

# Deployment Approaches to the Executive Innovation Work Mat

Part one

Approaching this through an integrated  
innovation framework concept

Initial set of deploying frameworks to  
consider.



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## Content Included in this additional short booklet

1. Taking ownership for innovation- the litmus test
2. Surfacing the challenges and road blocks to innovation
3. Seeking common cause through innovation
4. The cascading effect needed for innovation success.

These short articles have been taken from the blog [www.paul4innovating.com](http://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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## **Taking ownership for innovation – the litmus test.**

There is always a healthy debate on who “owns” innovation within any organization. Often it can boil down to where the innovation concept is along the pipeline is or who has been designated with manoeuvring or piloting the innovation through its different stages.

The reality of lasting ownership is much tougher; there are huge, often yawning gaps, in innovation accountability. The right answer should of course be everyone but making that statement on its own is a little bit of a cop-out, an easy answer to a complicated dilemma. So let me offer a connected way.

Working through the **Executive Work Mat** , jointly developed with our friends at [Ovo Innovation](#) , this Work Mat was designed for many reasons but principally to gain leadership engagement within all things involving innovation. One of its overarching principles was the quest to gain alignment from the top, at board level, through its interconnected structure and their strategic inputs so as to establish and make the critical connections all the way down and throughout the organization.

What we needed also was putting in place a fairly rigorous ‘**litmus test**’ to establish if this is achieving the positive reaction required and the Work Mats intent.

### **These are my thoughts on this.**

To achieve the alignment of innovation to the organizations strategy goals and objectives is so critical to have the best chance to deliver the necessary impact needed; to gain growth and improvement on the existing position. We need to test for alignment, we need to see if innovation is being adopted, if innovation is cascading through the organization. Is it having a positive effect on how the organization and its people view innovation? How do we harness all the necessary efforts for a positive ‘reaction’?



## **The Litmus Test required for Innovation.**

There are two handy definitions of a “litmus test” and why I think this can be applied nicely here in evaluating the value of [the Executive Work Mat](#). One, a litmus test is used in chemistry to test and establish the acidity or alkalinity of the mixture- I think innovation does prompt plenty of ‘reactions’ so this works well. The second, is a litmus test becomes a critical indicator of future success or failure, exactly what the Executive work Mat is attempting to influence in managing the innovation efforts.

## **The other aspect is the ‘cascading’ or ‘waterfall effect’ we need.**

To enable the [Executive Work Mat](#) to permeate down the organization, it needs to be “cascaded.” This needs to be completed though developing a common language as well as having a constant communications and variety of dialogues, so as to make better connections up and down the organization on the levers, resources and issues to ‘enable and promote’ innovation.

Often a cascading affect is regarded as more of an unforeseen chain of events that suddenly effect the system, they trigger often an unfavourable ‘reaction’. The effects of any cascading can be analysed and these are often through consequence / impact analysis or even event trees. One can view this within my litmus test explanation in this case, as an impact analysis assessment, to achieve a better alignment and move towards a more positive set of reactions:

1. Working through the logic of the work mat, what works, what doesn’t?
2. Is it being understood and aligned with the objectives laid out?
3. What are the main contributors (and inhibitors) to managing this effectively?
4. Is there the exercising of regular sets of dialogues to monitor its effectiveness in place?
5. Is it supporting and enabling a more effective allocation of resource?
6. Does it assist in the design of the innovation system, if not how can it?
7. The work mat becomes in itself a diagnostic tool to identify and correct causes and inhibitors as well as accelerate the parts that provide real sustaining impact

## **The Seven Parts of the Litmus Test – a short summary**

**Translation points in value, impact and alignment** – the value of the Executive Work Mat is to gain alignment, to promote value and achieve a better positive impact from innovation.

**The Leadership Commitment** – how leaders chose to engage, to encourage and promote innovation activity is critical. They need to mentor, coach, listen and respond to the concerns, opportunities and offer their contribution and judgment.

**Peoples involvement** – In some recent research by Deloitte on what is required for successful collaboration they felt three conditions needed to be in place. These I really resonated with, in where I feel any litmus test for innovation should focus upon when it comes to people:

- **Do they Belong**: people collaborate on behalf of organizations they feel connected too.

- **Do they Believe**: people collaborate when they commit to carrying out specific actions
- **How do they Behave**: people collaborate when they share a common understanding of how things are done.

**Designed-In** – the effectiveness of any innovation system is within its design, its processes and functioning. Here within the litmus test you are looking far more at establishing, generating, exploring, validating and using what is available and learning from it. It is in the care and thoughtfulness of the design.

**Engagement & Understanding Outputs** – the ability to communication, to find a growing common language of innovation is vital to sustaining success. It boils down to the relating, the responding and the respecting of this. Identification and dialogue allows innovation to flow more freely. Respect generates growing trust. Trust is vital to innovation.

**Risk & Rewards** – Always the risk and fear working on innovation naturally comes up, it consciously needs to be addressed. To assess the exposure, the barriers, the balances and checks needed, the learning from success and failure needs openly exploring.

**Finally**, we always need **Outcomes** - Any effort or initiative has to have outcomes measured on its return of effort and cost involved. It is focusing on effective implementation, on execution, on gaining a ROI and on achievements you can raise the awareness and value of innovation. Outcomes become essential to drive and sustain innovation. People hunger for success, leaders also.



## **Adoption and cascading become our litmus test for delivering sustaining innovation**

So for me, to achieve a lasting value out of the suggested [Executive Work Mat](#) you need to do these litmus tests and impact assessments to gauge the successful cascading and alignment effects. You are looking for the connection between engagement, alignment and ownership through growing identification.

If you have not yet considered [the Executive Work Mat](#) then I would simply encourage you to reach out and make that first connection, knowing a positive result from the ‘effect’ can make or break your organization.

# [Surfacing the challenges & road blocks to innovation.](#)

[Jeffrey Philips](#) wrote a blog entitled “[what really blocks innovation](#)” that he has seen at executive level towards innovation when [introducing the work mat](#) approach he and I developed. He put these into four framing boxes that make up the potential barriers. I agree with all of what he says and more.

## **Blockages do need to surface**

I'd like to go a little deeper though, with a suggested way to surface these deeper personal hidden blockages that you do find in working with innovation, that the work mat brings out. It is surprising as they often have real commonality once surfaced and then you need to find the dedicated time to allow them to be fully discussed, as they are critical to unlock.

Often in innovation adoption there are so many hidden barriers that need drawing out and resolving. Take a read of Jeffrey's observations, as they clearly triggered my own approach of how to deal with them which I thought I'd share here. As Jeffrey states there are “very different perspectives, different goals and even different definitions between and among members of many executive teams.” The key is to surface these.

We both totally share this point that Jeffrey raises, that “sustained innovation can only occur when there is clarity about goals, alignment within the executive team to the goals, deep commitments to appropriate staffing and resource allocation, and the willingness to lead into risky or uncertain initiatives. When these factors are present, innovation can flourish.”

To get to this point we need to draw out those real hidden concerns that inhibit innovations adoption at executive level. We need to trigger ‘collective’ discussions so the team can relate and share their concerns and offer up solutions that breaks through those barriers.

## **Surfacing hidden barriers is hard work**

To surface hidden barriers that might be blocking innovation does needs a conscious effort, a consistent questioning, validating and exploring to “peel away” and get at the root of the problem. Often it is simply the fear of moving from the current established practices into new ways and that stepping over is very hard and often very personal. When it comes to getting an executive team to recognize this and then make a collective team move is extremely hard, it needs a lot of debate, facts and recognition, that this behavioral change- as that is what it is- needs to be taken if they believe in innovation.

This is one of the real value points of having an external adviser as the facilitator and where the value of the Executive Work Mat starts kicking in. It is very hard for a member of a team, including the CEO, to instigate a change of the magnitude needed for innovation to really be embraced and adopted without specialized help.

Innovation requires concerted, dedicated efforts to take hold, to become fully embedded and run through the veins of the organization as the new blood type. Those famous antibodies kick in from all sides to protect the status quo, keep doing “business as usual.” The external

adviser has the tough job of grappling all those objections to the floor, hence why we call it a work mat.

## **Stimulating the innovation carriers**

I've outlined previously about the issues surrounding the [hidden human dimension of innovation](#): *“It is the pivotal role of people as innovation carriers – their networks, collaborations, knowledge flows, interactions and tacit knowledge – and how innovation itself is a potent competitive force that drives productivity”*. To allow innovation to flow within organizations requires the senior executives to address their own potential inhibitions so they then become the innovation carriers and allow the true force of innovation to be unleashed.

It is through engagement that allows innovation to happen. We need to make innovation the social process it needs to be but this starts from the top, leaders have to come together and decide to lead. They need to surface their own hidden barriers to innovation otherwise many others within the organization simply stumble along in their own interpretations of how innovation fits within the grand scheme of things. Or they simply “wait” or never change as they don't see the direction coming from the top of the organization. Leadership is required for innovation to really make that transformational hold.

## **We need to re-frame innovation as a series of challenges**

Let me explain part of the power of the Executive Innovation Work Mat. I think it is important to offer any change deriving from the work coming out of the work mat as innovation challenges that need addressing, as necessary issues to be aligned and clarified. The work mat can only trigger, its outcomes need resolution and commitment.

For me managers relate to challenges, they are trained to respond, to investigate, to surface the issues and find ways to tackle the problems. Innovation management is no different. Part of the design of the work mat is to surface the gaps that exist that requires executive resolution so to allow innovation to be fully integrated within organizations and aligned with strategic goals and objectives.

Also the work mat although stemming from initial work at the Executive and Senior level of organizations needs to have a **“cascading effect.”** The work mat outcomes need articulating, communicating and eventually becoming the adopted common language framework of the organization to gather around so alignment can potentially happen.

## **Addressing hidden barriers and personal blockages through ten challenges**

So for each executive to address innovation I believe lies ten challenges they need to question within themselves so as to answer and then collectively discuss. These allow a clear framing dialogue to unblock innovation and bring together clarity of where innovation needs to fit within the organization going forward.

The ten challenges can actually have a vital part to play in cascading this down the organization, for everyone to reflect upon and address. They become part of the

communication mechanism to form a common language for innovation. Different views can surface for the challenges but they all need addressing.

## **The ten innovation change challenges**

**Addressing the issue of unfamiliar responsibilities** – new and different ways of working, of understanding, of allowing innovation to take hold and flourish is often demanding new ways of responding, often adding to increasing responsibilities. This needs surfacing

**Innovation demands new directions** – making significant changes to the way the organization is run is very challenging, potentially disrupting and needs thinking through at the top level well.

**Inherited problems always surface** – addressing countless and inherent problems is messy and requires dedicated resolution. Changing a culture to become more innovative can be a massive step in structure, organization and policies.

**Problems within the organizations make up** – inadequate experience and resistance to change especially surface when a person is not equipped to deal with it. Installing innovation capacity, capabilities and competencies needs figuring out

**High stakes of innovation** – demanding breakthrough innovation makes everyone feel increasing vulnerable, increasingly visible and leadership has a real responsibility to manage this risk and set of fears. They need to be ready to ‘positively react and encourage’ both in supporting winning solutions and extracting positive learning from failures.

**Scope and scale of innovation** – Managing in scale and scope is demanding and requires well thought through systems and processes. To scope innovation needs robust business case approaches, its flexibility in its management and then to scale this up requires well established approaches and clear commitments to its engagement and execution.

**External pressures multiply** – everyone has an opinion outside the organization, let alone inside. Balancing these different interfaces and the pressures from these as you explore innovation needs managing well. Avoid that trait of just keeping raising expectations and actively work at the alignment for the ability to deliver on the promise.

**Influencing without full authority** – key activities within innovation usually demand that you become reliant on others. You need to spend (seemingly) inordinate time explaining and gaining others buy in and their own identification with concepts so as to move emerging innovation concepts along the pipeline. You need to find often imaginative ways of attracting across the resources needed. This is especially hard for senior managers to adapt too, the need to attract across, instead of simply expect, demand and simply take.

**Work more with a listening and feedback culture** – this can be totally different from the way business has been conducted today, through a more hierarchical structure. Flattening organizations to allow greater two way flow sucks up time; it simply undoes or unpicks command and control over time. It takes time to establish and gain the confidence and momentum. You need to allow more for debate, it shifts and alters the hierarchy and structures and that is a big step into an unknown, yet it is necessary for organization change, to allow innovation to truly flourish on a more sustaining basis.



**The need to develop work group diversity** – innovation asks for more diversity in opinion, it draws out more in thinking, in discipline, in alternative approaches and solution. This often leaves senior executives feeling they are less in control, reliant on other and that can feel scary and surface their own insecurities, buried increasingly as they moved up the organization and took on responsibility and accountability. It challenges often their very notion of management as they have known and experienced it. Innovation in its management challenges many past notions of managing.

## **To summarize**

Each of these ten innovation challenges needs to be surfaced at the right time within any executive work mat discussion. Each one, individually can block innovation from advancing. Finding that right moment is not easy to draw these out but it is certainly necessary, otherwise those hidden barriers never come to the surface and get resolved.

The real barriers to allowing innovation into organizations to flourish are these blockages. The job of the work mat and within the sessions is not just to align the seven parts of the work mat as simply an academic exercise itself but to really wrestle and grapple with those tough questions, that leadership engagement for innovation and what it really means to deliver a cohesive framework that the organization can work from with growing confidence.

Reducing concerns, addressing risks and making considered decisions are what senior executives are trained and schooled to be good at. To allow innovation to take hold, the key is to work hard at surfacing the known and hidden dimensions blocking innovation. These ten challenges can ‘break open’ the road blocks. Clearly any innovation journey, if seriously undertaken, needs some really dedicated work. The Executive Innovation work mat facilitates this as the central gathering point and that is why Jeffrey and I really believe in its value to innovation’s future within organizations.

We have to often remember senior managers are used to being successful by competing. The genuine change in their mindsets and understandings they need to often undertake for innovation is sometimes difficult to adapt too and sustain, as they are often on a steep and unexpected learning curve themselves.

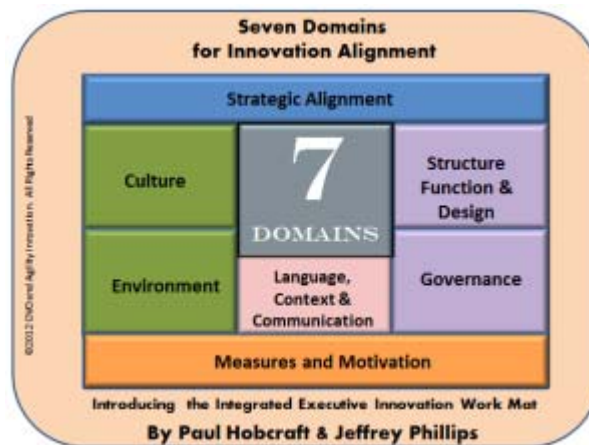
Like all aspects of change, this is only achieved through engaging them to practice, to use the work mat as the communicating mechanism for positive reinforcement as the strategic innovation framework, where all involved can learn and benefit. This calls for a collective and real collaborative effort but the return is worth it, they are making the decisive contribution to establishing a sustaining innovation within their organization. They are beginning to change the way the organization needs to work.

The original list of the ten challenges has been adapted from “creating learning experiences without changing jobs” by Cynthia McCauley at the CCL in 2006. I’ve applied it for a way for surfacing innovation issues and personal concerns at executive and organization levels.

## Seeking common cause through innovation

Although it is simple to state, creating a common language for innovation is very hard, demanding work. To begin to create it, then to gain a broader identification with its make-up and then to build upon it requires some dedicated time and effort, but above all, it needs recognition of its importance to obtaining a sustaining innovation entity.

Yet there is incredible sustaining value in achieving a common language. In the work that Jeffrey Phillips and I have been undertaking we see the [Executive Innovation Work Mat](#) and its seven connected parts we saw language, context and communications, as central to any innovation initiatives to work towards.



*The Executive Innovation Work Mat*

### **Languages unites us or divides us**

Language can have the power to unite us or potentially divide us. Developing a language to unite us in our innovation efforts goes some way to reduce disagreements and egos, that can block success. To create an environment for innovation, to offer within a set of governance, process and functional structures, to build a culture responsive, we need this common cause, this central innovation language, our clear unifying context.

So much of innovation is piecing together many fragmented pieces, strands of knowledge that can be unstructured, can be very ambiguous, yet requires sound judgement. Innovation builds on shared experience and the quality of its interaction points. The more we learn to collaborate, the more we begin to share experiences, the more we achieve a growing common language. We need to bring together increasingly the parts that growing specialisation, our limited grasp of all the complexities that can influence a decision. We need to constantly reconcile incoming information with our own language of understanding, so we need to strive towards improving the common parts surely?

### **We all have different meaning and interpretations.**

Each organization has specifics in meaning that can often end up in results that break down and so deliver results totally different from their original intent. We think we communicate

well but those that receive this often apply different interpretations that confirm their personal views, they often apply subtle nuances and variations, and it is within these different readings we can suffer costly errors, extensive delays and wrong end results in final product or service delivery. We suffer significant inefficiencies because we don't pay enough attention to ensuring the correct meaning is well understood, we simply believe our way of thinking is the only way it is conveyed to be understood, and as we all know, this is often far from the reality.

We need to seek explicit language and context to allow innovation to do its final job, of delivering a valuable new contribution that builds on the existing and meets new market and customers' needs or the jobs-to-be-done. Innovation becomes highly constrained if we fail to find that common language, that common purpose, the understand of the right context and ended up providing something that was not as good as it could have been or completely off track on the original insight . It somehow got lost in translation. Translation is one of those keys that can unlock innovation and partly why the work mat is constructed the way it is.

## **Our reasoning for specifically highlighting common language and context**

The reason we called the Work Mat, [the Executive innovation Work Mat](#) was that innovation suffers when it does not have total, enthusiastic support and senior leaders real involvement. The leaders of organizations have the ability to drive innovation across and down the organization, they can build the connections so activities, teams and individuals can identify and gain in their innovation confidence. Today, many leaders fail to understand their vital part in this process. We want to change that.

It is really only at the top you can provide the best framework and design for stronger facilitation, understanding and negotiations to occur around the innovation activity. In organizations innovation must increasingly become totally aligned to the strategic goals. If you want to achieve this, executive and organizational engagement to deliver on this strategic intent needs an overarching framework.

The outcome we believe comes significantly through the work mat. It can be cascaded down the organization once the top team has worked through its seven essential parts and are satisfied that they do provide a compelling story on innovation. Then equally it can come back up the organization, so it allows for the further identification and a greater 'dynamic' engagement of its connected parts, as the framework continues to achieve this executive and organizational alignment, through its constant encouragement and support, as its central tenet.

## **Common language is a constant dialogue and exploration**

Any innovation common language needs working upon. It needs to be current, relevant, accurate and highly visible throughout the entire organization. It also needs to be allowed to grow and flourish. A common language equally allows for a knowledge repository to potentially prosper. I refer you to my previous thoughts on where absorptive capacity fits within this, in its steps of acquiring, assimilating, transforming and exploiting but this needs a clear structure and commonality to it, to gain its lasting benefit.

In any common language we need to master the knowledge to exploit it and extract what it can offer. We need to appreciate always its terms, its definitions (and limitations) and the related performance values to improve our performance and achieve others understanding of

our meaning. The more we practice and move towards a common understanding of innovation, we are actually moving towards clarifying and reconciling, as best we can, within the constraints of what common language or context offers. We give innovation a greater chance to succeed. A common language enables greater transparency, clarity in accountability through its definitions; we achieve greater collaborative dialogues and meet more concurrence than without this move towards a common understanding.

## **Why should we have a common language for innovation?**

I was reading an article from Raj Kumar, a founding director at AIM Knowledge Management Systems, based in India on one of his [hack blogs](#) within MIX. Some of his points are specifically valuable and I can see apply here in discussing common languages and seeking common cause and “played back” in my way.

## **Knowledge more than ever plays its part**

In [a McKinsey study](#) they argue we need more knowledge workers more than ever. We are all increasingly dealing with increased ambiguity and having to apply increasing levels of judgement and draw even more on our experiences far more. To meet this we need increasing knowledge interactions. According to one study 70 per cent of all US jobs created since 1998 require judgement and experience and these now make up over 40 per cent of the total labour market in the United States.

I would support this knowledge need. The quality of the required interactions needs to reduce our own often fixed ‘mindset’ and understanding and be open to exchange and understanding. A common language within innovation can, and does, cut out potential misunderstandings and improve process, assumptions. We can move quicker and be ready to explore generalizations, for finding within these a greater range of more specific opportunities. We can achieve this by having some greater confidence and trust in how we all share and see ‘things’ that draws often the disparate parts together.

## **Delaying decisions can help**

Also although this can be open to interpretation we often do need to delay decisions until the latest possible time to improve the chances of this being right. Does that fly in the face of innovation? No, if you are seeking greater understanding, not for the sake of it but for its value to improve, adapt and increase the potential of the innovation activity. The more you are informed, the better chances of a good decision that leads to a better result. We are being increasingly asked to make better and bigger judgement calls and this becomes one of the reasons you need a clear innovation organizing framework, through [the executive innovation work mat](#) (link to white paper) that encourages, supports and guides your decisions.

## **Collaboration platforms need a soul or DNA to be valuable**

Kumar also brings out an important point that struck me hard. We constantly seek out improved collaboration tools, we push people to self-organize to drive interactions and populate the collaborative platform but he argues this is a form of organization blindness. The tools we provide are in his words, “akin to sign language”, they do not (yet) bring in the loops

of learning, the rich DNA to foster meaningful collaboration as the (present) format ignores much of the conduct and make up to get to a certain point.

He suggests meaningful collaborations are made up of purpose, goals, vocabulary, their assembly, the focus, the product, parsing (the context), the audience and finally the driving energy. We need to capture all of these within any common language for innovation so we have its context, goals and engagement clear. Kumar believes IT is getting closer to aid this.

### **His compelling energy framework has interesting potential**

I like his “[compelling energy](#)” framework, made up of compelling adoption, pursuit of truth, communities involved, contemplation time lines, teamwork and trust, commitment, innovation, good governance and seeking a culture of excellence. I’ll leave you to read an extensive discussion on this compelling “hack” of Kumar’s.

He defines within this framework part on innovation and suggests you set up innovation by need definition, thought-evolution and breaking of moulds – that does sound ‘compelling’ to explore more and a basis for a new mind change to move us from incremental to greater innovation advancement and breakthroughs. I’m thinking over this.

### **Bedrock for sustaining innovation is a common intent, language and context**

Common language is the bedrock for how we set about innovation. It cannot be silo driven, unless you want stilted results with incremental innovation as likely, the best you can achieve most of the time within this ‘constraint’. It is how we go about our communications, what and who you can connect with and your level of innovation engagement, do matter significantly. It is the ability to find common identity, a real unifying sense of purpose that sends positive signals to all involved and those interested parties, often external to your ‘inner’ innovation process, to engage fully.

A common purpose for innovation, set within clear guidelines and a framework, as we have proposed through [the executive innovation work mat](#), gives innovation that clear ‘voice’. It allows us all to gather around a consistent language of innovation as it places more on the context of why, where and how you want to manage innovation, and can conduct its different parts in a certain ‘fluidness’ that gives shape and meaning to innovation and all its critical inter-connected parts that make up the Work Mat.

**Please note:** All the executive innovation work mat hyper-links are pointed to different aspects or papers that might have value in exploring this area further.

# **The Cascading Effect Needed for Innovation Success**

Getting innovation through any process of understanding is hard. Knowing what is required to generate innovation throughout an entire organization is even more so.

## **We need to deploy the cascading effect on innovation**

Often we fail to understand our role in contributing to innovation, we need a cascading effect. For me the “cascading effect” for innovation is “a sequence of events in which each produces the circumstances necessary for the initiation of the next”. It is the presenting of an idea, a concept, prototype, a piece of knowledge that provides the catalyst to be exploited in a broader community as the next step and so on. It cascades. It is where we fit within the innovation web.

Innovation often has to go through a set of stage gates, or cross thresholds, set by others or judged to be the essential cross over points. When you achieve these cross over points you induce more resources, more attention and momentum. The more it successfully progresses, it eventually gains a higher resilience and then the innovation picks up more for this “cascading effect”. The more thresholds you cross, you gain space, time, increasing attention within the organization and an increasing identity of what the innovation can achieve. The more it creates a ‘reaction’ or achieves ‘growing interactions’ then the more it ‘cascades’ for producing a cumulative effect moving through the successive stages. We gain increasing identity and strength the more we get involved in the cascading effect.

## **Influencing the dynamics within the innovation system**

When I have discussed the Executive Innovation Work Mat I have argued you need to achieve this [cascading effect](#) as part of *the Senior Management Litmus Test for Innovation Engagement*. You need to influence the dynamics within the innovation system; you need to reveal increasingly [the challenges and roadblocks to innovation](#). You need to reduce these challenges down by actively promoting innovation. You do need a well thought-through plan.

Innovation does need structures and systems. It is complex. As we get increasingly involved in innovation activity we meet more of the *unforeseen*, the uncertainties of working on something new where there is a need to make a decision, often on a limited set of factors than the ideal. We need to reach out for help, for understanding, for assistance.

So ‘the cascade effect for innovation’ often does have to deal with many unforeseen chains of events that need working through, as they can be negative on the system by taking away vital resources from other more valuable, commercially viable projects, or they can be breakthrough or transformational in pursuing.

By having in place a clear Innovation framework you have a communicating mechanism to discuss many of these unforeseen events. It guides innovation activity. The framework can establish a common language; it can offer a sense of the [common cause](#) for this to work. We need to ‘cascade’ this down the organization so everyone can get ‘the picture’ and understand its component parts as well as provide the communication platform across and back up to frame issues as they occur.

I suggest this is based on [the Executive Innovation Work Mat](#), it can offer much in helping innovation if well thought through. Our resources are finite and innovation often suffers even more from this than many other aspects within business. We do need to provide an organizing innovation framework coming from those that set the strategy. This provides the general roadmap, the direction, the frame where innovation contributes to strategy. If we don't have a well-articulated innovation strategy, how do you expect innovations that 'drive' the strategy forward to meet its aims?

## **We have the need to cascade innovation from the top down**

We do need a [strategic framework](#) to moderate and accelerate meaningful innovation. Often we don't, this is not provided. For me the framework or work mat moderates innovation and goes much towards reducing the multiple interpretations, and the variety of initiatives often described or justified as innovative but definitely missing the strategic mark.

The majority of people within the organization and who work alongside it would appreciate a greater understanding of the core concepts, principles and direction that their innovation activity should take. To understand what is valued, essential to defend, promote and improve. To clarify what is highly strategic to describe and 'form' around helps innovation to perform its required task, of delivering new growth that aligns into the strategic needs.

Equally, many within organizations where innovation is left more 'open' do run the risk that there is an over-emphasis on idea generation. By placing the emphasis point further along the innovation value chain that it is the exploring the benefits that flow from ideas, not the ideas alone, can make a significant difference in improving the quality of innovation and reducing the belief that quantity was the important aspect.

## **Then we also have to cascade innovation from the bottom up.**

The richness of innovation lies not just in the well planned but in the sudden discovery, the pursuit of a game changing innovation concept often stumbled upon. Many of these come from the bottom up. In research labs across the globe, the researcher should have permission, an open endorsement from above, to investigate and explore innovation, not just in their field of ability but equally encouraged in a broader sense, as well.

There are many benefits in building into our daily activities valuable time to explore, to allow employees to investigate 'something' that initially may not seem to fit with any prescribed plan of predetermined concepts but from this "free time" emerges something that can evolve and fits perfectly within a good corporate strategy.

Equally there are countless innovations that emerged from nowhere, that had no relationship with the strategic directions, yet have been successful. Are these wrong, should they be ignored, killed off or just simply allowed to happen? Usually some survive and thrive against all odds, starved of resources, yet they somehow 'emerge' and become outstanding contributors to an organizations business.

Organizations need to stay totally alert to these. The issue is the way you approach this. If you insist on innovation that only 'maps' back to the innovation strategy, you drive out an awful lot of entrepreneurial energy, you miss many a potential innovation that might have been your next block buster. We need to find a balance here but it needs visibility and



curiosity and allow for time for emerging, unexpected innovations, to permeate before they are finally judged.

## **The combination effect of wanting to innovate and being able too is the desired end result**

Innovation provides organization the very concepts that drive growth, contribute to profits in new ways and allows individuals within the organization to identify with success.

If we don't offer a sound innovation framework, innovation remains haphazard, left to chance. If we build into peoples work time the chance to explore innovation that 'fits' the overarching strategy, we combine the best of both aspects. What we want to encourage is innovation that allows for both a purposeful approach to innovation that 'seems' to align to the direction laid out in the strategy but also to allow for those moments when you stumble upon something that has real promise. We need to allow for both.

## **Opportunistic and planned innovation can sit side-by-side.**

So if innovation can be either opportunistic or planned. To allow everyone to become engaged, to partly dream, to be allowed to explore and can be confident that they can 'cascade' both up and down the organization to achieve this innovation effect, then we need to seek out both. As we "cascade innovation" we need to build and align it to the strategy, the Executive Innovation Work Mat can be the very vehicle to allow that to happen. We need to achieve a [uniformed view on the overarching design of our innovation](#) activities and that does need to come from the top.

Designing a new strategic innovation framework at the top of organizations can help close the many gaps we see today in innovation, especially in achieving its need to achieve a growing alignment to an organizations strategy. We need to move from many present 'disconnects' to 'reconnecting' and "allowing" innovation to be more cross-cutting, more informative to allow all the people involved in its production that greater freedom and scope in their understanding so as to contribute into the growth organizations leaders are demanding.

## **The "cascading effect for innovation" has a two-way flow.**

We need to encourage bottom up innovation, those that are close to markets, the raw ideas and who can make more connections than those far removed. We also need the overarching innovation framework so everyone has a growing understanding of where, how, with whom and why innovation needs to head in a 'given' set of directions and what are the critical components that enable this to 'connect and happen' and provides the 'how' it can work. The components of [the Executive Innovation Work Mat](#), can promote this "cascading effect needed for innovation" to flow both ways and move closer to a well-aligned organization that marks a successful business.



# About Paul Hobcraft



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](http://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.

## My areas of focus

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](http://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 or not, that improves innovation performance. There are clearly dependencies and this evolving model attempts to provide answers to current performance gaps, 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](http://www.innovationfitnessdynamics.com)

Finally, [www.hocaconsulting.com](http://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.

## The personal journey makes up a set of unique experiences and understanding

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](http://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.

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**Paul Hobcraft** was voted into the top three innovation bloggers for 2011 and also for 2012 on a leading Global Innovation Community- Innovation Excellence- , go to



<http://bit.ly/tWE1oX>

Also in 2012 Paul was voted as one of the top 50 tweeters on the subject of innovation [su.pr/4U9EBB](http://su.pr/4U9EBB) .

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

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