

THE MARCH OF INNOVATION: TOWARD WHAT END?

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Abstract: The author displays several serious warnings and reminders that might help humans to work on innovation with more social responsibility. Otherwise, innovation as the watchword of the day might become very dangerous.

Key words: innovation, knowledge, religion, social responsibility

POHOD INOVACIJ: PROTI KATEREMU CILJU ALI KONCU?

Povzetek: Avtor prikazuje veliko resnih opozoril in opomnikov, ki bi lahko ljudem pomagali, da bi se z več družbene odgovornosti ukvarjali z inovacijami. Sicer utegne inovacija, ki je osrednji pojem sodobnega časa, postati zelo nevarna.

Ključne besede: inovacija, znanje, vera, družbena odgovornost

The world is engaged in the greatest transformation in its history. At no time in the past has advancement and change been so pervasive, so scary, so fast and so unpredictable. Baha'u'llah, Prophet-Founder of the Baha'i Faith, says that the world's equilibrium has been upset through the vibrating influence of a new spiritual infusion. Since the nineteenth century, change has been meteoric with only acceleration ahead of us as the world continues to advance across so many previous boundaries.

Innovation increasingly becomes the watchword in organizations, but unfortunately it is mostly episodic and random. Innovation occurs everywhere—socially, technologically, philosophically, spiritually, militarily, and politically. It is messy, dramatic, unpredictable and irreversible. Its patterns are chaotic, its processes vague and undefined, and its successes erratic and indiscriminate. But is it good? Can it be harnessed in a more processed-centered environment? Does it bring inherent positive value? In what ways do we have a moral and ethical responsibility while we engage in and foster innovation?

*All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization...that the leaders of men in every land may fully recognize the purpose for which the Eternal Truth hath been revealed, and the reason for which they themselves have been created.*¹

This suggests that we have a double responsibility: first, to foster innovation, and second, to be guided by an ethical and moral compass. But, not all innovation should be developed. Not all of it is beneficial. A moral compass must be applied so that whatever we develop can advance society as a whole without robbing us of our collective future. Our unfettered march to affluence has placed our entire planet in environmental crises. Advancement may in fact be amoral, but we must be careful not to make it immoral.

Innovation is defined as the transformation of the creative force into a quantifiable gain or measurable result. This transformation occurs from Discovery through Invention and finally to Implementation. The National Innovation Initiative of the United States has described innovation as an intersection where invention meets insight and leads to the creation of social and economic value.

Let us examine the *Eights of Innovation*TM, the key factors that facilitate innovation, and the ethical and moral compass that might influence them in the process of fostering innovation in organizations.

Eights of InnovationTM

Principles

1. Don't innovate where you operate
2. Innovation is messy, dramatic and irreversible
 - Innovation is the engine to the future
3. Opposition is fuel, Use it wisely
 - Ideas are answers to problems—even bad ideas address real problems
4. "No" is easy; "yes" is risky
 - Do the homework: Not all good ideas are strategic
5. Ideas are cheap, implementation is costly

- Tenacity and wisdom are the two wings of success
 - It's the innovators, not the ideas that need to be nurtured
6. Collaborate to Accelerate
 7. Insert Miracle
 8. Expect Serendipity

Process

1. Obscurity or Invisibility
2. Active Opposition
3. Complacent Acceptance
4. Accepted Practice or Tactical Reality
5. Strategic Advantage
6. Corporate/Organizational Standard
7. Industry Standard
8. Decline

Don't innovate where you operate

When organizations attempt to innovate within the operational components of an enterprise, both the innovation and the operations are compromised. Only when the activities of the two are separated by a strong firewall can both succeed. However, both the operational components and the innovators must learn to respect and understand the constraints and drivers of each arena.

Innovation is chaotic and has limited recognizable outcome in the beginning. It must be allowed to develop unfettered by measures of performance and the vested interests of the status quo.

Operational efficiency must also remain untainted by innovative thrusts until the innovation is proven sufficiently, thus protecting the efficacy of the productivity of the enterprise.

Unless the enterprise leadership understands the necessity of both and protects both, the fight for excellence becomes internecine and counter-productive to the ultimate benefit of the organization.

Innovation is messy, dramatic and irreversible

Even the most visionary innovators cannot imagine the outcome of the process with which he or she is engaged. The passion for delivery and the tenacity for success drive the innovator forward. But the ultimate potential is seldom visible even with a glimmer of the future.

Steve Jobs could never have imagined the game-changer that the iPod initiated in the complete transformation of Apple. He wanted to make the best consumer music product. The Wright Brothers could never have imagined the building of a space station that was a not so distant future of the invention that they perfected. The women marching in the streets of London in the 1800s for recognition of a better condition could never have imagined someone like Margaret Thatcher becoming one of the great leaders of Europe only a few generations later.

Innovation is a messy and unpredictable process filled with dramatic events, political maneuvering, difficulties both technological and human, and packed with unforeseen advances and reverses.

But, once success is achieved, there is no return. The Wright Brothers wanted to fly. They could not foresee supersonic flight or space travel. They were unknowns who with their tenacity and passion overcame every obstacle, coupled with good fortune. Once flight was accomplished, the world never turned back.

No one is willing to give up the digital age with its communications, music, videos, and imaging technologies. Every advancement eliminates a past activity and opens up unimagined vistas for the future.

Opposition is fuel, Use it wisely

Whenever revolutionary forces emerge, whether technologically or otherwise, reactionary forces respond. This corresponds to Newton's third Law of Motion, *for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction*. Those who oppose an innovation often oppose it with good reason. They are the guardians of the status quo and have responsibility to safeguard the interests and productivity of the enterprise. There are also those who respond with vested interests, but usually those who oppose innovation have cause.

The innovator should see this reactionary response as beneficial. It will uncover the minefields of resistance, the obstacles to implementation and identify the pathway to success. Most innovators have difficulty seeing the entire field before them. He or she is focused on the implementation of a solution to a perceived problem, but do not necessarily see the complete horizon. It is the opposition that uncovers the true strategies to success.

When we can work in an environment of consultation and mutual appreciation, we will embrace opposition whether we are the innovator or the guardians of the status quo. For even the protectors of the status quo realize that change is the only constant for advancement.

Many companies' R&D efforts are unfocused. Money is wasted "reinventing wheels" that others have already rolled out. Good ideas get stuck in developmental bottlenecks.²

"No" is easy; "yes" is risky

Concerning revolutionary change and innovation, one can get a "no" to any endeavor at any time. It is the "yes" that is the challenge. People in authority, in any organization, work in arenas above tactical realities and production schedules; they spend considerable time in realms of political intrigue, social manipulation, and, resource acquisition and management. For those folks, to answer "yes" to change and innovation involves significant risk. Most innovators are unaware and insensitive to these considerations. A lower level employee can make a mistake and get his or her hand slapped, or receive a negative comment on a performance review. A person at a high level in an organization, when a mistake is made, most often loses his or her job, or is marginalized, which is far worse.

To the extent that innovators can learn what drives decisions in an organization and learn how to maneuver in this labyrinth of activity, he or she can become far more valuable to the organization and more successful in implementing novel ideas and revolutionary change.

One must find kindred spirits and vested interests to further a change in an organization and then with great sensitivity, patience and fortitude mount a strategy that can move an idea through an organization and gather momentum prior to having to ask for formal acceptance.

Ideas are cheap, implementation is costly

Generating ideas is easy. Gather a group of fairly talented and diverse people and they will find solutions to most problems, big and small. In a period of a couple of hours at most, the group will generate several hundred ideas and at least 10% will be extraordinary and completely solve the problem at hand. The difficulty will be to fund them and implement them.

Implementation requires capital, resources, time, serendipitous interventions, invention and luck. Do we have enough time? Are there sufficient resources? Who will fund the solution? Where will it be tested? What obstacles, big and small, must be overcome? Whose playground are we messing with? Who will have the tenacity to keep moving forward when challenged?

One of the great questions to ask the innovator is whether he or she would be willing to mortgage his or her house to fund the idea and make sufficient gain if successful. This is what the innovator is asking the organization to do. Fund one idea and mortgage it against other competing ideas. Who has "skin in the game?"

Investment, whether in resources, capital, time, or sheer effort, must be rewarded appropriately, if it is successful. Justice to all participants must be considered. The differences and discrepancies across industries, countries and societies around reward and recognition is vast and as the world shrinks, we must find adequate mechanisms to accommodate participation.

Additionally, all good ideas cannot and should not be funded. It depends on strategic intent and benefit to the greater good that should ultimately determine what ideas come to fruition. In this case, consultation amongst all significant parties is a must.

The progressive development of man is vitally dependent on invention. It is the most important product of his creative brain.³

Collaborate to Accelerate

*Consultation bestoweth greater awareness and transmuteth conjecture into certitude. It is a shining light which, in a dark world, leadeth the way and guideth. For everything there is and will continue to be a station of perfection and maturity. The maturity of the gift of understanding is made manifest through consultation.*⁴

Collaborative technologies abound in the digital media. Companies that stand apart from the pack are those who have learned how to open its research activities to collaborate with an enormous cadre of capable people worldwide. Acceleration of the innovative process demands collaboration both within and without an organization's enterprise walls.

Proctor and Gamble provides an exemplary model for advancing technological prowess with its collaborative innovation. Seldom will an innovative change in a company occur without both internal and external infusion of information and technologies. The original iPod was an idea brought into Apple, not generated within. It was visionary recognition by the people within Apple that drove the success beyond even the concepts of the original ideator.

Of course collaboration must be accomplished with wisdom and security. But, there are ample measures that can be taken to ensure success and acceleration.

Insert Miracle

Every inventor understands the concept of *Insert Miracle*. In fact, they plan for it. Many planning charts of innovation include a box for that very event. This is the moment that one knows will occur, but has no idea when and how it will occur. Oftentimes a timetable is attached to it that includes other options in the event that it does not occur when needed.

Although one wouldn't expect to insert prayer at a time like this, it is in fact appropriate. Not the kind that we have been accustomed to, although that is certainly welcome too, but the concentration of thought on a cosmic power will draw energies into the process. There is considerable research available that promotes the idea of positive thinking, cosmic connectedness via string theory and the like, and meditation practices. I believe it was Johannes Keppler, who while in a meditative state, solved one of his great theories by focusing on the drifting of the smoke and flames of the fireplace before him as he relaxed and let his mind drift.

Expect Serendipity

Finally, the innovation process is one of planfulness coupled with a large quantity of serendipity. The unexpected plays an enormous part of the process of innovation. Again we only have to call upon Newton and his three laws of motion. A body at rest tends to stay at rest and a body in motion will tend to stay in motion. However, motion will require continuous energy being applied. With innovation, as we apply energy to the process, it will become attractive and other events will tend to come into contact with the work.

For this reason, the outcome of innovation is seldom visualized completely at the beginning. One must have a vision of some outcome, but that vision must remain flexible and to expect the unexpected.

Often is the unexpected meetings of disparate people, concepts and activities that generate an unexpected answer to a baffling problem. While working on a project for an oil company, I observed that it was a heart surgeon whose experience with fluid dynamics within the heart was able to assist in formulating a solution to a problem that had been wrestled with for 10 years.

*The doors are open, but we must be ready and fitted to enter. The ocean of divine providence is surging, but we must be able to swim. The bestowals of the Almighty are descending from the heaven of grace, but capacity to receive them is essential. The foundation of divine generosity is gushing forth, but we must have thirst for the living waters.*⁵

Conclusion

Innovation provides the opportunity for an enterprise to continue to advance. Without the recognition of, the need for, and the development of, a process of innovation with the moral commitments of both management and labor to work in harmony for advancement, an enterprise is sealing its future doom. Leadership must ensure that innovation is prized and protected. Employees must realize it is their responsibility to be continuously learning both inside and outside of the organization's realm to be enabled to adapt to change.

Change will be, for the foreseeable millennium, the only constant we will know. As humankind reaches more lofty heights of attainment and matures in its global responsibility to all of the world's inhabitants, moral and ethical

leadership and followership will be increasingly required. And, as in the life of all human beings, our adulthood is the longest and most productive time of our lives. As we collectively enter and continually amaze ourselves, let us recognize that we are all one family striving for advancement.

And finally, here are some inspirational words -

... the challenge is the empowerment of humankind through a vast increase in access to knowledge, the strategy that can make this possible must be constructed around an ongoing and intensifying dialogue between science and religion. It is—or by now should be—a truism that, in every sphere of human activity and at every level, the insights and skills that represent scientific accomplishment must look to the force of spiritual commitment and moral principle to ensure their appropriate application. People need, for example, to learn how to separate fact from conjecture—indeed to distinguish between subjective views and objective reality; the extent to which individuals and institutions so equipped can contribute to human progress, however, will be determined by their devotion to truth and their detachment from the promptings of their own interests and passions.⁵

References

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