

# Delivering innovation projects- the next place to be... but watch out for those rabbits!

Professor Eddie Obeng

About a month and a half ago at 15:32, I needed a break from thinking, so I picked up my pile of 'someday-if-I-have-a-spare-moment-I'll-look-at-this' mail-shots. I browsed looking for current trends and fashions, the unexpected, giggling at the same traditional 'old world' solutions that didn't work the first time round still being flogged. One caught my eye, a project management conference with all the usual project management blurb but a single session on innovation projects. If you know me and my work you'll know I've been banging on for ages about 'types of projects' and why innovation doesn't work. I even offered a free helicopter ride to any PMT reader who would suggest a killer title for my latest book\*. There was a web address for the project management conference to which I immediately turned. I discovered to my surprise that all the sessions on the conference were completely booked up! All that is except the innovation project session which still had lots of space!

I hit F9 to refresh my screen not believing what I had seen still up came the same result!

I'd like to share with you a couple of things. First my favourite statistics ~5,000,000 32,500 1:300,000 Do you like them? Are they convincing (that after all are what statistics are used for more as a crutch than for illumination) Oh I see, you want to know what they are. The first is the number of links you

discover if you search the internet for consultant+innovation+change, the second the number of publications on amazon for innovation+creativity and the last one, the number of ideas recorded in organisations which made it in into product and service offers still the marketplace profitably making money two years after launch!

If your conclusion is the same as mine - it makes as much sense to base your organisation's strategy on innovation as it does to base it on winning the lottery. It's not for a lack of documented approaches to innovation that we see so little nor is it for a lack of consultants willing to help you (take your money) it must be something(s) else.

However the current buzz seems to be on innovation. Does this mean we've all lost our minds? I think not. The truth is that in our current world, where the pace of change outstrips our ability to learn, the global -complexity and fragmentation mean that unless you can find a way to thoroughly **dominate your market** though say, size or channel control, the only options left are to **evolve or die**. I think evolution is preferable to corporate elimination. One element in evolving the organisation is to innovate.

And yet given the challenge of getting growth and global competitiveness there are few places to turn apart from

## innovation and why it's the NEXT BIG THING in project management

Most organisations use the same analogy of a funnel (optimistic ones) or a pipeline (unimaginative ones) to describe their processes, assuming that the more that goes in the top end the more will come out. This simple analogy fools them into believing that innovation can be controlled and managed as a 'painting by numbers' project. They install gates, water-falls and stop go traffic controls. The problem with successful innovation is that it breaks all the 'traditional' project management rules such as:

- Clear goals understood and fixed in advance
- Defined fixed roles for resources
- Use of steering committees involving senior management
- Fixed assigned budgets

The analogy I use when teaching innovation is to imagine Rabbits. Yes I've used soft fluffy delicate bunnies to represent ideas - the sparks of innovation.

The task:

to get as many rabbits from Point A to Point B across fields a small town and other hazards



You can choose from two options

### OPTION 1

Go for numbers - breed lots of them and play the probability game as they try to get to Point B - some will be squashed

on the busy roads other eaten by foxes or surprisingly shot dead by you!

### OPTION 2

Prepare the farm to breed the best. Look out for promising rabbits, feed them well and get them to work-out in the gym to become really tough and fast, and then help them to make the journey - patrolling dangerous roads and getting rid of the dangerous foxes

*OPTION 1 This is the traditional approach - collect lots of ideas evaluate them - killing off the ones you don't like and then relying on the passion of the champions to get the 'skunk-works' to deliver - if they get caught out and killed by the organisation it's just too bad. By the way in most organisations the people put in charge of evaluating and killing off ideas tend not to be selected because of their wackiness but instead their good sense and risk aversion - so guess what the only ideas which stand the slightest chance of success are the mediocre ones which your competitors have already been working on for the past four months!*

*OPTION 2 Any idea found is improved and enriched to get the most and best out of it, rather than killed*

You may not be surprised to find out that I subscribe to the second option. And I've found out where the real dangers are. It seems that innovation success depends in fact on the success of five smaller embedded enabling projects. We call these generic enablers Creating the Opportunity, Achieving Focus, Making it Possible and Making it Happen.

To have a look at what happens to rabbits who try to make the journey visit:

<http://www.pentaclethevbs.com/Rabbit/RabbitsFunnels.htm>

1. **Creating the Opportunity** - Making sure that you have organised yourselves to create capture improve enrich, visualise and manage ideas
2. **Achieving Focus** - Making sure that we can assess the value/ relevance/ strategic fit/ commercial sense of ideas?
3. **Engaging Commitment** - Have we removed all the barriers to progress - Involved all the people we need to and emotionally prepared ourselves?
4. **Making it Possible** - Have we de-risked the innovation internally/ externally and in terms of realisation?

5. **5. Making it happen** - Have we set up the right type of project for making money from the innovation and learning/ identifying patterns?

The relative importance of each of these project enablers depends not only on the specific innovation but also on the organisation you are trying to innovate within.

The chart below gives the average scores in our database. If you want to know where to start you can try our Innovation HealthCheck at:

<http://pentacle.co.uk/healthchecks.htm>

and compare your score to the average in your industry

## Innovation HealthCheck Results

Main Industry Sectors in Pentacle database

Mean scores					
	1 Creating the Opportunity	2 Achieving Focus	3. Engaging Commitment	4. Making it Possible	5. Making it happen
Financial services	66.00	57.84	63.84	71.50	61.50
FMCG	61.50	66.83	74.17	69.33	58.17
Manufacturing	63.15	70.33	74.00	68.15	58.49
Consultancy/ Design services**	95.00	77.00	85.00	80.00	66.67
ICT (Information Computing Telecommunications)	61.65	56.67	59.99	69.15	55.83
Pharmaceutical /Health	76.67	73.33	80.00	76.67	76.67
Max.	95.00	77.00	85.00	80.00	76.67
Min.	61.50	56.67	59.99	68.15	55.83
Database Mean	70.66	67.00	72.83	72.47	62.89

Now you know where your real bottleneck is you need to widen it - simply working on that enabler will directly influence the chances of success of your innovation projects - which by the way is likely to be a Fog, Quest or Movie but never Painting-by-

numbers. Remember this and your chances of making a name for yourself though innovation projects will be higher than the spin of a roulette wheel.

Dr. Eddie Obeng is Learning Director at Pentacle The Virtual Business School. He is author of *New Rules for the New World*, *Money Making Machine! Perfect Projects* and *Putting Strategy to Work*.

The Virtual Business School Burke Lodge 20 London End Beaconsfield Bucks HP9 2JH  
+44 (0) 1494 678 555 Rabbits@PentacleTheVBS.com

\*I kept my aviation fuel - the final title, *Who Killed the Sparq?* came from an internal Pentacle Brainstorm, sorry.

\*\*The Consultancy Score is very skewed by the inclusion of IDEO in the survey