

Innovation: It's a Project Jim, but not as we know it!

How to select the best approach for delivering innovation

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You're on the fifth book and the messages are starting to repeat themselves. In spite of titles like Innovation Breakthroughs in Dynamics and New Journeys New Thoughts: innovation in practice and Really, Really New Stuff they all seem to be saying the same thing. That to make innovation happen you just have to be more creative – if only you could generate more ideas and shove them into the organisation, more stuff will come out the other end. They all talk about a funnel, some even draw it, with ideas going in the top and stuff coming out the bottom! It looks so simple. So why isn't it working for you? You've done the company-wide launch. You've set up an innovation process. You've run creativity and idea generation and brainstorming workshops. You've appointed a 'Head of Innovation' and still nothing valuable seems to be coming out. The few ideas that have been generated in this way, which made it as far as the first review gate by the MOC got canned, apparently for not relating to the organisational strategy. And the only one which managed to get past that is such a huge project that it is unlikely to be completed for the next four years! There must be a better way.

There is.


It's not a funnel!

You've set up an innovation process. You've run creativity and idea generation and brainstorming workshops. You've appointed a 'Head of Innovation' and still nothing seems to be coming out.

For a start the innovation model is wrong. It doesn't fit with our new world realities. In the new world, think of innovation as a task of getting as many rabbits (ideas) from one side of a busy city (across the organisation) to another, to people who will adopt them if they think they are 'cute.' (Apologies for this analogy to all vegetarians and imaginative, sensitive, squeamish readers who can see what is going to happen to most of the rabbits!).

Choices

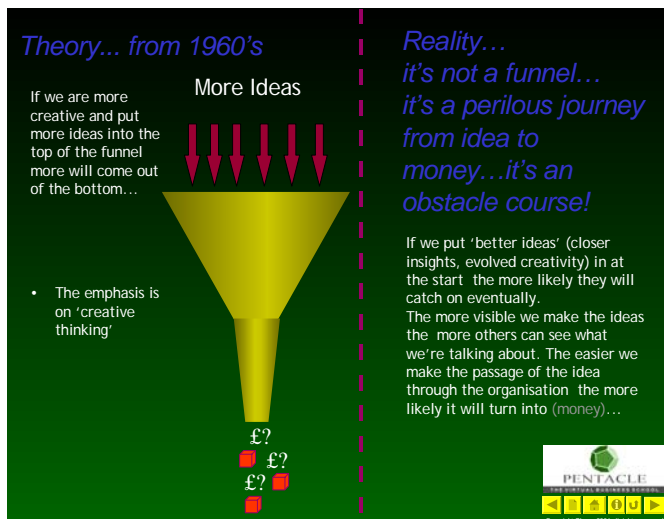
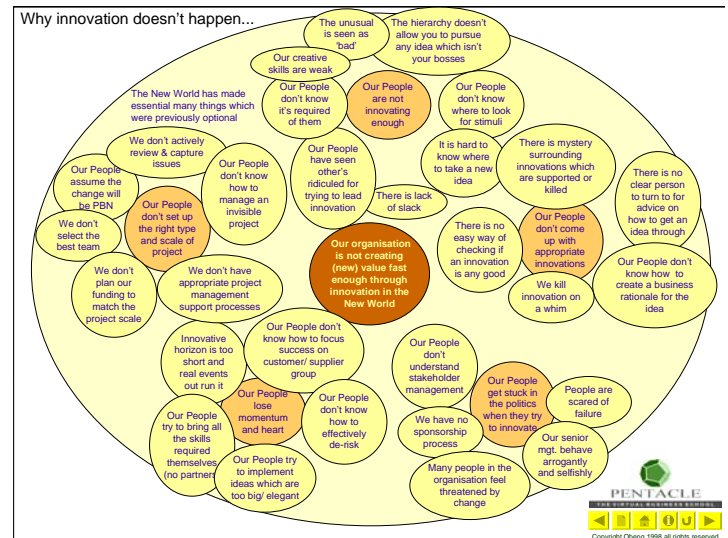
Old world solution	New world solution
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Release more rabbits - the more the number of rabbits the better your chances• Kill some of the rabbits yourself along the way - the slow ones	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Release tough fast rabbits• Find the really dangerous roads to cross, patrol them and stop the traffic



In the Old World, in reality you didn't really need that much innovation, and the organisation was pretty repetitive without a high level of turbulence &

chaos and the demands for an innovation had a longer shelf-life. So the funnel seemed to make sense. In the new world it doesn't. There is a strong emphasis on particular deliverables on turning ideas into money. This is very hard. This is a very hard project.

New World Alchemists turn 'Ideas into Money'



One of the amusing paradoxes is that in many organisations 'the hierarchy doesn't allow you to pursue any idea which isn't your bosses' and yet at the same time the bosses sit on the gating committee! So now do you see why it is likely that : The few ideas which have been generated in this way, which made it as far as the first review gate by the MOC got canned, apparently for not relating to the organisational strategy. Whether they are in line or not!

So what goes wrong? Where are the really busy and dangerous roads as we try to get our idea to move through the organisation? Where do our poor rabbits get squished? Well, I think that there are five clusters of busy roads where bad things happen.

Which means that we have to get good at five areas of project delivery with innovation projects.



Stakeholder views come first

1. The safest way to make an idea turn into money is to make sure that the person who will pay for the idea gets the solution they want. This means that even before creativity you have to have a clear stakeholder focus and 'interrogate' the stakeholder for insights into the outcomes of the project. In innovation projects this step is absolutely critical. So the process of creating the opportunity relies on very effective stakeholder engagement.

I'll skip the next two steps- except to point out how important they are. (This means you'll still have to buy the book!)

4. Making it possible is a process of de-risking. Innovation projects should be 'chunked' to a size where they can deliver quickly and learning can be gained to determine how best to grow the benefits. Without this they can be enormous, elegant solutions which don't work at all unless they are all completely constructed (remember

many of the dot com e-commerce sites). So now you see why: And the only one which managed to get past that is such a huge project that it is unlikely to be completed for the next four years!

5. A final hurdle to trip you up is the fact that it is unlikely that an innovation project is going to be painting-by-numbers. It's most likely to be first a quest or fog and then often subsequently a movie (Think about Edison trying to record sound. First the **quest** to record it and then after that the **movie** of creating the phonograph records and the music industry!). Have you selected the right method? Leader? Team?



So there we have it. Our rabbits have made it safely across the city. Not one squished because we trained them and toughened them up by being creative on issues we knew stakeholders really valued, found the dangerous cross-roads, and by aligning them to our goals, making sure they were every key stakeholder's baby, making them more

likely to deliver quickly, and using the right project approach we helped them safely across.

Some help required!

I'm looking for a title for my next book on making innovation work. So far I've come up with; 'Making Innovation Work,' 'Kissing Frogs,' 'To find your prince...' 'Kissing Toads,' 'Stop Kissing Frogs!' 'Making Dreams Live,' 'Turning Ideas Into Money,' 'New Alchemy,' 'The New Alchemists,' and 'innovation' (trendy lower case). Do you have any ideas? Preferences? The prize, if I use your new suggested title or for one person out of the hat if I use one of mine you like, is a one hour flight in my Robinson Helicopter. Tempted to give me your idea or tell me which one of mine you like?

In the meantime be sure to order a copy of Perfect Projects.

Delivering projects in the complex New World is one of Dr. Eddie Obeng's passions. If you want to make sure that in delivering your project, even when you are on your own, you are not alone - subscribe to allchange.com the on-line club for project leaders, programme managers and change agents.

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