of aligning innovation to the organizations goals and strategy and then really work these through well on how to do and not chase our tails. We do need to apply a lot more thought to connecting the parts of innovation really well.

Alignment begins when innovation *is strongly* linked to strategic goals, and continues as people, activities and funding are *aligned* to the goal of consistent, sustained innovation. Innovation is uncertain, unusual and risky. The only organization that can manage innovation effectively and consistently is an organization that is designed and aligned to sustained innovation. Aligning resources and directing the focus of the organization is the role of senior executives, so innovation success starts with vision, engagement and commitment from the most senior executives and then working through all the combining elements that make up innovation so it can be integrated into a clear innovation framework. From my research there are critical linkages that when combined will make this happen.

Can we combine all innovation elements for strategic organizational success?

I wrote recently in a blog "From a buzzword to the imperative" (<http://tinyurl.com/8wluhbz>) that I keep coming back to the leadership of innovation; we need to move it from the peripheral to a more central one for innovation to be constantly successful. Wherever possible, executive should actively engage in innovation, to demonstrate commitment. When the organization sees that executive management is actively engaged, they understand the importance of innovation, they become motivated, they become aligned through a growing identification but they need this explained, to be framed so they know where, why and how they fit into this bigger picture.

Simply by communicating the purpose for innovation, innovation successes and innovation activities are some of the top roles for senior executives but it has to be in a well worked through in some really coherent ways, offering a comprehensive framework and not piecemeal as most organizations tend to do. You then eventually get to the point where this engagement, commitment and effort brings the organizations people together and they begin to value and relate to this consistent framework.

This then becomes a common platform for innovation to be housed under and is gradually developed into the common language that becomes central in good communications and practices across organizations. These forces that combine and place innovation in its appropriate context to deliver on the strategic goals and aspirations set.

I believe we can get towards this 'point' with some thoughts and structures can make an enormous difference to innovation. I feel if we can gain some much-needed traction on bridging the clear leadership gap on innovation for building for the long term success they certainly seem to crave for, out of innovation, then we can generate the sustaining growth for their businesses that combines short term needs with long-term goals.

Identification sits at the core of innovation

There are so many aspects to get right in innovation. These can be ensuring the culture, climate and environment for innovation are working well, it could mean setting up processes, well-designed procedures and structures, it can be providing innovation governance. Each part has a vital part to play in being combined for innovation, so it can function but these are not the core. Our identification with innovation is that core.

The core lies in the scope and definitions, the context that innovation is set and the identification with these. How often do organizations fail because they rushed into innovation, along those classic lines of: “let’s experiment and learn as we go” as their mentality. We fail because we don’t take the necessary time to examine the significant differences in innovation terminology, in the different ways or types of innovation, in gaining from ‘evidence based’ research and experimentation. What we expect to see from our day-to-day work seems not to apply to our innovation selection criteria. We experiment indiscriminately, poking a stick around the opportunity haystack looking for that elusive ‘golden’ needle.

Random selection and discarding practices

Organizations have been randomly selecting, then discarding practices constantly, in a never-ending search of more of other organizations best practices, without understanding what these truly entail, or what this truly requires in commitment. No wonder innovation continues to receive a bad ‘rap’ when you often have the innovation blind, leading the blind. There are so many facets within innovation that need a much deeper, extensive understanding that is so often lacking. We love to collect or synthesise and then quickly dismiss what doesn’t work, dispensing with some valuable utility on the way, as we move onto the next ‘complete’ package. Then the cycle repeats itself, perhaps not immediately but in its quiet eroding way that throws innovation even more into question and doubt.

Lost identities, lost opportunities

We have lost our identification, yet this one word strikes at the core of innovation as *the* essential to have. Everything we do should have an overly binding context to it. If we don’t place innovation within its appropriate framework we fail to contextualize our activities, the intended fit, which offers the real relationship we need. We need to fit our work to the strategic goals. If this is simply missing then innovation is likely misfiring, or not hitting the targets because it is scatter-gun in approach and its interpretation.

Innovation cries out for an integrated innovation framework.

Offering an integrated innovation framework is the place where we can gain the necessary identification. It is central to what we should be doing; it establishes the boundaries within which innovation should take place. This is *the* one essential place for leadership engagement. If innovation is never placed in its context, then how do we expect the results often asked for by the CEO? Innovation is adrift, it is actually unsupported, and we don’t achieve that precious identification.

If we don't have provided that innovation framework, we leap into innovation, often in good faith, *as asked*, so we become often hyper-active as we all find our own ways forward. Eventually we stumble along and finally work out our own language and understanding of what innovation means, different to even the persons sitting at the next desk. Just take a look at all the different definitions of innovation you will find, just in one large organization alone. This lack of a clear context is so harmful we add further unnecessary complexity and over time frustrate the organization and confuse the majority.

People disconnect because they lack what is needed to connect! They continue to work hard, often very hard, but sometimes never truly understanding how their tasks and roles contribute to the strategic direction. We need to make sure each person makes their specific connections to an integrated approach for themselves. To achieve these connections you need a shared understanding, a common framework and a common language, to reduce the mental traps and misunderstandings of what innovation is individually meaning. We need everyone to try to get onto the same page.

Educating formulates the understanding

Educating, informing, clarifying constantly simply helps formulate understanding and aids execution. We need to find ways to communicate a common language, a common way to frame the needs expected from innovation. That needs to come from the top of organizations and then built up by a growing contribution from all as they become engaged. If you can achieve this, you can move to a growing consensus but this takes time. You can eventually achieve a common identity that begins to move 'mountains' through collective achievement, that is both distinctive and unique to your organization. A uniqueness that can never be copied, perhaps just admired or envied.

CEO's that are seen to be successful achieve connections, what is often called that emotional connection through describing the context, setting the values and vision driven criteria and by often pushing the organization towards 'impossible goals'. It is amazing how this brings alignment as long as it is consistent, constant in its messages and widely shared and understood. Then the leadership makes it their business to position individuals and the decisions over what, where, when and how in the context of this, to allow them to make their decisions, as individuals and within their teams. Innovation activity becomes 'orchestrated' not micro-managed.

The value of the middle makes for the new connectors we need.

Middle managers tasks should be increasingly become more those of connectors and facilitators, not the guardians and gatekeepers for the decision makers. Their work should include the encouragement that everyone is engaged in innovation work, for each person to constantly go back and check against this integrated innovation framework to work out their place to relate to this and become aligned. The middle manager carries through connection and identification.

Through this new work they achieve this 'shared understanding' or set about correcting any areas of concern through their own dialogues with senior managers of where any shifts have taken place or seem in conflict with the understanding. This is identification again, for it lies at the core of innovation. Making sure everyone has a 'sight-line' and identification into this

innovation framework so they stay well-connected. Communication and relationships becomes the key.

Today we are living in a world of knowledge-intensive innovation

To build distinctive competences for sustaining those often elusive competitive advantages, is very much context specific. We need to provide learning events as competence is actually firmly embedded in the specific context in which it is created. If an organization lacks that context of innovation then how can it acquire the appropriate knowledge to give it any advantage? If the CEO and his leadership team can't articulate the context, then they can't expect winning at the innovation game. It is not their people failing to deliver innovation, it is them, as leaders, failing to deliver this integrated innovation framework where context sits and identification is gained to seek out knowledge-specifics needed.

Until the CEO identifies with his core role in innovation, the organization remains rudderless. If he can't supply what is expected, then it is more than likely the corporate strategy will be ignored, as it has not been placed in its appropriate context. It fails because it is not communicate in ways that can be understood, it lacks personal identification.

Without the appropriate identification of the opportunities seen for growth not communicated then how can the right innovation be applied? Innovation stays disconnected to strategy. It is arbitrary based on interpretation and choice designated down the organization hoping it aligns. Context set in a clear framework for innovation changes that. It gives innovation a real chance to contribute.

Boundaries and Freedom

How we harness our innovation activity does not need the advocating of tighter controls, it needs articulating the potential and releasing people by underpinning how that will be managed through innovations organization. Ideally this can come through having a clear governance structure and providing the right environment that is needed, so as to allow others to do the work that needs to get done and see how they contribute in meaningful ways. Management's dictates or rules should not stand in the way, they should be swept aside. What should be put in that critical space is a common set of agreed organization definitions, a real clarity made up of what connects and why and then ensuring the resources are made available to achieve the innovation 'called for'. This calls for a focused yet adaptive and flexible leadership, that constantly looks to engage and provides the clarity necessary within a corporate innovation framework that can cascade down the organization. Leaders need to actively ensure through clear designation that everything is in place for all the appropriate conversations, and is equally ready and listening to the new 'pulse' of innovation, they are generating from this new intensity of focus.

Identification becomes the core to innovation

Eventually with enough of this leadership engagement, constantly being articulated and framed for the challenges identified, there emerges a common consensus and organizational language around innovation and its intent. It connects and gains both organization and personal identification and this 'identification' sits at the core of innovation.

We get closer to achieving a consistent, more vibrant innovation as it becomes more routine and embedded, for it becomes increasingly linked to everyone's goals, a certain oneness and because of this, it is sustaining. We identify as we understand what our contribution will be, then the leadership has done its primary job, its aligned innovation purpose to the goals, by laying out the parameters to achieve this.

About Paul Hobcraft



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I simply enjoy innovation. I got 'hooked' ten years ago and have increasingly focused upon it until it is 100% of my business thinking and activities. I research across innovation, look to develop novel innovation solutions and frameworks that have real potential value to apply to different problems we all face in managing innovation. I provide these through a range of solutions that underpin my advisory, coaching and consulting work at www.agilityinnovation.com on supporting innovation for individuals, teams and organizations.

For me, innovation needs to enter the DNA of our organizations and our own individual make-ups. Here on this site, I try to work across different aspects to offer thoughts, ideas, advice and concepts to help each of us to understand innovation that little bit more.

Through my business, **Agility Innovation Specialists**, we deliberately set out to help grow your body of knowledge on innovation. Having this 100% focus we believe does provide the necessary *additional* intensity of focus needed for innovation success that someone who specialises can provide.

We research topics that relate to innovation for the future, applying what we learn to further develop organizations core innovation activity, offer appropriate advice on tools, techniques and frameworks so clients can achieve positive and sustaining results from their innovating activities. Web site: www.agilityinnovation.com

Recently a dedicated site for exploring the components of our 'fitness' make-up for innovation, is outlining my working towards an approach that can model what is dynamic and not that improves innovation performance. There are clearly dependencies and this evolving model attempts to provide answers to current performance gaps, and where to put a greater focus upon, to improve the innovation performance engine in capability and capacity building, to raise the game and align it more into the strategic needs. This dedicated site can be found at www.innovationfitnessdynamics.com

Finally, www.hocaconsulting.com HOCA consulting contributes to those emerging areas of Corporate need to link the new approaches we need to have in place to meet the different challenges we are faced with today.

My Personal Journey and Background

As for my personal journey of how I got to this point I can only say it has been varied, challenging but full of fun and learning. This has taken me to live and work in Saudi Arabia, Kenya, Malaysia, Switzerland, the Netherlands, USA, Australia, and recently eleven years in Singapore, starting up businesses, turning them around or simply accelerating them and achieving their footprint within the world.

In mid 2008 I moved back to Switzerland from Singapore and presently focus my time between Asia and Europe for this innovation practice and its related sister company (www.hocaconsulting.com) that focuses upon related subjects important to growing organisations capability in today's world. I work and move between my preferred bases of Switzerland and Singapore.

Innovation as a source for our growth fascinates me. I hope I can share some of this passion with you here on this site as I search for the DNA makeup of innovation.

Paul Hobcraft was voted into the top three innovation bloggers for 2011 and also for 2102 on a leading Global Innovation Community- Innovation Excellence- , go to



<http://bit.ly/tWE1oX>

Also in 2012 he was voted as one of the top 50 tweeters on the subject of innovation su.pr/4U9EBB .

“These accolades are highly appreciated and valued- they inspire me to keep innovating in my own unique way and style. These community recognitions help me believe I can contribute to the wider innovation community we are all part of”

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