

innovative spaces

The Innovation Worker supercedes the Knowledge Worker

Knowledge Management is seen by many to be the dominant paradigm for business today. This interest has been fuelled by a shift from physical capital (as in buildings and equipment) to intellectual or knowledge capital. The intention of Knowledge Management is to maximise the sum total of knowledge inside an organization to improve business competitiveness.

The flaw in this scenario is that knowledge is insufficient for effective action. How many times have you known what needs to be done and not done it? What is missing is wisdom. Wisdom is knowing what needs to be done and doing it when it needs to be done. The emotional space we find ourselves in can be a key factor in whether we translate our knowledge into effective action.

Also, in times of rapid change and decreasing product life cycles, knowledge rapidly becomes obsolete. Managing knowledge needs to be replaced by generating new knowledge. When you generate new knowledge coupled with effective action, you produce new results through innovation. Innovation is the key to increased competitiveness, not knowledge.

Traditional innovation focuses on a top down approach to transforming the company. The elite managers design the future of the organization and then impose it upon their employees. The organization is proactive to change and the individual is left to respond. The change management model struggles in the face of this reactionary change. Top down change focuses on transforming everything and fails to conserve the things that work. Knowing what to conserve and what to transform is critically important.

The 'I/We/It' model presents an alternative view of what is needed in the innovation process. 'I' is the subjective world of the individual that focuses on Purpose, Self-knowledge, Self-correction and Persistence.

'We' is the subjective collective view of the group that focuses on Relationship, Communication, Leadership and Inspiration. 'It' is the objective world of nature that focuses on Processes, Technology, Measurement and Statistics.

Traditional Innovation processes focus on the 'It'. The 'I' and the 'We' are largely ignored. When you focus on the 'I' and the 'We' a new space for innovation is created.

A bottom up innovation process can inspire your team in your daily activity and grow your business.

The key is to stop trying to manage knowledge because you can't. Knowledge is always changing and you never know if a knowledge worker is working anyway. Start managing innovation because you can see and touch the added value it creates for your customers.

Innovation is about change - deliberately and consciously creating change. When we have change imposed upon us we typically resist it. This is a costly breakdown for business as a great deal of money is spent on 'change management'. When you work with innovation in the workplace as part of your ongoing responsibilities you train yourself to deal with change in a new way. The opportunity is to improve your business performance through more effective action AND simultaneously improve your ability to respond to the demands of the everchanging marketplace.

Innovation is also about learning: Learning what works better and applying it in new ways.

The first step is to learn about your personal space for innovating:

- What is my personal way of being that allows me to perform at my best?
- How do I manage change?
- What are the things that stop me from performing at my best?

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When the 'I' learns, the individual grows and what they can offer to the organization grows also.

The second step is to learn about the collective space for innovating:

- What relationships, moods and conversations need to be had by our group to perform at their best?
- How does our group manage change?
- What relationships, moods and conversations are currently in place that are thwarting our group from being at their best?

When the 'we' or the group learns, the group grows, the customer receives added value and the organization benefits.

In the 1960's, Peter Drucker coined the term the 'Knowledge Worker' to highlight the shift from work that was primarily physical to work that requires personal knowledge and expertise. Today, it is insufficient to simply be knowledgeable, one must also take effective action.

A more appropriate term for today is the 'Innovation Worker'. An 'Innovation Worker' provides added customer value and an ongoing competitive advantage for the organization through generating new knowledge and more effective action.

Inside this framework, the role of the manager is to create and maintain 'Innovative Spaces' that allow more effective action to take place. This becomes the key not only to create new and more effective ways of adding value to customers, it also becomes the key to managing the effect of external changes on employees and ultimately employee motivation and performance.

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Notes

- The model of 'I/We/It' is referenced from: Laura Divine and James Flaherty, "Coaching Essential Competencies for Leaders", Fall 2000 from and was sourced from the Canadian government website at: <http://leadership.gc.ca/coaching>
- The idea of the 'innovation worker' was proposed by Jacqui Chaplin.
- This article is based on discussions between Geoffrey McDonald of designprobe, Jacqui Chaplin and Chris Chittenden of Gaia Consulting.
- The workshop 'Innovative Spaces' derives from the 'Being Creative' workshop developed by Geoffrey McDonald.

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