In Search of Fluidity

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In Search of Fluidity

Innovation requires increasing fluidity in all we do.

A short discussion on the need for Fluidity

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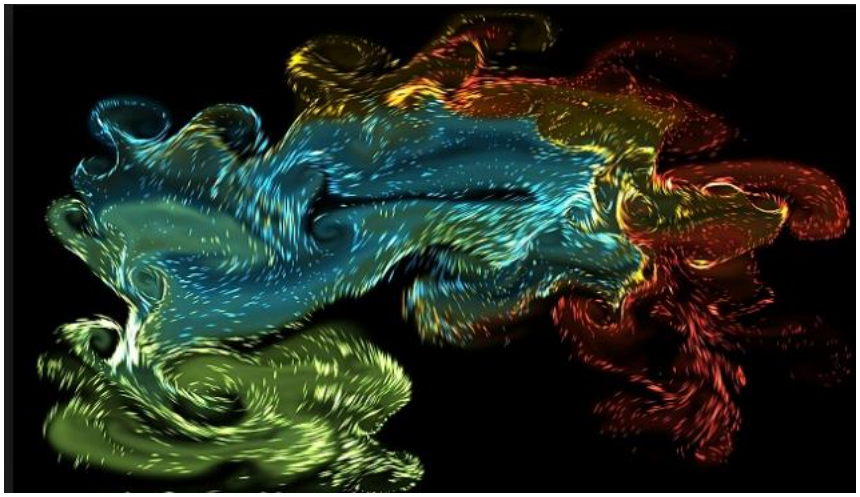
A new innovation perspective – change to fluidity



Fluidity is becoming our growing need of understanding today

There is considerable discussion around changing structures and models to become more adaptive, agile and fluid. With such an increasing level of complexity and environmental turbulence that organizations are having to master, most of their existing systems, processes and approaches are facing increasing challenges.

The solutions of fluid, agile and adaptive are aiming to develop highly flexible and fluid organizations as an attractive answer to move towards.

There is so much change being undertaken, the growing call for quick improvisation and ad hoc responses all needs to take us away from those rigid processes into open and fluids ones.

Fluidity – the growing need of organizations today.

Posted on July 2, 2015 by paul4innovating

Organizations are facing increasing a dilemma in how they organize and manage within their systems and structures.

They are being forced to deal in increasingly complexity and environmental turbulence and 'adapting the appropriate response' remains increasingly a difficult one to master, within the existing regime and structures.

On the one hand the value in stability is still essential; working within specific routines and practices gives a clear 'path dependence.'

This allows for efficiency and effectiveness to be constantly at practice, constantly building the problem-solving processes, so as to master tasks in complex environments to resolve 'known' problems in 'given' ways.

We need to become increasingly fluid but how and why?

Yet there is considerable discussion around changing structures and models to become more adaptive, agile and fluid, to react and deal with this increasing turbulence occurring all around us. We need to react and become more responsive, becoming more adaptive to changing environments and business challenges, that are often unknown, unexpected, or not yet explored or exploited.

The need for a different innovation interplay

In a recent series, of introducing the innovation interplay, co-authored with Jeffrey Phillips of Ovo Innovation, we discuss how change needs a higher appreciation and focus within any innovation design. We go on and suggest the importance of thinking new innovation design is increasingly coming through the business model and this requires increasing undertaking of change.

This change thinking is not just for the innovator, but for the customers and markets that any innovation is channelled towards but also, in how it has a real impact on the dynamics of current competition and the potential effect on competitors. Designing deliberate change into innovations eventual outcome, increasingly through new business models, is a powerful point of real advantage that needs greater leveraging.

So we have this dilemma of needing stability but trying to build increasing fluidity

Yet today our organizations are far too rigid, they are not adaptive or agile enough to really exploit innovation to the full. They struggle with this organizational constraint imposed by the singular, or dominating pursuit of efficiency and effectiveness at the cost of 'fluidity.' Organizations and individuals see change far too often in negative terms and not in the way innovation can bring positive change that seeks constant, ongoing adjustments to deliver the best, optimal solution.

How can both work alongside each other? Many theorists have suggested, of having in place the 'ambidextrous organization.' This would require organizations to be design organizations in their structures, people and processes to either be focused on 'being efficient' or being 'change orientated'.

I have been drawn to this **dual system of ambidextrous** as it helps resolve one of the consistent stumbling blocks for innovation to 'take hold' and evolve. Innovation is constantly fluid, needing to be adaptive as we learn and adjust to new learning and this is constantly requiring a very change orientated approach. Often innovation comes up against a rigid system and for many "it just seems not to fit"and gets rejected as not appropriate to us.

Innovation struggles as it often remains outside the prevailing system. Innovation constantly challenges against the dominant mindset within organizations, who like the idea of innovation but are mostly measured to drive efficiency and effectiveness, keeping highly focused on the short-term performance as their role, reward, advancement and key to ongoing career success, so innovation 'sits outside' their domain of focus. Something needs to change if innovation is really important.

Yet the very essence of our stability in organizations is under threat.

There is so much change being undertaken, the growing call for quick improvisation and ad hoc responses all needs to take us away from those rigid processes into open and far more fluids ones.

The solutions of fluid, agile and adaptive are aiming to develop highly flexible and responsive organizations as an attractive answer to manage in more uncertain times as the way to move forward. The ability to make this very defining and shaping move in any organizations does seem very fraught with risk.

We do need to extend our thinking about fluidity far more, so let's initially step back to see if we can then move forward into a more fluid organization..

There is no doubt a classic change model that needs an update

The classic "*unfreeze > change > refreeze"* approach to change just does not work anymore. This still remains one of the most classic change models as a three phase model, introduced by Lewin in 1947, and became the basis for many subsequent change models. Lewin's change model seeks to "*unfreeze*" the existing conditions, in order to allow "*change or transition*" to occur, so as to then arrive at a new state of hopefully higher capability or competence, at which point the operating model is again "*frozen*" or "*refreezes*" into its new state.

Certainly this model is becoming very outdated and somewhat dangerous from an innovation perspective, for two reasons. First, the model anticipates resistance to change rather than engagement with change. Second, the model assumes an eventual "refreezing" state, where the company remains in stability, without change. Today we are in need of being in a state of constantly improving our operating model and exploring growth through far more business model evolution to influence markets.

Shifting to a different change model needs a high level of transition

We need to '*unfreeze*' through ***recognition of our present rigidity*** > We should make a ***'****transition' through experiment and exploration* > Finally we should ***not*** '*refreeze*' as the recommendation of past views have suggested, ***we should build the adaptive, agile and fluid abilities required for today*** from learning, collaborating and embrace a constant change mentality.

To achieve a more organic fluidity, moving from hierarchies to networks, from formal rules and high levels of coordination into far more spontaneous interactions, improvised processes that resolved specific issues and the constantly forming and dissolving project teams where far more lateral organization-wide communications take place is a set of real challenges.

Everything seems to be flowing faster and we have to respond

We are seeing far more fluidity in relationships where the knowledge is flowing within, across and between organizations. The boundaries are blurring, that increasing fuzziness needs shifting our style of decision-making and solution finding.

There is also this growing sense that innovation is endless, it never stops but simply shifts from one stage to another, often looping back to be re-evaluated and thought through. The

old linear process is not working, learning and adjusting is a constant all along the pipeline development process and requires a higher level of fluidness to deal with it.

There is this nagging feeling of relentless destruction or disturbance, the very opposite of the stable equilibrium we seemed to enjoy in the past. Those that become capable of managing the constant change and disequilibrium will thrive.

Yet we need to face this paradox of fluidity and stability.

Those growing conditions of uncertainty and complexity also need boundary building, identity formation and problem solving architectures that are stable and can provide replication of essential actions or activities. We need to seek out and maintain yet constantly challenge to "undo" and redesign.

We are still struggling with the dominant linear logic of much of what we do in organizations, and often this constrains innovation, restricts us to provide radically different business models and limits our abilities to change fast enough. We are learning to be far more adaptive in our learning but this is constantly meeting up with resistance of this linear logic.

What would help us build a higher fluidity into the design of our organizations?

Firstly what makes up the competencies of fluid?

Here we provide a list that has many aspects or enabling attributes to them you might recognize. Embracing all of them is not the answer but taking a more detailed and thoughtful approach to those capabilities, competencies and capacities to build fluid into your organization becomes important.

Today we are all on the search for new adaptive infrastructures. We should be participating in platforms and building our ecosystems to extract outside knowledge to learn how to recombine it in new ways. Nothing today stands still; we are in that need to constantly redefine, to build in flexibility and this adaptive skill.

We should encourage thinking and challenging present orthodoxies and explore ways to rewire and rethink much of the prevailing system and processes as it has far too much built-in rigidity.

Today we are losing predictability on much that was a constant within the past, we have a speed of development that needs to constantly be reduced down, for gaining competitive advantage and getting our innovation to market earlier.

So can we identify competencies that would help embed a more fluid way of working?

We need to look for or deliberately design into our thinking the following:

We are all becoming far more digital, fluid and fast, we are absorbing and responding at faster rates and we are adapting to a constant, multifaceted world of connections, systems and knowledge piecing to combine up into different ‘wholes’.

• To get there we need to be far more nimble, we need to learn navigation skills far more, we are increasingly assignment driven, less exploratory in many things, and technology is taking on this role.

• We need to become increasing agile, iterative, be experimenting, and constantly determined to execute to drive our results and value-add.

• We need to seek empowerment, focus on delivery and collaboration outcomes far more resolutely.

• We need to grasp the make-up of value creation and why innovation is becoming new business models in its potential.

• We need to establish within ourselves and the working environment we operate within a sound conflict resolution pathway and strive for authenticity and trust within the places we operate.

• Lastly a real willingness to seek out diversity, to be visible, and be wanting to have this constant entry and exit to our projects and challenges, to drive our personal satisfaction and worth up.

In summary

We need to relentlessly challenge and push out our own boundaries and knowledge and adapt these to be designed to those we seek to exploit constantly. The mantra of “adapting, exploring and quickly responding” to the needs seen in rapidly changing markets and across our customer base of past, present and future needs this fluidity.

The need for being fluid across our organizations is to respond to those different demands being faced today, it requires a far more adaptive and responsive business to work in increasing parallel of balancing stability alongside pushing for dynamism . This dual need of maintaining stability in the force of resisting shocks and keeping leveraging the existing optimization has to yet work alongside responding to changing markets, resolving increasing challenges. The end result is in delivering more innovation that meets the changes occurring, these require both fluid and stable thinking and approaches.

Achieving a Level of Fluidity

Posted on March 9, 2016 by paul4innovating

There is this constant set of discussions about changing structures and models to become more adaptive, agile, lean, flexible and fluid; to react and deal with the increasing turbulence occurring all around us.

We all sense this pressing need to react and become more responsive, becoming more adaptive to changing environments and business challenges, that are often unknown, unexpected, or not yet explored or exploited. The question is how much and how far can we go?

Organizations are facing increasing a dilemma in how they organize and manage within their systems and structures. They are being forced to deal in increasingly complexity and environmental turbulence and 'adapting the appropriate response' remains increasingly a difficult one to master, within the existing regime they have in place.

On the one hand the value in stability is still essential; working within specific routines and practices gives a clear 'path dependence.' This stability allows for efficiencies and effectiveness to be constantly at practice, constantly building the problem-solving processes, to master tasks in complex environments to resolve 'known' problems in 'given'

ways but this relies on this stable flow and that is not the case of much of what we have to handle today.

We are being challenged more and more on this efficiency and effectiveness focus. It is often not working to deliver the results. We are missing a new way of working.

We increasingly have this dilemma of needing stability but trying to build increased fluidity.

Stability and fluidity- how can both work alongside each other? They are opposites yet we need both to thrive in today's world. Many theorists have suggested, of having in place the 'ambidextrous organization.' This would need organizations to design their organizations in their structures, people and processes to either be focused on 'being efficient' or being 'change orientated'.

We required this increased level of duality. The mindset of exploiting or exploring but can we have both, I certainly think so, it mostly depends on what we are about to do to get this mental picture of which frame of thinking should dominate but not be exclusive.

I have been drawn to this 'dual' system of ambidextrous as it helps resolve one of the consistent stumbling blocks for innovation to 'take hold' and evolve. Innovation is constantly fluid, needing to be adaptive as we learn and adjust to new learning and this is constantly requiring a very change orientated approach. Often innovation comes up against a rigid system and for many "just seems not to fit"

Innovation struggles as it often remains outside the prevailing system. Innovation constantly challenges against the dominant mindset within organizations, who like the idea of innovation but are mostly measured to drive efficiency and effectiveness, keeping highly focused on the short-term performance as their role, reward, advancement and key to ongoing career success, so innovation 'sits outside' their domain of focus.

Something needs to change ***if*** innovation is really important.

Yet the very essence of our stability in organizations is under threat.

There is so much change being undertaken, the growing call for quick improvisation and ad hoc responses all needs to take us away from those rigid processes into open and far more fluids ones.

The solutions of fluid, agile and adaptive are aiming to develop highly flexible and responsive organizations as an attractive answer to manage in more uncertain times as the way to move forward. The ability to make this very defining and shaping move in any organizations does seem very fraught with risk.

We do need to extend our thinking about fluidity far more to see how we can evolve our thinking more towards this fluid state, within ourselves and our organizations design.

To achieve a more organic fluidity, moving from hierarchies to networks, from formal rules and high levels of coordination into far more spontaneous interactions, improvised processes that resolved specific issues is one huge challenge. It takes time to learn and adapt to this as we all are 'stuck in our ways.

The appeal of us constantly forming and dissolving project teams where far more lateral organization-wide communications take place is a set of real challenges but so highly prized and will be of increasing value.

Everything seems to be flowing faster and we do have to respond

We are seeing far more fluidity in relationships where the knowledge is flowing within, across and between organizations. The boundaries are blurring, that increasing fuzziness needs shifting our style of decision-making and solution finding.

There is also this growing sense that innovation knowledge is endless, unrelenting in its flow into us, if we care to open ourselves up to it. It never stops but simply shifts from one stage to another, hopping from one idea to another, requiring us to loop back to be re-evaluated and think the implications through.

We are increasingly recognizing that the old linear processes are not working, the need for fast results gets stacked up in this type of process. Our reaction times need speeding up, our learning and adjusting is a constant, all along the pipeline development process and requires a higher level of fluidness to deal with it. We have to adjust to this increasing demand forced upon us.

We are still struggling with the dominant linear logic of much of what we do in organizations, and often this constrains innovation, restricts us to provide radically different business models and limits our abilities to change fast enough. We are learning to be far more adaptive in our learning but this is constantly meeting up with resistance of this linear logic.

There is this nagging feeling of relentless destruction or disturbance, the very opposite of the stable equilibrium we seemed to enjoy in the past. Those that become capable of managing the constant change and disequilibrium will thrive.

We must face this paradox of fluidity and stability.

Those growing conditions of uncertainty and complexity also need boundary building, identity formation and problem solving architectures that are stable and can provide replication of essential actions or activities. We need to seek out and maintain yet constantly challenge to "undo" and redesign.

So can we find competencies that would help embed a more fluid way of working?

We need to look for or deliberately design into our thinking the following:

We are all becoming far more digital, fluid and fast, we are absorbing and responding at faster rates and we are adapting to a constant, multifaceted world of connections, systems and knowledge that need piecing together, un-stitching and re-stitching to combine up into different 'wholes' and needs to solve specific issues and challenges. So what is needed?

• To get there we need to be far more nimble, we need to learn navigation skills far more, we are increasingly assignment driven, less exploratory in many things, and technology is taking on this role.

• We need to become increasing agile, iterative, be experimenting, and constantly determined to execute to drive our results and value-add.

• We need to seek empowerment, focus on delivery and collaboration outcomes far more resolutely.

• We need to grasp the make-up of value creation and why innovation is becoming new business models in its potential.

• We need to establish within ourselves and the working environment we work within, this sound conflict resolution pathway and strive for authenticity and trust within the ways we operate.

• Lastly here, a real willingness to seek out diversity, to be visible, and be wanting to have this constant entry and exit to project and challenges to drive our personal satisfaction and worth up.

Finally, we should examine characteristics or factors that create barriers for fluidity

Our over reliance on past models – when the near future closely resembles the recent past, relying on existing models to determine appropriate actions and investments is rational. Instead companies must assess the amount of change and to recognize the need to 'let go' to reduce the reliance on existing models that are constraining future performance in a fluid world.

Change proficiency/capability – in most companies, people receive training and develop skills based on their specific roles and responsibilities, but rarely develop skills that actively encourage, enable or accelerate change without it being instigated form a higher level. We cannot expect companies and cultures to change frequently and capably if people don't have the skills, capabilities or proficiency to change effectively and be empowered with the mandate to investigate and recommend.

Preferences for stability over change – people, organizations and cultures prefer stability to change. Change is uncertain and demands new learning and new expertise, while stability reinforces existing knowledge and skills. Over time, the desire for stability leads to inertia and active resistance to change. Companies must create a preference for more change, reducing inertia and building change capabilities. That "making change constant" needs enactment.

Focus on short-term profits rather than longer term viability – Since change is uncertain and distracts from efficient day-to-day operations, and there is an ever-increasing focus on short-term profitability, change always takes a back seat to efficient operations and short-term profits. Longer term viability suffers because of an over reliance on an increasingly out of date business model, infrequent innovation and a lack of change capacity. This shift in corporate mind-set and shareholder need is becoming an imperative to finally change. It is stopping long-term growth, mortgaging our futures.

In summary

We need to relentlessly challenge and push out our own boundaries and knowledge and adapt these to be designed to exploit constantly. We need to be increasingly fluid in how we 'go about this.'

We need a new mantra of "adapting, exploring and simply responding to the need seen" in rapidly changing markets and across our customer base – past, present and future and within ourselves, on how to cope with this increasing need for agility and this fluidity we all need today.

About Paul Hobcraft

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I simply enjoy innovation. I got 'hooked' fifteen years ago and since then have increasingly focused on innovation until it is 100% of my business thinking and activities today.

I research across innovation, looking to develop novel innovation solutions and frameworks where appropriate. I provide possible answers to many issues associated with innovation with a range of solutions that underpin my advisory, coaching and consulting work at www.agilityinnovation.com .

The aim is to support individuals, teams and organisations, in their innovation activity, applying what I have learnt to further develop core innovation understanding, so clients can achieve positive and sustaining results from their innovating activities.

For me, ***innovation needs to enter the DNA of our organisations*** and our own individual make-up. In my writing, I try to offer a range of thoughts on different aspects of innovation to help each of us to understand this subject better.

Innovation as a source for our growth fascinates me.

As for my personal journey

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, Hong Kong, Australia, and recently twelve years in Singapore. Today, I live in Switzerland, my adopted home.

I've worked in a number of senior positions within global corporations, in global, regional, country and functional levels tackling different challenges that have included start-ups. turn-rounds and significant re-engineering and operational design or automation across a global network.

The work has been varied, the challenges diverse coming from starting up different businesses in emerging markets, turning difficult ones around in challenging economic and market conditions more than once, re-engineering a global organization over a three year period choosing to live permanently out of a suitcase (or two) for months at a time in each

of the major global locations as the best way to deliver the changes, and finally simply accelerating companies, getting them through to critical mass points, for achieving their positive contributing footprint, within the world.

In 2000 I went into my own business of consulting and advisory work, firstly based in Asia and then in recent years, based in Switzerland

After I moved to Ticino in Switzerland, from Singapore I am spending different times between the two regions, although Europe holds an increasingly more central role. All the time my focus is on innovation and many of the related topics that move it increasingly towards a core within organisations. Innovation understanding does 'simply span' globally and I have been fortunate on building on the foundations initially laid down in Asia and advanced while in Europe through an ever-expanding network of collaborators, knowledge and insights.

My present focus is spent building this innovation practice, providing advice on building the right capabilities and capacities, into organisations or individuals wanting to advance on what they have already in place; to improve, accelerate and develop their innovation competencies and understandings of the 'fit' of innovation.

Paul Hobcraft has been voted into the top innovation bloggers over a consistent period from 2012 on a leading Global Innovation Community- Innovation Excellence- ,

"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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