

# Turning on

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**Creativity and innovation have become top of mind on many an agenda, and increasingly are being described by some as the key to our sustainability. Ideas springing from know-how and know-what have become the key levers in today's economy.**

## The Nomura Research Institute

classifies four historical eras of economic activity<sup>1</sup>:

1. **Agricultural**
2. **Industrial**
3. **Informational**
4. **Creativity and Innovation**

The Institute suggests that creativity and innovation will be the next dominant global focus replacing the current focus on information.

If innovation is so obviously important, why don't we all just go out and innovate? The answer is that innovation is challenging and requires some clarity before we begin.

What is innovation? The word "innovate" can be traced all the way back to 1440. It comes from the Middle French word *innovacion* meaning renewal or new way of doing things.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, a society, organization, business unit, or individual is innovative when continuously adapting and successfully functioning in a rapidly changing environment.

What is creativity? Creativity is the generation of ideas and alternatives. Innovation is the transformation of those ideas and alternatives into

useful applications that lead to change and improvement. In an organization, ideas and insights need to be original, useful, and feasible.

Creativity is possible without innovation; however, innovation is not possible without creativity.

So how can leaders facilitate the creation, discovery, evaluation, refinement, and implementation of new ideas?

There are a plethora of tools and techniques available to stimulate thinking: brainstorming, DeBono's six thinking hats,<sup>3</sup> affinity diagrams, force field analysis, morphological analysis among others. These appear to yield results but are enhanced by an environment that is supportive of fresh thinking. Do we need another book of creativity techniques? No. Creativity is not predominantly something that can be forced through creativity techniques. It depends upon creating an appropriate culture or environment for ideas to emerge. When the context is right, techniques can play their part in raising the level and type of creativity within organizations.

It appears that success in idea generation and implementation is 80 per cent culture and 20 per cent technique.<sup>4</sup> So how do you develop a culture of innovation? What conditions foster idea generation and implementation?

# fresh ideas

## the Idea Bulb

The following questions enable you to conduct an idea audit to establish the readiness to generate and implement fresh thinking and new ideas within your organization.

- 1. Creating context** for fresh thinking is critical. Is the culture intrapreneurial? Is the knowledge in your business unit rich and accessible, and is the team diverse in capability? Have team sessions been conducted to facilitate creative processes?
- 2. How much** autonomy and resources do team members have to pursue ideas? 3M enables every individual to devote 15 per cent of their time to pet projects.<sup>5</sup> This time also enables individuals to visit alternative departments, trading ideas.
- 3. How many** forgiveness coupons have been handed out?<sup>6</sup> These coupons can be designed to encourage risk taking. In large organizations people express a high need for ideas and then many managers add, "But I only want ideas that are going to be successful." If you really want to encourage innovation, you have to accept failures. Remember the "L" is for learning not for loser.<sup>7</sup>
- 4. Are questions** continually being asked? Asking questions opens up a field of possibilities that would not be recognized otherwise. Children know this inherently. They are the masters of questions, asking on average 125 of them a day, compared to the average adult's 7. "Adopting a child's attitude towards questions – the more, the better – helps you to facilitate the process of tapping into your own inner genius. It is unfortunate, but as adults, we are trained exactly the opposite. We are taught that asking questions is a sign of weakness."<sup>8</sup>
- 5. Are interns**, recently employed, and new hires being tapped for ideas? They are usually the ones with fresh ideas. They are the ones who have not yet been part of your culture. They are the ones already outside the box.

- 6. Have you** created a space for developing ideas? "Spatial design can create tangible, physical environments conducive to creative work; spaces whose material walls subtly establish psychic freedom."<sup>9</sup> The environments of IDEO, IdeaVerse at AT&T, and The OZ Network at Dupont maintain this theme with bright, unconventional color schemes; relaxed, informal furniture; extensive video and library facilities; desktops; and in some cases intranets.
- 7. Are innovative** ideas recognized and rewarded? Innovative individuals need to be protected, nurtured, and publicly rewarded along with those who reward and protect them. To encourage sharing of ideas with colleagues, leaders can incentivize innovation and provide recognition to those who provide effective creative solutions to problems.
- 8. Is leadership** by example evident? Leaders can enhance the development of an idea culture through their own activities. Personally exhibiting the desired behaviours is likely to lead to a higher degree of creativity and innovation within the team.
- 9. Are there** opportunities to share ideas between business units? Actively sharing creative ideas and innovations across the organization communicates the necessity to develop ideas in teams. Collaboration (rather than individual activity) is more likely to generate implementable ideas.

Innovative behaviour is one of the strongest factors affecting individual, team, organizational, and community success.

Developing innovation in your area does not necessarily mean restructuring, but rather stimulating the climate and ultimately the organizational culture. Innovative leaders can accomplish this by encouraging their team in generating new ideas and developing opportunities. In this new century, we need leaders who get results by championing ideas!

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