

Understand what the word "**Innovation**" actually means - and the rest is easy!

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I wonder how many people have tried to define what the term innovation actually means.

For many, especially governments, the word is used as a descriptor for the entire process of commercialization, often described as "from idea to market". Government initiatives to promote innovation are aimed at enhancing outcome across the spectrum of these activities.

For some other groups, innovation is about new initiatives with innovation being described as big "I", for major initiatives, to small "i" for incremental changes to existing products, processes and services.

Other types of innovation are called "incremental", being small changes or "*disruptive*" where the change is of great significance or impact. For example the introduction of television many years ago may have been disruptive in that it changed life styles, whereas the introduction of colour compared with black and white television may have been just incremental. Obviously the introduction of the personal computer could be called disruptive.

Many consultants "talk-up" innovation and many could well be accused of creating confusion. They talk about innovation being undertaken in an environment requiring the alignment of people to the corporate goal, and implementing "global" top down strategies and 360 degree balanced score card reviews and the like.

Now all of the above may sound very good, but how does it deliver real innovation value, and how does it change the way people think and work? Does it deliver to people simple tools that they can use at work the very next day? Sadly, it does not.

It is quite amazing, but if you give people simple tools that are easy to use and give them the opportunity to proffer their ideas without the fear of ridicule, you have the perfect opportunity for achieving innovation within your business; and it is really all very simple.

The dictionary defines the word innovate as "change" and innovation as the process of change. Once people understand and embrace this simple definition the rest is quite straight forward.

Of course we should all realise that innovation applies to everything we do, all products, services and process as well as perhaps even the way we lead our lives. The best definition of the word innovation is "**change which adds value**©". If we accept for a moment that this is a good definition, then the "call to action" for innovation is any means by which we can stimulate change, for the better, or to add value.

Just to reinforce the point of the need for change, here are a few interesting facts:

- The top 10% of electronics companies worldwide change 80% of their products every five years, such is their rate of innovation (have you ever seen the same model of SONY or Panasonic TV go five years unchanged?)
- Only General Electric survives from the original Dow Jones Industrial Average stock Index published in 1896.
- Of those listed on the Capital S&P 500 in 1957 only 74, or fewer than 15%, were there 40 years later
- “In the 1920’s the S & Poor’s index of 90 big US companies showed a turnover rate of around 1.5% a year, a new S & P member could expect to be there for 65 years. By 1998, turnover in the S&P 500 was almost 10% a year. Companies now have an average life span of no more than 10 years”

Think now for a moment and see if you can identify a product that has not changed at all in the past five years. Often when posed with this question people say “water”, or “honey”. How wrong they are. Water has undergone a complete rebirth in its packaging, additives and consumer perception. Honey, now has more flavours than ever and ever improving ways of being dispensed.

The message is clear, embrace innovation, drive change, or be ready to fall by the way side.

In recent years Roger La Salle, a professional engineer who has spent a life time in new product and business development, has developed what may be described by some as the ultimate innovation tool, a take home tool called “**Matrix Thinking**”© . It consists of just a few words in a single matrix drawing that will almost guarantee to provide the stimulation needed to drive innovation.

Just one of the many matrix thinking tools is the question of “*I Wish*”. This is far more powerful than brainstorming. For example, take any product, process or service and think for a moment about it, then make one wish of a what you would like to change about it to make it better, or to add value – voila – innovation on demand!

Take a glass of beer; what would you wish – that it would stay cold? Great, now develop the stay cold glass.

Matrix Thinking© has many such stimuli arranged in a grid drawing whose intersections inspire creative thoughts to drive innovation and the search for new opportunities. When most people have experience in the use of the Matrix Thinking© tools they usually manage to come up with creative and inventive solutions to common, but hitherto unsolved problems, **in less than 12 SECONDS**.

Roger La Salle, often referred to as Australia “*innovation guru*” is the creator of the “Matrix Thinking”™ technique and is a widely sought after international speaker on, Innovation, Opportunity, and business development. He is the author of three books, Director of a number of companies both in Australian and overseas and has been responsible for a number of successful technology start-ups. In 2005 Roger was appointed to the “Chair of Innovation” at the Queens University in Belfast. www.matrixthinking.com

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