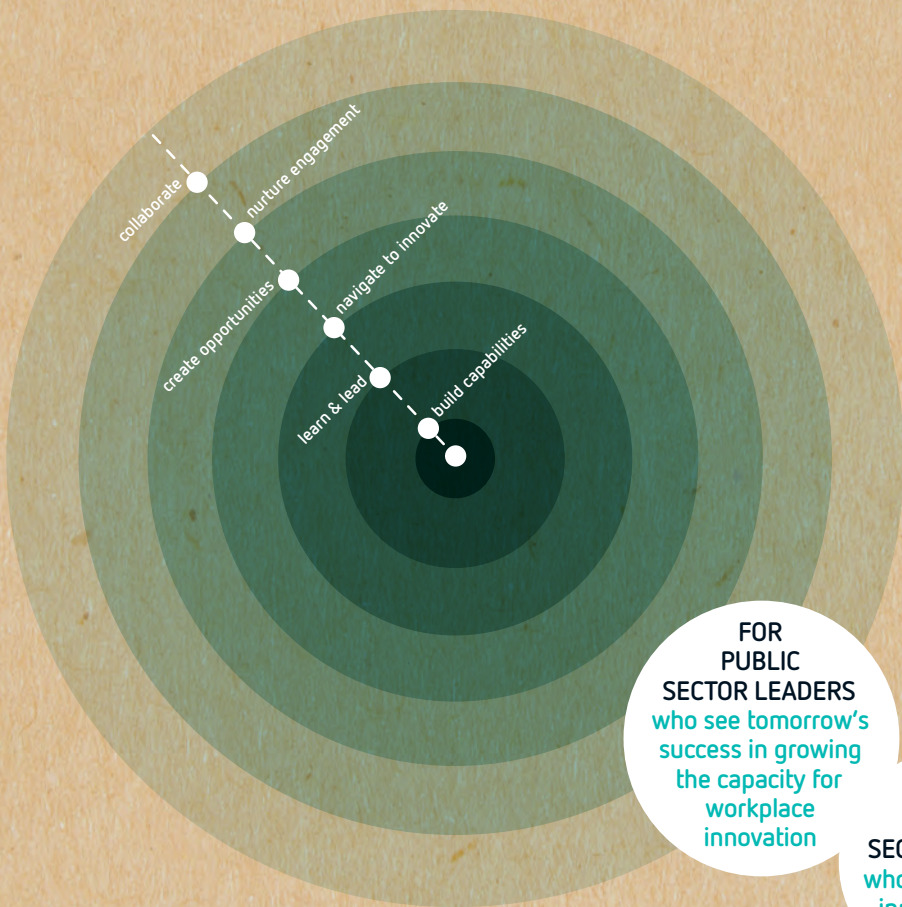


# 30 Great Ideas

BUILDING INNOVATION SKILLS  
AND CAPACITY FOR THE PUBLIC  
SERVICE PROFESSIONAL



FOR  
PUBLIC  
SECTOR LEADERS  
who see tomorrow's  
success in growing  
the capacity for  
workplace  
innovation

FOR  
PUBLIC  
SECTOR STAFF  
who want to be  
innovative in  
their work

— ED BERNACKI —  
The Idea Factory

# 30 Great Ideas

## BUILDING INNOVATION SKILLS AND CAPACITY FOR THE PUBLIC SERVICE PROFESSIONAL

FOR  
PUBLIC  
SECTOR LEADERS  
who see tomorrow's  
success in growing  
the capacity for  
workplace  
innovation

FOR  
PUBLIC  
SECTOR STAFF  
who want to be  
innovative in  
their work

We are in a knowledge economy, and ideas are its currency. All Governments use knowledge to create value for the publics they serve. This is fuelled by a continual flow of ideas to meet today's challenges, and to invent solutions for tomorrow's challenges.

### All of us must nurture different types of ideas:

- Ideas to improve 'my' work – personal, informal, and often invisible to others
- Ideas to improve 'our' work – collaborating using more structured processes
- Ideas to invent 'new' solutions – deliberate initiatives to solve challenges facing the organisation
- Ideas to grow 'capacity' to innovate – investing to nurture this capacity to innovate in all staff within the organisation

The collection of 30 ideas, insights, and strategies is based on 15 years of public service innovation and strategy experience in Singapore, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the USA. They offer practical insights for being more innovative; a roadmap to understand the skills and knowledge to learn and use in our professional careers.

## Public Sector innovation ecosystem: role for all staff

### Staff – which skills and knowledge to innovate?

Most ideas come from staff working on everyday challenges. Invest in skills for solving problems and innovation, and create opportunities to solve current and future challenges.

### Managers – motivator, gate keeper or 'damager'?

Managers can enhance a culture of ideas ... or hinder it. Understand how to encourage ideas, knowing that people do not think alike. Managers must help staff manage ideas toward a result.

### Executives and Senior Managers – where is change needed?

Leaders must 'lead'. Their decisions shape a culture open to ideas. Communication is crucial to nurture a climate of trust, and the motive for staff to want to innovate.

## Bonus resources

Idea Factory education programs, innovation strategies, idea journals, and White Papers. The 100 Day Challenge to Build Your Capacity to Innovate translate the book into a strategy for teams and departments at any level of Government. It's an action plan. Many actions are easy and free, as they align Learning, HR and Internal Communication staff to support innovation.

ISBN 9780993910401



9 780993 910401

# 30 Great Ideas

BUILDING INNOVATION SKILLS  
AND CAPACITY FOR THE PUBLIC  
SERVICE PROFESSIONAL

*Insights and ideas for people who work in Public Service*

- *by*
- *Ed Bernacki, Innovationalist*
- *The Idea Factory™*

## Why the bumble bees?

Bees, our most important pollinating insects, aren't design to fly. If they stop flapping their wings they fall since they can't glide. Bees must work hard to create and keep the momentum they need to enrich everything they touch. They are good role models for innovators.



- *“Analysis and thought are critical to the recognition of a good*
- *idea, but they are not enough. They are a necessary condition*
- *not a sufficient condition. In the end, good ideas often come from*
- *instinctive flashes of insight. Often the best ideas are very simple.*
- *But when you have a good idea you know it with conviction even if*
- *other people do not recognise it”.*

- Former Prime Minister of New Zealand, Sir Geoffrey Palmer. How do you know a good idea when you see it?

- *“Just because something isn’t broken does not mean it*
- *can’t be improved”.*

- Andrew Demetriou, former CEO of Australian Football League (AFL)

- *“Innovation is more than Improvement. Continual*
- *improvement and innovation work hand in hand.*
- *Improvements are important but innovations are like a*
- *quantum improvement that breaks new ground to create value*
- *in new ways”.*

- Changing the Way We Think, Singapore Public Sector Innovation Guide

- *“Ideas are islands in a sea of mediocrity”.*
- From a Hawaiian style shirt given to Ed Bernacki by a
- workshop participant in New Zealand

# 30 Great Ideas

## BUILDING INNOVATION SKILLS AND CAPACITY FOR THE PUBLIC SERVICE PROFESSIONAL

Written by Ed Bernacki

This book is designed to prompt your thinking about building your capacity to innovate as individuals and teams.

© July 2016 by Ed Bernacki, The Idea Factory™

All rights reserved. Any reproduction of any part of this publication without the permission of Ed Bernacki is prohibited except in the case of brief quotations for articles or reviews of this book.

Good ideas are to be shared, not stolen!

Every effort has been made to ensure that this book is free from errors or omissions.

However, the writer, editor or publisher shall not accept responsibility for injury, loss or damage to any person acting or refraining from action as a result of the material in this book.

Published by the Idea Factory. Designed by Lia Rodriguez Romero.

30 Great Ideas: Building innovation skills and capacity  
for the Public Service professional Includes Index  
ISBN 978-0-9939104-0-1

1. Leadership in organisations. 2. Innovation in Public Sector. 3. Skills for innovation

# Contents: 30 Great Ideas

This is a practical resource written for Public Service professionals. It's a collection of 30 articles, case studies, and contributions based on personal projects and contacts. They range from local government in Ottawa to the Singapore Prime Minister's Office. This book will advance your journey toward being more innovative in the way you work.

Changing the way we think about innovation in the Public Sector .....	7
How to use this tool kit of ideas to grow your capacity to innovate.....	9
Section 1 - Changing The Way We Think .....	13
Innovation is a difficult concept to understand.....	14
1. Changing the way we think.....	15
2. Myths of innovation .....	17
3. What it takes to be innovative.....	18
4. Your tool kit for creating innovation.....	19
5. Golden Rules to foster creativity in our organisations .....	20
Section 2 - Develop Your Skills for Innovative Thinking.....	23
Skill development to build the capabilities of people to innovate.....	24
6. Generating ideas .....	28
7. Developing ideas.....	32
8. Judging ideas .....	34
9. Communicating and promoting ideas.....	36
10. Translating your ideas into actions .....	38
Create your Innovation Skills learning platform .....	40
The Art of Small Changes: Find your 15% .....	43
Section 3 - Innovation: Ensuring We Walk the Innovation Talk .....	45
How to talk about innovation – some tips from experience.....	46
11. How to think outside the box .....	47
12. Better or different: Which ideas are better? .....	50
13. Developing your ideas.....	52
14. I'll know a great idea when I see it! .....	54
15. Innovation: Learning from Australia's Aboriginal history.....	57
16. Collaborating: Using the brains to storm a creative problem.....	59
17. Every organisation need an innovationalist.....	64

Section 4 - Do People Think Alike? Harnessing Cognitive Diversity .....	67
A Dangerous idea if we want innovative organisations.....	68
18. Cognitive Diversity: A case where informed discrimination may be useful.....	69
19. Do your training and management programs assume people think alike? .....	72
20. Creating awareness of cognitive diversity in Government .....	75
We want people to have a good attitude! .....	77
Section 5 - Leading Innovation: Where Does Your Organisation Need New Ideas? .....	79
A test for leadership and innovation.....	80
Leading Innovation. No simple formula for innovation .....	81
Managing for Innovation Self Audit .....	85
21. Leaders act on flashes of inspiration and discovery.....	86
Designing your Innovative Strategy .....	89
Case Study: Singapore Ministry of Defence / Air Force.....	90
Case Study: Leading Creativity: Communication Security Establishment.....	91
Case Study: How to Ensure an Innovative Program Survives and Thrives.....	92
Case Study ComSuper: Creating your Idea Management Process.....	94
22. Your Wakeup Call: Are you part of the solution or the problem?.....	96
23. Innovating HR: Forget software, innovate how we manage people.....	98
24. Innovation, change, and risk: Are you preaching the wrong message?.....	101
25. Lean thinking in the Public Sector. City of Melbourne.....	105
Case Study: Melbourne becoming a 'Lean' city .....	107
26. The Best Tactics for ideas. Productive staff idea meetings.....	108
27. The Best Tactics for ideas. Harnessing the suggestions of staff .....	110
28. The Best Tactics for ideas. An in-house idea factory or innovation lab.....	113
29. The Best Tactics for ideas. A new technology for notebooks and journal .....	115
30. The Best Tactics for ideas. Staff conferences and idea fairs.....	117
References, Notes, and Quotes .....	120
Becoming a Public Sector Idea Factory!.....	125



# CHANGING THE WAY WE THINK

## about innovation in the Public Sector

The Singapore Government created a national innovation skills program to build the capacity of the Public Service to innovate. I was asked to write the innovation guide to support this program. Its title was, *‘Changing the way we think,’* and opened with, “The Public Service is building a culture of innovation. By doing so, we create new strengths and capabilities for the future – but it means changing the way we think in some ways.” The skills framework did not prescribe a problem solving process or tool. It was a learning platform of core innovation skills and knowledge. This was in 2001.

In 2015, the Australian Public Service Commission ‘State of the Service Report’ stated most agencies, “...had not yet identified the knowledge and skills that their workforce needed to support innovation.” This is a problem, one that is common at different levels of public administration.

There is one truth about innovation.

*Talking about innovation and expecting that this makes you innovative is as effective as talking about physical fitness and expecting this makes you fit.*

We are doing a lot of talking at the moment.

To make sense of innovation, consider George Orwell’s book, *Nineteen Eighty Four*. He introduced the concept of ‘doublethink’ to describe words which have two contrary meanings. Doublethink is a good word. Some say innovation is the successful implementation of new ideas in any aspect of an organisation. This is useful, but it is not sufficient to say that implementing an idea is innovation. You need to see the results as well. Consider definitions often used by academics and consultants:

Incremental innovation: *minor improvements to existing services or processes.*

Radical innovation: *fundamentally new ways of doing things.*

If you look to the work on *continuous improvement*, you will see this definition:

Continuous improvement: *minor improvements to existing services or processes.*

Why do we call *improvement* a form of *innovation*? Good question. Calling something *innovation* does not make it *innovation*. Do not underestimate the value of improving the way we work. Most ideas in the Public Service will be improvements to our processes and services.

I suggest you ignore the jargon and focus on what counts. We need new ideas in all aspects of our organisations to ensure we deliver high quality services. We also need new ideas to engage the people who work in them. This book is a collection of 30 articles divided into five sections. Section One is a jargon free presentation of some innovation concepts from work in Singapore. This definition captures the essence of improvement and innovation:

*“Innovation is More Than Improvement. Continual improvement and innovation work hand in hand. Improvements are important, but innovations are like a quantum improvement that breaks new ground to create value in new ways”.*

This book has many ideas to prompt your thinking. Its five sections focus on building capacity to innovate:

1. Changing the Way We Think: what does it mean to be innovative?
2. Develop Your Skills for Innovative Thinking: innovation skills framework.
3. Ensuring We Walk the Innovation Talk: how be to innovative, and how to talk about being innovative.
4. Do People Think Alike? Harnessing the cognitive diversity of people to shape ideas.
5. Leading Innovation: Where do we need new ideas? What’s our innovation strategy?

Leadership of Public Service innovation requires that we tackle two challenges:

1. *Public Service Innovations*: developing and using an expertise to solve the current and future challenges of serving the public.
2. *Building Capacity for Public Service Innovation*: develop the leadership, collaboration, and innovation skills of staff, managers, and leaders to achieve the first objective: creating solutions to tackle the challenges of serving the public.

At a personal level, we face the same challenges, whether you manage your desk or an entire Department:

1. We need to develop our skills to solve problems, make decisions, and manage change.
2. We need to develop our skills to collaborate effectively with people who think like us, and who do not think like us.

The broader your tool kit for solving problems, the more innovative your results. Challenge yourself to learn new skills.

We need people who can solve problems and shape new initiatives to improve and innovate. We need people who can champion new ideas. We need innovationalists.

Now, it’s up to you.

Ed Bernacki

# HOW TO USE THIS TOOL KIT OF IDEAS to grow your capacity to innovate

This book gives you access to many insights from working in public service in various countries. This book is designed to be used in different ways.

- ★ Staff and managers can understand innovation by reading Sections 1, 2, and 3.
- ★ All staff can improve their skills to collaborate by reading Section 4.
- ★ Section 5 provides recommendations for managers and executives.

## Public Sector White Papers

It was not possible to explore many ideas in this book in depth. More ideas and case studies will be packaged as White Papers.

1. Public Service Staff Conferences: explore the idea of half-day staff conferences for collaboration and innovation.
2. Innovation skills to build capabilities and capacity to innovate
3. Building the capacity to innovate in our organisations: facts, myths, snake oil, and straight talk on Public Sector innovation

## 100 Day Challenge to Build Your Capacity to Innovate

As a leader, you must keep one eye on the horizon to see where you need to lead your team or organisation, and the other eye on the ground to guide people towards this future. You can download the *100 Day Challenge to Build Your Capacity to Innovate* which turns

this book into an action plan to help with your journey. These actions and projects are like pieces in an innovation puzzle. Many have no direct costs: they align internal staff through an understanding and application of improvement and innovation.

Ed Bernacki and a team of professionals are available to help with the execution of this 100 Day Challenge.

### *Day One: Management Team Commitment*

- ★ Have the senior executive team discuss how it will lead this '100 Day Challenge.' Clarify the commitment to the process.

### *Week One Audit your capacity and capabilities to innovate*

- ★ Review the current understanding of innovation to create a strategy to focus on the first stage to build your organisational capacity to innovate.
- ★ Use the 100 Day Challenge model to shape your strategy. Commit to its implementation.

### *Month One: Building the foundations*

- ★ Begin with the easy and free tactics, such as idea meetings (many in this book).
- ★ Align internal communication and learning teams.
- ★ Use initial events to engage a larger group of staff to help lead efforts to improve the organisation.

### *Month Two: Building sophistication*

- ✳ Add idea management processes, training and other internal services. Use problem solving models to design approaches to solve customer issues.
- ✳ Develop values for improvement and innovation. Identifying longer term capacities.

### *Month Three: Engaging the wider organisation*

- ✳ Wider launch of idea meetings, problem solving processes, and internal training programs.
- ✳ Engage more staff groups on the challenges of the organisation.

### *Month Four: Review your progress*

- ✳ After 100 days, various projects and initiatives will be underway.

While this is framed for use in 100 days, it can be 200 days. Any and every initiative is good. Review investments of time and resources. Step back to see how this can be improved and enhanced. Use the same process to plan for the next three months.

## **Public Sector Navigator Notebook**

*Start small. See results. Notebooks are a still a useful technology!*

The Idea Factory created a new generation of notebooks called *Navigator Notebooks* that direct our attention on managing ideas, collaboration, and creative thinking. It's a notebook with 16 editorial pages to inform and inspire staff on the job. Look around your offices. This notebook is an innovation. Editorial themes include:

- ✳ *What it takes to find new ideas, finding more and bigger ideas*
- ✳ *Strategies for promoting your ideas*
- ✳ *Resilience – how to avoid being killed by the creativity killers*

- ✳ *How to make notes, capture ideas, and sketch your ideas*
- ✳ *Not another meeting! Turn meetings into idea factory*
- ✳ *Collaboration – working with people who do not think like you*

This is the best investment you can make to support staff on the job. Over 60,000 Navigator Guides and Journals have been sold, many to the Public Sector.

## **Idea Factory Training Navigator**

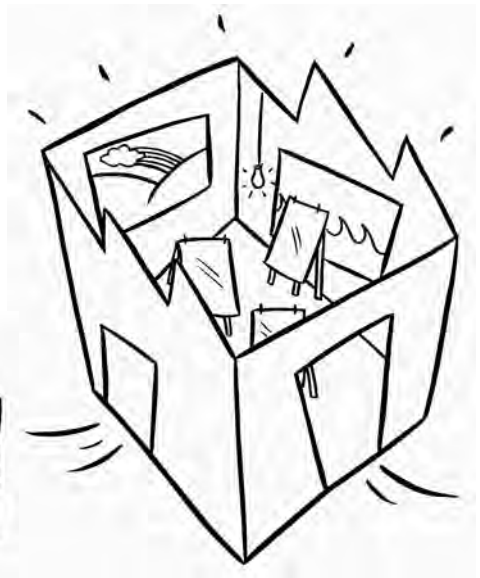
For the first time, the official Idea Factory Training Navigator Guide, 'Wow! That's a Great Idea!' is available for purchase. This Navigator has been used in many training programs and education courses. This 80-page resource expands on Innovation Skills (Section 2). Managers can use its content for in-house workshops. This can be customised and branded in volumes of 200 or more.

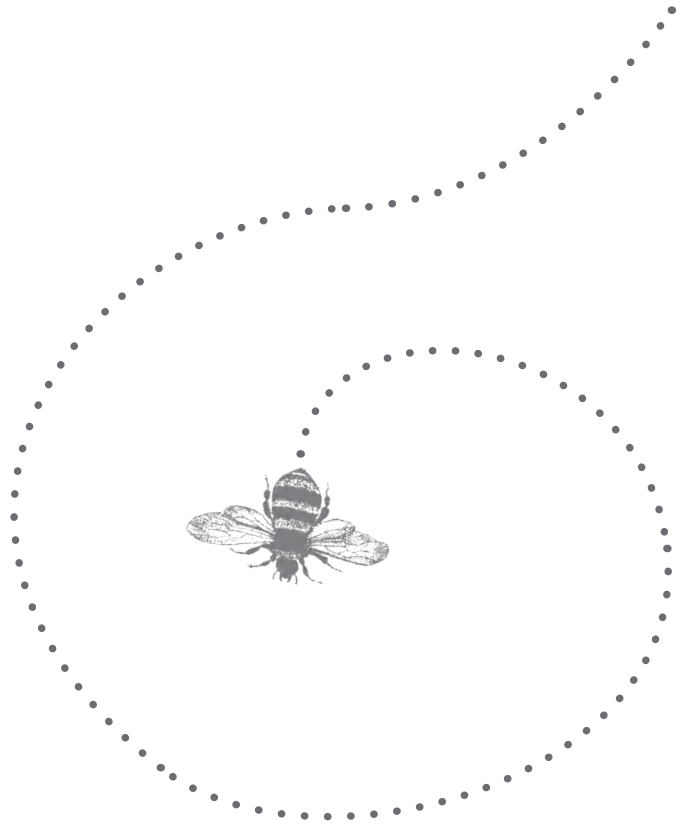
Resources available from

[www.PSIdeaFactory.com](http://www.PSIdeaFactory.com).

For specific questions or information

contact [info@PSIdeaFactory.com](mailto:info@PSIdeaFactory.com)





# 1

# CHANGING the way we THINK

*In 2001, the Singapore Prime Minister's Office launched a national public service innovation skills program. It was sophisticated, elegant, and simple; build the capacity of the public servants to innovate by developing five skill areas.*

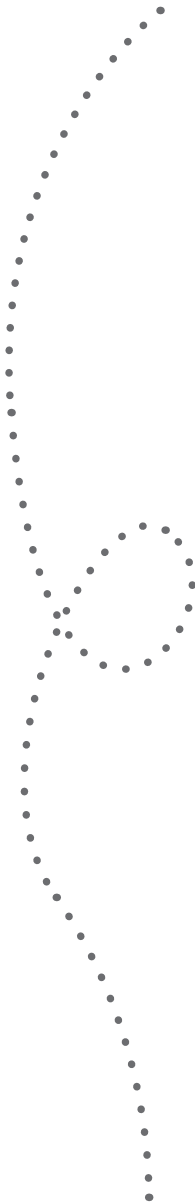
*Ed Bernacki collaborated with the Singapore PMO to write the innovation guide that went to 20,000 managers. It was called, 'Changing the Way We Think'.*

*Section one seeks to tackle a wicked problem with Public Sector innovation – the poor understanding of what it means to be innovative.*

## ARTICLES

1. What it Means to be Innovative
2. Myths of Innovation
3. What it Takes To Be Innovative
4. Five Golden Rules to Foster Creativity in Our Organisations
5. Your Tool Kit for Creating Innovation

# INNOVATION is a difficult concept to UNDERSTAND



It is easy to say something is innovative, but when you try to express what makes something innovative, it can be very difficult. To explain this is particularly hard when it comes to public services.

Innovation involves change. Yet not all change is innovative. Some change leads to improvements in the way we do things. Some change leads to new ways of working. If this new way produces positive results well beyond what is expected, we may consider this as innovation.

Change, too, is a fluid concept. Some say people resist change. This is not useful. All people accept some change. Some people also resist change. Research says we resist change that we do not understand or believe in. We happily accept change that fits our way of thinking – and we have accepted much change throughout our careers.

There is a useful lesson here to understand how people change.

This section can help you better understand innovation. Much of this comes from projects in Singapore that have helped those in public service develop a personal understanding of what it means to be innovative. It is always going to seem slippery. Use this section to create a personal understanding of what innovation means for you. Perhaps start with....

**For me, being innovative means** .....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



# 1. CHANGING the way we THINK

*These words are taken directly from 'Changing the Way We Think.' The first five ideas build an understanding of innovation and what it means to be innovative.*

“The Public Service is building a culture of innovation. By doing so, we create new strengths and capabilities for the future – but it means changing the way we think in some ways. This handbook starts your journey”.

## What it means to be innovative

Creativity is about finding new and original ideas that solve problems and create opportunities. But to bridge the gap between creative ideas and results takes action. That's when innovative thinking is needed most – acting on our ideas and making them happen. That's innovation!

## This may mean...

- ✱ Taking new perspectives to our daily work.
- ✱ Doing things differently; doing different things.
- ✱ Focusing on finding ideas and acting on them.
- ✱ Striving to create value in new ways.

## We must also broaden our understanding of innovation.

The Public Service is known for its efficiency and effectiveness. Going forward by building a culture of innovation ensures we will find new ways to create greater value for the organisation, its people, and those we serve.

## What it takes to be Innovative in Public Service

An innovative Public Service continuously innovates at all levels, in every sphere of activity as a way of life. As such, managers and individual officers need to believe:

- ✱ I AM open to new ways of thinking and working.
- ✱ I CAN create new ideas.
- ✱ I HAVE the confidence and skills to act my ideas.

Public Service innovation is not new but it is crucial for the future. We must serve the nation and provide innovative solutions to the challenges we face.



### **Innovation Takes Many Forms.**

Some innovations are technical and scientific. Others enhance our processes, services and policies. All result from adopting an “opportunity seeking” attitude.

### **Innovation Involves Everyone.**

Innovation does not need a qualification or a job title. It requires an open mind and the desire to act. Anyone can be innovative thinker.

### **Innovation Is Not Creativity.**

Innovation builds on creativity. Creativity helps us find great ideas. Innovation focuses on acting on these ideas to get results.

### **Innovation is More Than Improvement.**

Continual improvement and innovation work hand in hand. Improvements are important but innovations are like a quantum improvement that breaks new ground to create value in new ways.

### **Innovation Starts With Ideas.**

Ideas can be fragile until they are well developed and communicated. Ideas go through stages – from insights into action plans.

## 2. MYTHS of INNOVATION

*This section was conceived to stop the excuses given to explain why focusing on innovation cannot work in the Public Sector.*



### **Innovation Cannot Live in a Large Organisation**

A large, bureaucratic organisation with chains of command and levels of authority would seem like the last place in which innovation could thrive. However, many large organisations are innovative in the way they solve problems, create opportunities, and deal with change. The spirit of creativity lives in every organisation. The emphasis is on shaping the culture to be open to new thinking. Any organisation that is open to new ideas, that encourages its people to seek better solutions to its challenges, that is confident to experiment, and that encourages and rewards innovative ideas will be “innovative” in servicing its customers.



### **Innovation Cannot Be Managed**

Innovation can be managed. The very essence of all innovation is people using their creative potential to develop new ideas. The degree of motivation that drives people to want to innovate relates to their perception of the organisational climate around them. People know whether it's safe to challenge the existing ways of doing things. It's up to the organisation to create such a climate. Management must shape an environment that's open to new thinking and based on trust. They must protect those who raise new ideas because innovation takes a culture based on trust not control.



### **Innovation Is Not for Everyone**

It is myth that creativity is a gift that a few people have. The potential resides in every public officer. While an individual may not produce radical innovation every day, it is natural to think of better ways to do things. We can unleash this natural creative spirit to make innovation second nature in the Public Service. Training can enhance our creativity by giving us new tools to understand the innovation process and how to use it. Innovation is relevant and even crucial to the Public Sector. The challenge is to focus innovation into the areas of services, processes, and policies.



### **Innovation Cannot Be Measured**

It is said that innovation is the act of *thinking outside of the box*. If so, then a system of measurement is the box that limits its range and the lid that cuts off its creative oxygen. The problem is not with measurement, but with the effective communication of the measurement. We measure to understand our own progress and the challenges we've satisfied. It's not to penalise, but to enable through continual improvement of our means of facilitation. Innovation can be measured if the purpose is to remove the barriers that hinder it and to nurture those factors that encourage it.

# 3. WHAT it Takes To Be INNOVATIVE

It was once said that necessity is the mother of all invention. The reality is that the Public Service can't wait for necessity to dictate the degree of innovation in our organisation. We must all contribute. To shape an innovative culture, you have to be diligent, open, and involved.

## **Diligence**

To produce lasting innovation, be deliberate and rigorous in your efforts. Create a vision of what your work, team, or department would look like if it were highly innovative. Take a broader perspective on your work. Many opportunities stare at us daily but we fail to notice.

## **Openness**

All actions and decisions impact the culture of the organisation. An open and supportive environment challenges and encourages people to collaborate with co-workers, and to try new ways of working.

## **Involvement**

Innovation is a hands-on process. You must be involved with training and using your new skills. People want to create. Some find big ideas while others enhance existing ideas.

*Is creativity some obscure, esoteric art form?*

*Not on your life. It's the most practical thing a business person can employ. Merely to let your imagination run riot, to dream unrelated dreams, to indulge in graphic acrobatics, and verbal gymnastics is not being creative. The creative person has harnessed his imagination.*

**Bill Bernbach, DDB Needham Worldwide.**

# 4. Your TOOL KIT for Creating INNOVATION

To build our innovation capacity we must focus on creating a culture that supports new thinking. Our fundamental belief is that everyone is creative. Our challenge is to unleash the creative spirit inside each of us. More importantly, we have to pay attention to our training needs across the entire innovation process.

On top of risk management, project management, mentoring and coaching, several new competencies are critical to building the innovation capacity of an individual. Managers and staff can contribute to a more innovative culture by developing their capacity to innovation. These competencies are the foundation vital to the innovation process.

**1 Idea Generation:** Innovation starts with finding new ideas when and where they are needed. We can use tools that create new ways of thinking that help us find new ideas.

**2 Idea Harvesting and Developing:** Our first ideas are often raw and need to be nurtured. We can enhance, combine, or connect them to shape more powerful ideas. We focus on the weak areas of our ideas to transform average ideas into great ones.

**3 Idea Evaluation:** By evaluating ideas we find those new ideas capable of creating the results we want.

**4 Idea Marketing and Proposing:** To get commitment to any new idea takes

communication. Learning to sell your idea is as important as finding it in the first place.

**5 Idea Implementing:** Transforming our ideas into action plans and results is our goal.

**6 Team Learning:** Every time we use the innovation process, we gain new skills and conviction in our personal understanding and skills as a team.

## The Singapore Hand of Innovation

*The Singapore Government explained the concept of skills and the metaphor of its Hand of Innovation.*

*“The Hand of Innovation is based on the metaphor of an open hand that is ready to take action upon ideas. It also speaks of the underlying attitude of openness and responsiveness, critical in fostering innovation in organisations. The five fingers each represent five competencies needed for innovation at the individual level.*

*“As with the fingers of a hand, each competency is unique, yet interdependent with the others in order to function effectively. The sixth competency, “Team Learning,” forms the palm of the hand that holds together and synergizes the other five competencies, bringing forth the message that creativity and innovation is best as a team effort and not just an individual one.”*

# 5. GOLDEN RULES

## to foster creativity in organisations

### 1. Listen to people

*Listen to people when they comment, criticise, offer suggestions, or ask questions.*

Respond positively. There is a belief that for every customer who complains about your service, another nine stays silent. Do not silence the one who dares to speak up. The same applies for staff who offer ideas.

Sometimes it is very hard to keep your composure if someone is complaining. Understand where their anger and frustration is coming from. The best thing you can do is to listen, understand their concerns, and thank them for the comments. Don't be patronizing or defensive. Many tremendous opportunities have been wasted with comments such as, "What's wrong with the way we do it around here?"

### 2. Seek out idea people

*Seek out employees, suppliers, customers, and others who are idea people.*

Develop networks of people who can contribute a wide variety of perspectives to your business. Look for enthusiastic people who are prepared to think about important issues and make decisions. Employees or customers who challenge the status quo are not the enemy; they are your best allies. They are the source of your new insights and ideas.

### 3. Respect ideas

*Support and respect ideas that are generated. Give credit where and when it is due.*

We want to generate ideas that get results.

Not every idea is workable from the start. Be positive and support the initiative. People who make suggestions are taking a personal risk. Sometimes they may not be able to explain it very well. Don't trivialize them. Encourage them.

### 4. Be committed

*Be committed to the process of finding ideas for the ongoing success of your business and its people.*

The Idea Factory and all other innovation and business strategies end up being 'just another fad' if they do not become part of the culture of the organisation. The Idea Factory is designed to produce results that are measurable and tangible. Sometimes the best result may be a better understanding of a particular aspect of the business. Other times it may be a new service that you can launch the next day. Be committed to the process.

### 5. Give ideas

*Give ideas generously to others knowing that you will be rewarded in turn.*

If you see an opportunity that a customer, supplier, or anyone else could use, take the initiative to tell them. The same applies for problems. Encourage ongoing discussions. At the very least, you may develop a supporter who can refer business to you.

*“The English language does not distinguish between idea creativity and artistic creativity. If you create something which was not there before, you are creative. Because of this failure of language, people are reluctant to accept that idea creativity is a learnable skill. Once we have separated idea creativity from artistic creativity, then we can set about learning, and develop the skills of learning for new ideas.”*

*Edward de Bono*



### **Your challenge: practice creativity!**

Mozart is said to have studied and practiced music for 10 years before he became competent and confident to create music. Whether you are Director or a junior assistant, how will you practice creativity to develop your skills to be innovative? What will you do to practice your creativity?

- ❶ Set some targets to find new ideas in all aspects of your life.
- ❷ Use your idea skills to prompt your search for new insights and solutions. Convert your insights into ideas. Perhaps a few will become innovations.





# 2

## Develop your **SKILLS** for innovative thinking

*We're in the age of the knowledge economy, and ideas are its currency.*

*Knowledge drives our economy. And what drives knowledge is our ability to find new ideas and apply them to the challenges we face.*

*These skills underpin your ability to create and manage ideas. These pages represent a brief graphic overview of each skill.*

*This is your skills tool kit to build your capacity to innovate.*

### **ARTICLES**

6. Generating Ideas
7. Developing Your Ideas
8. Judging Your Ideas
9. Promoting Your Ideas
10. Translating Your Ideas Into Actions

# Skill DEVELOPMENT to build the CAPACITY of people to INNOVATE

Perhaps the most overlooked aspect of Public Sector innovation is the opportunity to enhance the skills of people to innovate. When the Singapore Prime Minister's Office launched its innovation program, public servants could take two to three days of training in each of these five key skills from the Civil Service College. Regardless of someone's previous experience or skills, training in these competencies facilitates a greater degree of success in the search for ideas that solve problems and ideas that lead to new opportunities. Here are definitions to start.

## Skills

The competencies form the core foundation that will enable people to progress through the innovation process.

## Attributes and Behaviours

You may read about attributes and behaviours of people deemed to be creative. Risk taking or thinking outside the box are often highlighted as attributes. The key is to recognise the differences between attributes and skills, something you can enhance through training.

## Tools

Tools for problem solving, improvement, and innovation are no different to the tools used by tradespeople. You must understand the tools of the job. Tools prompt new thinking in new ways. They range from Six Thinking Hats to improve decision making, to Idea Boxes to create original concepts, to

design thinking to solve problems, to TRIZ, a Russian problem solving toolkit that all technical people should study.

## Innovation Processes

All initiatives to shape new solutions follow an innovation process. The terms will differ but the overall idea management process is basically the same.

1. **Insight:** We may see a problem that needs a solution or see the potential for some type of change to create value.
2. **Idea:** This insight leads to the formation of new ideas. Many tools can expand the scope of ideas we create.
3. **Opportunity:** Having an idea is the first step; developing this idea requires skills for developing, judging, and communicating an idea. Our goal is to expand the idea to its fullest potential.
4. **Action:** Once we have a concept worth pursuing, we begin to put the idea into practice. We can create a pilot program, an experiment, a prototype, samples, or the systems to implement the new idea. This effort is more structured and project orientated. Often our first attempt identifies flaws or weaknesses. This is normal. We then modify our ideas to respect what we have learned by moving forward.
5. **Diffusion / Distribution:** Once the prototype or trials have proven successful, a new broader strategy expands the use of the idea across an organisation or to those who can benefit from it.

## Collaboration

Underpinning the success of all of these efforts is an overriding focus on improving the way we collaborate. Many organisations use some form of behaviour or cognitive style assessment to help people work together more effectively. Section 4 explores cognitive diversity. This focus on skills should be matched with an understanding of thinking styles to help people recognise that they will apply their skills in different ways and likely create different types of ideas.

## Creating Opportunities for Ideas

Many departments create opportunities for new ideas. The Bank of Canada hosted an Ideas Expo. Singapore Ministry of Defence hosts a PRIDE event annually. Many departments have an idea suggestion program. There are many informal ways to create opportunities. Managers can host weekly ideas meetings to seek ideas. Staff can be encouraged to try new approaches.

## Innovation starts with Leadership

Leaders must lead. This can be hard to do. Some find many reasons for delaying or ignoring ideas. Innovating the way we work and the design of our services is not possible if we do not make a decision to change something. The question leaders must address when the thought of innovation seems cloudy with many pressures impacting your time is this – is doing nothing a better option than doing something to move forward? Sometimes, the right decision is to do nothing new.

## Why a focus on innovation skills is important

The Australian Public Service Commission publishes a 'State of the Service Report' to review how the Australian Public Sector contributes to meeting strategic goals and

addressing the Government's priorities. The 2015 Report\* shows that the current understanding of innovation and innovation skills is weak. I believe would be similar at most levels of public service, and in different countries.

*"...agencies reported that practices to encourage and support innovation were in use across part of the organisation. The majority of agencies, however, indicated that to meet organisational requirements in the next three years, they required agency-wide adoption of practices to encourage and support innovation.*

*"...most agencies had not yet identified the knowledge and skills that their workforce needed to support innovation. Some agencies, however, were addressing the issue."*

This highlights a weak understanding of the core strategies and tactics for innovation. I am deeply troubled by the final point.

In 2001, I worked with the Singapore Government to help launch a national innovation skills program, part of the PS21 change program. It started with this knowledge as a foundation, and built communication and training programs on this foundation. The lack of this core knowledge creates confusion:

- ✱ Between the concepts of innovation skills, behaviours, and attributes.
- ✱ Between tools (Six Thinking Hats, and various others) and problem solving processes (Design Thinking or brainstorming).
- ✱ Between improvement and innovation, and the related tools and processes.

Organisational leaders must answer these questions to build a capacity to innovate:

1. What knowledge and innovation skills should all staff know or have

2. How will staff get this knowledge and skill?

(\*Source: 2015 State of the Service Report, page 38. [www.stateoftheservice.apsc.gov.au](http://www.stateoftheservice.apsc.gov.au). For more information on innovation skills, see [www.PSideFactory.com](http://www.PSideFactory.com). Link to: Training, or Leadership, linking to White Papers.)

## Design Thinking – the ‘new’ thing

Design thinking is the latest reincarnation of problem solving engaging the Public Sector. It is used as a way to improve services and products in the public and private sectors.

Design thinking, along with continuous improvement, innovation and lean, offer useful ways to solve our challenges. The differences are more style than substance. Design thinking has its own jargon (human centered design, wicked problems) and a process: *empathize, define, ideate, prototype and test*.

What’s the next new thing? Behavioral Insights is now popular. “Deliverology” is a toolkit from the UK to reform public services. (See, ‘*How to Run a Government So that Citizens Benefit and Taxpayers Don’t Go Crazy*’ by Michael Barber). Radical Efficiency is about public service innovations that deliver better outcomes at significantly lower cost.

What all problem solving processes have in common is that they prompt us to act. Some say we must, *innovate or die*. Some people see the risk of innovation as failure. There is a bigger risk: continuing to deliver a level of service which sooner or later becomes *acceptable mediocrity*.

## Problem solving is the foundation

Everything starts by developing more skills for solving problems. One study from the 1960’s found that executives often get

the definition of the problem wrong the first time. Little has changed. Our first perceptions of a problem are rarely accurate. Wicked problems are ill-defined or unknown at the start of the process.

The term *human centered problem solving* starts the process by focusing on the user or customer to explore how they are experiencing the problem. This way of thinking is like an anthropologist. They look at the world around them and see, feel or experience what others miss. What is obvious in time is not always obvious at first.

Design Thinking uses divergent and convergent thinking. We diverge to explore different, unique, or even crazy options to solve a problem until we start to converge toward a final solution. These approaches come from the 1950’s work by Alex Osborn. (See Idea 16).

My objective in this introduction is to ensure we see value in all approaches. Regardless of your toolkit, a foundation of core skills grows your capacity to innovate. Use the following section as a framework for a *personal innovation skills learning plan*.

# WHAT do you need to LEARN?

## What is important to you to make your contribution to your organisation more innovative?

1. A better understanding of what it means to be innovative.
2. Making more effective use of my time to allow for more innovative ideas.
3. Better ways to 'brainstorm' to look for new ideas.
4. Better ways to develop ideas before we judge or discredit them.
5. Better ways to manage ideas so they don't get lost or forgotten.

## Team Issues

6. More understanding that we solve problems in different ways.
7. Making our meetings more open to new ideas.
8. Better ways to deal with criticisms that often arise with new ideas.
9. More help with tools or techniques to collaborate more effectively.

## Opportunities to Innovate

10. More time to talk about the problems or challenges we are facing.
11. More support from my peers at work when it comes to acting on new ideas.
12. More recognition for the ideas I come up with.
13. More support from my superiors when it comes to acting on new ideas.

Set some personal learning challenges that you can consider when you read this book.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

## 6. GENERATING IDEAS – new or renewed

Many great ideas already exist in our organisations. They are in the heads of staff, customers, or even suppliers. The first stage of innovation is to get these ideas out of people's heads and onto paper. These can be very insightful and useful. You can then generate totally new and original ideas.

### Three sources of ideas:

- 1 Copy them – you see an idea and use it without rethinking the idea.
- 2 Imitate them – you see an idea and adapt the idea to your situation.
- 3 Create them – you see an opportunity to do something new and then create the idea.

### Stages for generating ideas

- 1 Define your challenge – what is the problem or opportunity you face? Define it. Describe the key issues, much like how a job description defines a job. Putting it in writing helps to clarify what is really at stake.
- 2 Can you solve the challenge on your own? Try.
- 3 Notice your assumptions and biases.
- 4 Jump to the first solution. Get the obvious ideas down that come to

mind. Now step back – how can you broaden the possible options?

- 5 Brainstorm further possibilities. Prompt yourself to consider how others might solve the problem. For example, if you work in marketing, how would Boy Scouts or the Church solve the problem?

### Steps for idea generating sessions

If you cannot solve the problem on your own, recruit some people to help. Get a diversity of thinking styles (Section 4), experience and expertise.

- 1 Get all of the obvious ideas written down quickly and concisely. Sometimes the group will see the best way from the very start. Usually not.
- 2 Use a brainstorming tool to push your thinking for more options, alternatives, and possibilities. You can:
  - \* **Combine Ideas** – look at the various ideas you have and combine them. What does the combined idea create or produce? What combinations have others missed?
  - \* **Connect Ideas** – define the broad 'problem' or issue and then force yourself to see it from another perspective. If you have a health care problem,

how would a technology business solve the broad problem? What would be different? If you work for a social cause, how would a beer company develop the promotion? Look for ideas from other contrasting situations, organisations and environments, and then connect them back to your ‘problem’.

★ **Enhance the Idea** – start with a picture of an idea in your imagination and then expand this. As such, the idea is like a picture on a puzzle. See the picture and then start to describe each piece that must be put into place. No detail at this stage; simply describe the piece. For example:

1. Start with your one sentence description of the idea.
2. Describe the features of the basic idea. How could it work?
3. What must be in place to make it work? Identify the pieces to act on the idea.
4. Any related revenue sources, savings, options, or partnership that we can make?

5. Develop each enhancement to create the overall picture of the successful idea in action.

③ Test your results by then asking: why is it a good idea? Have we developed it enough?

## **Brainstorming is not a team building exercise**

Idea generation sessions should be results driven to achieve your challenge. However, a lot of team building happens when you achieve your results as a team.

## **Rules for brainstorming**

Alex Osborn provided recommendations to improve the quality of our ideas by getting people to “harness their brains to storm through problems”.

- ★ Quantity of ideas is more important than quality – at first.
- ★ Don’t judge ideas until all ideas are raised.
- ★ Word your ideas in a positive and enthusiastic way.
- ★ Record and save ideas. Some of them will be gems!

## **Tools to generate ideas: Parallel Worlds**

There are many creativity books filled with useful tools that prompt you to generate original ideas. **Parallel Worlds** is a method to stimulate new ideas by looking at different “worlds” to see how they solved problems and created opportunities. Many people already use this approach on an intuitive level. This tool is provided as a sample of a tool or process you can use to generate original ideas during a brain storming session.

Case Study: A small company sells adventure walks and hikes in the Blue Mountains in Australia. It needed new themes for these hikes to help with marketing. When challenged, the vision of the three directors was to “*inform and educate*” people about the wilderness.

Using **Parallel Worlds** as a tool, they looked for a parallel world that also had a vision to *inform and educate* people. They created a list of about six ideas and then picked world of libraries. After using the process, they focused on the books that are found in a library such as book for... *history, geography, science fiction, health, how to, personal improvement, science, biology, mystery, romance, children’s books, large type books, and so on*. These were listed in Column One.

Elements of your World	Understanding of the Element	Force Fit this understanding to your world
Column One	Column Two	Column Three – how can this idea prompt a new idea for your solutions

At first they did not understand how to use this list. The understanding of books on these topics was a package of information or a story linked to the topic. Suddenly, one person had an insight: they could offer hikes based on themes for history, geography, science fiction, health, and so on. They became excited about the potential for a new range of hikes. By the end of this 10 minute session, they already had 20 good themes for hikes that never occurred to them. They decided to visit a library and create a huge list of themes.

### Public Sector Parallel Worlds

Here is a more detailed public service example to better explain the tool. Many staff were to retire in the following five years from this Canadian Department. The loss of wisdom, insight, and expertise for the operation of the Department was a problem. This staff group used Parallel Worlds to create ideas to *capture* this wisdom and expertise.

Step of the process	Use of the tool
1. Write down your challenge statement.	How can we <i>capture</i> the wisdom, insight and expertise of people who will retire to make it accessible to staff in the future?
2. Select the key word in your challenge: <i>capture</i> . Be emotive. Marketing could <i>inspire</i> . Advertising could <i>attract, entice or educate</i> .	<i>Capture</i>
3. Brainstorming 5 or 6 other worlds or environments where your key word applies. Choose one far from your own field and one that everyone in the room understands something about.	Capturing can exist in: <i>nature, policing, sports, photography, war, and communication</i> .
4. Pick one world: <i>photography</i> was selected; what is the world of photography and how does photography <i>capture</i> ? Generate a list in column one below.	Elements of photograph include: camera, photography studio, lens, video, film, staging, magazines, props, lighting, picture framing, picture libraries, and so on.
5. For each element, spend 20 seconds discussing it to understand what it means. This is a very important step as it provides insights for your new idea.	Fill in column two.



6. Force Fit – now force fit these insights to create ideas for your challenge. It takes creativity to complete column three. Do not be satisfied with ideas that you already have. Use the tool to find new ideas that others will have missed.	After exploring this concept, one person picked up on the idea of ‘video cameras’ which led the group to an idea of recording people. This idea grew to recording people much like a talk show interview.
--	---

The main idea: the camera person would be the video photographer. We could capture the person on film. A panel of people would interview the person on what they want to share. This would be filmed in short segments which could be then turned into a database of tips and ideas for future staff. The group then jumped into various directions with great excitement and the type of insights they could record. Staff also felt the onus should be the panel to explore the retiree’s expertise. At this point, it could be productivity to use *Six Thinking Hats* to explore the idea further – this is the nature of Skill Two.

### Case study: inspiring people

I worked with a company producing wilderness equipment (tents, backpacks, and clothing) wanting to inspire people in the wilderness. The group looked at various worlds and selected religion.

*“Let’s pick religion and list many of its symbols and structures that inspire:”*

Elements of your World	Understanding of the element	Force Fit this understanding to your world
<i>Column One</i>	<i>Column Two</i>	<i>Column Three – how can this idea prompt a new idea for your solutions?</i>
The Bible	Foundation of belief Manual for living	A cool looking guide for being inspired while you are experiencing nature – a manual plus a place for notes and insights to encourage people to capture what inspires them and then contribute to others.
The Church	Place of inspiration communal place	Appreciate the design and splendor of the wilderness, much like how we explore a church.
The Apostles	Influencers, story tellers and inner circle.	Create apostles - mountain climbers and adventurers. Seminars and workshops on fitness, nature, safety, etc. Define the <i>word</i> they would preach.
The Congregation	Members of the church. Some have different roles.	Customers using products in the wilderness.
Sunday Service	Regular special events to reinforce inspiration	Offer programs to prompt regular hikes – locally and work with other companies to market adventure tours. Offer seasonal themes – Easter hikes, Christmas walks. Consider other religious rituals for further ideas.

## Skill Two

# 7. DEVELOPING your ideas

Rarely will our first ideas be complete. They may be good, but are they great? Developing an idea means transforming the idea into its fullest potential.

Artists understand this. An idea is like a painting. First, you have an insight for what you want to create. You sketch out the painting. You stand back to see how it must evolve to become a work of art. Rarely will this happen in one step. Often you step back to reflect and then step forward to continue its development. Many artists work on numerous paintings at one time.

Most innovative thinkers do the same – they work on numerous ideas at the same time by learning to step back to reflect, and then step forward to work on the idea. It may take time to develop your idea.

Your initial idea may be defined in a single sentence. A completed idea may take a page to outline the full potential of the concept.

### 1 Clearly formulate your idea

Describe your idea as if you had to explain it to someone else:

- \* What is the idea?
- \* What purpose does it serve?
- \* What does it make possible?
- \* How does it work?
- \* What does it involve?
- \* Who will benefit?

### Initial review

- \* What is “great” about your idea?
- \* Why is it exciting?
- \* What is better or different about it?



## **2 Turning your idea into an opportunity.**

Create the opportunity to expand your great idea to its fullest potential. Add a page or two of detail to describe the successful idea in action. Think as if anything is possible. Don't get bogged down with too much detail at this stage. Your goal is to build a case to decide if the idea could be developed into an opportunity. Once you see the possibility you can then create the specific steps to make it happen.

### **Brainstorm concerns like these to develop your idea:**

- ★ Find three options or features to enhance the value of your idea. Can you find any more?
- ★ Think in terms of enhancing the idea in the short, medium, and long term. What options do you have to enhance the idea at each phase?
- ★ How can you create synergy through partnerships, joint promotions, or alternative ways of implementing the idea?
- ★ What is the bigger context? How can it create value and growth? What are the key revenue sources, both today and for the long term?

### **You can also develop the basic idea with a structured tool.**

A tool like Edward de Bono's "Six Thinking Hats" is a powerful way to separate different types of thinking – emotion from fact, positive from negative, and critical from creative – by having a group adopt the same "hat" or perspective for a few minutes:

- 1 The White Hat** What facts do we know or need to know about the idea?
- 2 The Black Hat** What's not great about this idea? Why might it not work?
- 3 The Yellow Hat** What's great about the idea?
- 4 The Green Hat** What's possible with this idea?
- 5 The Red Hat** What do you feel about this idea?
- 6 The Blue Hat** How can we improve the process to make it more effective?

**How do you know when you have a great idea?**

## 8. JUDGING your ideas

- When generating ideas, defer judgement until you have a range of possibilities.
- Some will be hot ideas – some cold. Some will be totally crazy but don't dismiss them too quickly. Flying to the moon was once a crazy idea.
- Recognise that ideas are not all equal and that they need to be judged. Be honest with yourself. What are the weaknesses and the strengths? Support your idea but don't fall in love with it. Don't be blinded by the limits of your idea. Our goal is to see the value of an idea and what needs to be improved.

### Which decision is needed?

Consider the decision facing you. Your objective can be to:

- ❶ Judge the idea – is it a poor, good, or great idea? You can either accept or reject the idea.
- ❷ Enhance the idea – how do you make a “good” idea “great”? You need to find more insights to make the idea stronger.
- ❸ Select between ideas – which is the best idea? Sometimes a better idea can be found by combining ideas.

### Judging your idea

Here are two ways to judge an idea. Stand back from the idea while you review it:

- ❶ For new ideas that may need more thinking, start with “pro’s” and “con’s”. What’s good about the idea, its advantages? What’s weak about the idea, its limitations? What’s interesting or unique about the idea? From your review, is it worthy of action? Will it make a difference?
- ❷ To move ideas toward action plans, develop some criteria. These are explicit and specific. The list can include questions about the cost of an idea, usefulness of an idea, acceptability of an idea, or viability of the idea. You can create your own model to judge ideas.

## Avoid 'Paralysis by Analysis' When Judging Ideas

Paralysis by Analysis describes what happens inside organisations when the rules take over and we forget that we must actually make a decision. Judging is about finding the best ideas, prompting enhancements, and ensuring we make good decisions. It is not intended to create lots of paperwork to justify a decision that is already made. Some managers insist on a Return on the Investment measure (ROI). The reality is that is very complicated to estimate in the Public Sector. It is hard enough to forecast potential sales of a new product. Measuring the benefit of a change of a new internal process is far more complex. Judging is a skill to prompt action. Rather than suffer 'paralysis by analysis', ask these questions to prompt action:

- ★ Is taking action a better option than doing nothing?
- ★ Is a decision now better than a decision in three months?

The answers should be obvious. There are numerous models you can use to make different types of decisions. Training can be very useful to expand your tool kit for judging ideas. Idea 14 offers some tools. *The Theory of IT* is part of the design thinking tool kit.

*"Analysis and thought are critical to the recognition of a good idea, but they are not enough. They are a necessary condition, not a sufficient condition. In the end, good ideas often come from instinctive flashes of insight. Often the best ideas are very simple. But when you have a good idea you know it with conviction even if other people do not recognise it".*

**Sir Geoffrey Palmer, former Prime Minister of New Zealand**

## Skill Four

# 9. COMMUNICATING and PROMOTING your ideas

Having a great idea is one thing but getting others interested in it is another. Your ability to sell the value of your idea often determines whether you get the commitment or resources you need to develop it. This applies equally to CEOs and staff. Every great idea needs to be well communicated

Here are some tips for making sure this goes smoothly:

- ★ In every case, describe your idea in a few sentences in terms of the benefits to be gained. Clearly define the problem this idea solves for the business or the opportunity it creates.
- ★ Know your audience. Do they like the big picture followed by the detail? Or do they want the detail which naturally leads to your idea, the perfect solution?
- ★ If you are presenting to a group or writing a proposal, paint a vivid word picture of the idea in action, and create a place to involve your audience. People need to see themselves as a part of the picture or they may feel threatened.
- ★ Don't gloss over weak points in your idea. Anticipate the concerns people may have and mention them yourself. Diffuse the opposition and start to build collaboration.
- ★ Be prepared to address what you need to get started and how you would like to proceed. Once people are excited about your idea you need to know what to ask for – how much money, time, or other resources you may need. What will it take to get things started?

*Enthusiasm and energy are very contagious. Selling your great idea effectively can fuel the momentum to set in motion the actions necessary to bring the idea to life.*



## Key insight

What type of people are you presenting your idea to?

- ✦ Big picture visionary thinkers?
- ✦ Detailed analytic thinkers?

How do people hear your ideas?

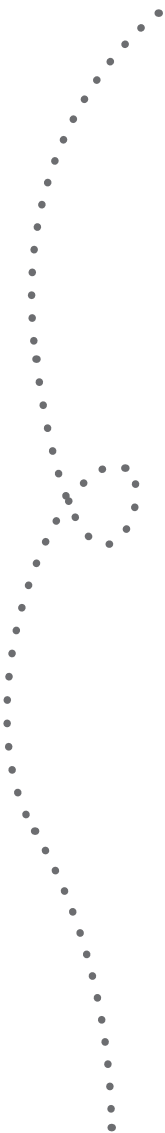
Regardless of your style of thinking, you must present to ‘their’ style. Big picture innovative thinkers want the vision of the idea in action. Analytical thinkers prefer the prudent approach: start with the details and build to a conclusion. Design your presentation to the style of the audience.

*“An important idea not communicated persuasively is like having no idea at all”.*

*“ There are few things more destructive than an unsound idea persuasively expressed”.*

**Bill Bernbach**

# 10. TRANSLATING your ideas into ACTIONS



Having ideas is one thing but acting on them is quite another. The ability to act on new ideas is the factor that separates leaders from followers. To act on the foresight you showed to find the idea takes discipline, diligence and conviction.

## Start with your great idea

Visualise it as a reality. What hinders many from turning ideas into actions is weak planning. Rule #1 for translating ideas into action plans is to understand the difference between what you want to achieve and how you want to achieve it. That is, the difference between goals and your strategies. Consider:

- ★ A **goal** is what you want to achieve.
- ★ A **strategy** is how you want to achieve the goal.

Once you have defined these, you need to set your tactics, the specific actions needed for each strategy to achieve the goal.

If you skip the strategy stage, you will miss opportunities. Unless strategies are developed properly, you cannot be sure that they are the most effective approaches. A great idea executed poorly becomes a poor idea. Innovative thinking is needed

in all phases of the development of the idea.

## Turning an idea into an action plan

Outline your great idea in a clear and compelling way. This provides focus and a reminder of what your hard work will achieve.

Start to formulate your proposed strategies. Discuss them (one at a time) to maximise the opportunities that each offers. Consider their cost in terms of dollars, time, and other resources.

Each strategy should be clear and obvious to those who will use it. Most great ideas will only have three to five strategies. Finally, add the specific actions for each strategy.

For each strategy, ask yourself two questions:

- ① What must you do to get a result using the strategy to achieve the goals? This is your to-do list.
- ② What must you avoid doing (or not doing) to prevent failing?

The first list is quite simple. The second is a challenge but it defines the specific actions you need to take (or to avoid) to achieve success.



## Idea Management Process

Here is an overview of a basic process for managing ideas, whether you are looking for ideas for innovation or risk.

*(For a poster of this model that you can use as a planning worksheet to design an idea, email the Idea Factory and ask for the Insights into Action model).*

### 1 Notice and insight

Everything starts with insight. It comes from harnessing your intuition and investing time to observe, understand, and interpret:

- ✦ What you must be aware of?
- ✦ What comes to your attention that seems in need of resolution?

### 2 Define the issue

When you have an insight, describe it as if you have to explain it

- ✦ What is the issue or idea? What does it involve?
- ✦ Who will benefit or be threatened? What purpose does it serve?
- ✦ What does it make possible? What is the risk?

### 3 Create the opportunity

Expand your great idea to its fullest potential. Add a page of detail to describe the successful idea in action, or the prevention of a threat in place.

- ✦ What is the bigger picture?
- ✦ How can it create value and growth, or destroy it? What are the revenue implications?

### 4 Define the actions

List critical actions required to make the opportunity a reality. Your planning must be thorough yet realistic. Your intended actions shape your strategies and To-Do lists. Your observations of what can prevent success add to your To-Fail List.

Being innovative is about solving problems, managing risks, making decisions, and moving forward. It all goes hand-in-hand.

# Create your INNOVATION skills learning platform

Building skills for creativity and innovation is important for everyone working in the public service. All staff solve problems, make decisions, and deal with change each day. Sharpening your skills makes your results more productive. Create a Personal Learning Plan for developing skills in each area. What can you read? What courses can you take? What will you do to develop your skills this year?

<p><b>Problem Solving and Decision Making</b>          Staff must understand basic problem solving. Innovation starts as initiatives to solve problems. To make quality decisions we must explore our challenges effectively to produce quality options.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✦ Skills for problem finding.</li> <li>✦ Effectively defining a problem or challenge.</li> <li>✦ Understanding problem solving processes like design thinking.</li> <li>✦ Understanding problem solving models and processes</li> </ul>	<p>Create your Innovation Skills Learning Plan.          List the courses, books, and references you can access to learn more of each skill area.</p>
<p><b>1. Ability to generate new ideas</b>          We have a well-defined problem and now need to solve it. This is the ideate stage. The first level of ideas already exists in the heads of staff and other stakeholders. The second level takes more formal idea generating tools and techniques to generate new and original ideas.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✦ Creating ideas individually and in collaboration.</li> <li>✦ Understand brainstorming collaboration processes.</li> <li>✦ Ability to use “tools” to create stronger and more sophisticated options.</li> </ul>	

<p><b>2. Ability to develop ideas</b></p> <p>Developing an idea means expanding the idea to its fullest potential. Stepping back to reflect and then stepping forward to develop the idea further. The initial idea may be defined in a single sentence; a complete idea takes a page to outline the full potential of the concept.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✳ Understanding the need to manage ideas through stages of development.</li> <li>✳ Ability to use processes to enhance an idea. For example, <i>Six Thinking Hats</i> is an ideal tool for developing ideas.</li> <li>✳ Understanding that weaknesses or limitations have implications for managing the risks of failure.</li> <li>✳ Creating a business case.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>3. Ability to judge ideas</b></p> <p>We defer judgment until we have a range of possibilities. What are the weaknesses and strengths? What else is possible? Our goal is to see the value of an idea and what needs to be improved.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✳ Understand that ideas need to be judged, evaluated, and measured.</li> <li>✳ Ability to judge, through intuition and use of tools to distinguish between ideas (which one is better) and to evaluate the robustness (is it a good or great idea?)</li> <li>✳ Use of models to judge the value of ideas.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>4. Promoting your ideas</b></p> <p>Ideas need to be well communicated. The ability to promote the value of an idea often determines if the commitment and resources will be given to develop it further.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✳ Recognising the need to promote an idea.</li> <li>✳ Ability to explain and present an idea; to convert something conceptual for presentation.</li> <li>✳ Ability to define the value of an idea and present it to earn the support of others.</li> <li>✳ Presenting ideas to different styles of thinkers.</li> </ul>	

<p><b>5. Ability to translate ideas into actions</b></p> <p>Having ideas is one thing but acting on them is quite another. To act on the foresight shown to find the ideas takes discipline, diligence and conviction.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✦ Ability to translate a workable idea into a series of stages, phases, or steps.</li> <li>✦ Understanding of planning: distinguishing between goals, strategies, and actions.</li> <li>✦ Ability to create strategic plans, and related action plans.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Collaboration and Team Effectiveness</b></p> <p>Do people think alike? The answer is obvious, yet, do we implicitly assume they do? To improve staff engagement to enhance productivity and innovation, we should understand these differences and use them.</p> <p>Section five offers insights to improve collaboration and team work.</p>	

## How to read this book to build your capacity to innovate

Section One	Explore definitions of innovation and being innovative
Section Two	Ideas 6 to 10 introduce individual skills. Each skill is part of a wider process. There are numerous tools and approaches for each.
Idea Skills:	<b>Ideas and Articles useful for each skill</b>
1. Generating Ideas	11, 12, 13, 14
2. Developing Ideas	13
3. Judging Ideas	14, 15
4. Communicating and marketing ideas	14
5. Idea Implementing	10
6. Team Learning	Section Four on collaboration and cognitive diversity, 16
Design Thinking	See links between design thinking and innovation skills in the 'References, Notes, and Quotes' section.

# The Art of Small Changes:

## FIND YOUR 15%

Management Academic, Gareth Morgan, observed that most people have very little control over their day-to-day activities. He suggests we control about 15 per cent of our time. The rest is taken up by activities that are dictated to us. He suggests we focus on the 15 per cent of the work that we control. At a practical level, list your personal projects for the next year. Which do you control? Focus your creative energies on those you can control. Contribute to the others, but don't be frustrated by what you cannot control. What you may control:

- ✱ Problems waiting for a solution in your job – you define the agenda.
- ✱ Meetings where you set the agenda – turn them into idea factories.
- ✱ Project teams you lead – you set the style for the group.

When working on a large problem with a team, assume you can only control 15 per cent of the factors. Make a similar list. While the problem may be very large, what can you control or influence to create change? Act on what you can control.

Morgan says that the strength of this approach, "...lies in its pragmatism, and in the fact that effective change always rests in the ability of individuals and groups to lever what actually can be changed. Once mobilized, 15 per cent initiatives have a compounding effect as one change builds on another, which allows new initiatives to flourish."

### Four step model for solving large scale change problems.

1. **Define the Challenge:** (the objective you are trying to achieve).
2. **BUT:** Any solution is so complex, we must involve so many stakeholders in the process.
3. **15% solution:** What could we control?
4. **Eventual Result:** Nurture a climate that encourages stakeholders to participate while generating specific results.

*Gareth Morgan is a highly influential management academic, and author of top selling international books, *Images of Organization and Imagination*.*



# 3

## INNOVATION: ensuring we walk the innovation talk

*Are big and bold ideas needed to solve every challenge? It depends. Sometime we need to innovate; sometimes we can renovate an idea. Before we talk about the ideas we need, focus on the problem we need to solve.*

*Brainstorming is not a team building exercise. It should be results driven to achieve your challenge. However, a lot of team building happens when you achieve results as a team.*

### ARTICLES

How to talk about innovation – some tips from experience

11. How to think outside the box
12. Better or different: Which ideas are better?
13. Developing your ideas
14. Judging Ideas: I'll know a great idea when I see it!
15. Innovation: Learning from Australia's Aboriginal history
16. Collaborating: Using the brains to storm a creative problem in commando fashion
17. Every organisation need an innovationalist

# How to talk about innovation: some tips from experience

The use of terms *creativity* and *innovation* has become so imprecise that they have become almost meaningless. Creativity and innovation are extremely important concepts. Both have a great deal of useful academic and consultant research, models and recommendations. Here are some tips.

**1** *Think twice before using the word innovation.* If you can use a more exact or precise word, always do so. You cannot lead innovation if people do not understand what you mean by the term innovation.

**2** *Never use the term 'innovation ideas'.*

**3** *Can innovation fail? No. You can fail to innovate.* Technology can fail. Project management can fail. Marketing can fail. This does not mean innovation has failed.

**4** *Never use the expression, 'We are a creative and innovative organisation,'* unless you can explain the difference between these terms.

**5** *To test the effectiveness of innovation initiatives in an organisation, ask staff, "What does it mean to be innovative in your job?"* Listen to what they say. Everyone should be able to answer this question.

**6** *Do not talk about innovation projects.* It is arrogant to think that every project will become innovation. Talk about projects. Some will succeed. Some will fail. Perhaps a few will lead to innovations.

**There is one truth for innovation: talking about innovation and expecting that this makes you innovative is as effective as talking about physical fitness and expecting this makes you fit.**

**7** *Innovation starts with problem solving.* You will not innovate if you cannot solve problems effectively.

**8** *Avoid the concept of 'incremental' innovation* – as it is ridiculous unless you can clearly explain the difference between incremental innovation and continuous improvement.

**9** *Recognise that we solve problems in different ways.* As such, what one person thinks is highly innovative could be routine for someone else. Do not let these differences in thinking styles get in the way of collaboration.

**10** *Learn to manage your ideas.* Ideas need to be managed as we manage our money.

**11** *Many experts say brainstorming is ineffective; I do not agree.* The original concept is as strong today as it was when conceived in the 1940's. The problem with the experts is that they have not read the original work. If you want to see that old ideas are still robust, find a 1953 copy of *Applied Imagination* by Alex Osborn. Osborn ended his book this way; "We need new ideas to win wars. We need even more and better new ideas to win peace". It's still timely advice.



# 11. How to THINK OUTSIDE the Box

A reason often given for innovation training is “to get our team to think outside the box”. The boss may feel that the quality of solutions or ideas is not great. It also comes from people working in teams who feel that the contribution of others is not helping to find new solutions to the challenges they face.

If you have been in this situation, you know how hard it is to deal with. Perhaps it is best to start with what this term actually means. There may not be an official definition of “out of the box” thinking but we can consider the opposite; what is “in the box” thinking?

## Inside The Box Thinking

I believe ‘thinking inside the box’ means accepting the status quo. For example, Charles H. Duell, Director of the US Patent Office, said, “Everything that can be invented has been invented”. The year was 1899: clearly he was in the box!

- ✦ In-the-box thinkers find it difficult to recognise the quality of an idea. Therefore, they rarely invest time to turn a mediocre idea into a great one.
- ✦ In-the-box thinkers are skillful at killing ideas and make comments such as *that’ll never work* or *it’s too risky*.
- ✦ The best in-the-box thinkers are unaware that they drain the enthusiasm and passion of others while they kill innovative ideas.

They also believe that every problem needs only one solution; therefore, finding more than one possible solution is a waste of time. They often say, “There is no time for creative



*“Never, ever, think outside the box.”*

solutions. We just need *THE* solution”.

## Outside the Box Thinking

Here are the tips and tools you’ll need to be a great out-of- the-box thinker.

- ✦ Willingness to take new perspectives on day-to-day work.
- ✦ Openness to do different things and to do things differently.
- ✦ Focusing on the value of finding new ideas and acting on them.
- ✦ Striving to create value in new ways.
- ✦ Listening to others.

- ★ Supporting and respecting others when they come up with new ideas.

Even creative people can become in-the-box thinkers when they stop trying. Apathy and indifference can turn an innovator into an in-the-box thinker. In only one case is in-the-box thinking necessary. This comes from a cartoon: a man talks to his cat and points to the kitty litter box. He says, “Never ever think outside the box!”

Out-of-the box thinking requires openness to new ways of seeing the world and a willingness to explore. New ideas need nurturing and support. If you do not cultivate them, they cannot possibly succeed.

So, now it's your turn to act, but don't wait until a problem arises. Just take a minute to think about what you do every day and how you can do it that much better.

## Why New Ideas Are Important

If you look at the work we do in our organisations to see what people do in common, you would find that virtually all people do three things every day regardless of their role, responsibility, or accountabilities.

- 1 *People solve problems:* jobs are filled with problems and challenges that need to be resolved.
- 2 *People make decisions:* everyone makes decisions to get results.
- 3 *People deal with change:* no one is change resistant as they could not survive in school or any organisation without changing. Everyone accepts change they like and resists change they do not like.

For this reason, we must continuously challenge ourselves to think of new ideas to

ensure that we are effective and efficient in meeting our objectives. This begs a question – what if we do not challenge ourselves to look for new ideas? This is a paradoxical question. People can ignore or delay solving problems. We can also continue to assume that what solves a problem today will continue to solve the problem in the future. It may be a valid assumption but how do we know? This leads us to make a simple decision every time we have the opportunity to take some action. At its most basic, we have two options:

- 1 *Do nothing*
- 2 *Do something*

It is possible that the ‘do nothing’ option is the right decision. It is useful to consider the implication of ignoring a situation. However, this is different to avoid making a decision on the situation. If you decide that taking some action is better, here are a couple of suggestions.

# BANNED!

## *CREATIVITY KILLING COMMENTS are not permitted*

Bosses can say dumb things. These comments come from workshop participants. I asked what they have been told by their bosses.

“We’ve tried that before. It will never work”.

“Try something new? Are you kidding...it’s too risky!”

“If it was a good idea, we would have thought of it already”.

“Our customers don’t want anything creative”.

“We don’t have the time to be innovative”.

“The boss will never approve it”.

“This is the way we do it around here”.

“If you don’t like it, you know where you can go”.

“You’re not paid to think”.

Have you been told something outrageous?

Email [info@PSIdeaFactory.com](mailto:info@PSIdeaFactory.com)

# 12. BETTER or DIFFERENT: 'Which ideas are best?' is the wrong question

Are big and bold ideas needed to solve every challenge? It depends. Sometimes we need to innovate, sometimes we can renovate an idea. Before we talk about the ideas we need, focus on the problem we need to solve. What type of idea best solves the problem? The best way to solve a problem or challenge is to think of solutions from two perspectives:

1. *Would the best idea improve the current approach by fixing some element of it?*
2. *Would the best idea change the way we are currently doing something?*

One type of solution is not necessarily better than the other.

To give you a way of seeing this difference, consider how a similar problem was solved in North America and many other countries. This problem is simple: too much water is wasted when we flush our toilets. The problem was to create ideas to reduce the amount of water flowing down our toilets and into the sewer system.

In North America, the traditional toilets often used 13 to 17 litres, virtually Niagara Falls flushing down your toilet. Then a solution was found. Reduce the size of the water tank to 6 litres. Many cities offered residents incentives to replace older toilets with this 'innovation'. Had anyone bothered to look to countries like New Zealand or Australia,

they would have seen a different solution. Suddenly, the North American 'innovation' is a poor improvement as it was still very inefficient compared to the 'dual flush toilets'. These marvels further reduced the volume of waste water by 70 per cent by offering users the option of a 3 or 6 litres flush. Though we can only guess what the inventor of this concept was thinking, you could suggest that two different problems were being solved:

1. *How do we reduce the volume of water needed to flush a toilet?*
2. *How much water do we need to flush 'what needs flushing' most efficiently?*

What is obvious, is that liquids require less water for flushing as compared to solids. The objective of this description was not to profile the history of toilets: it was to give you a story to remember the difference between better ideas versus different ideas that change the way we do things.

1. The single flush going from 17 litres to 6 litres is a much better idea.
2. The dual flush going from 17 litres to 6 litres to a 6-3 litre toilet is a different idea.

You can sharpen your skills for solving problems by using these two idea strategies:



## 1 Finding a better way to do something

When you believe that the current solution is basically good but needs to be improved, start with a page in a notebook, or on a computer, and create three columns along the top.

1. **What's working?** In column one, write down what is working well with the current approach.
2. **What's not working?** In column two, write down what is not working well. Column one should be longer than column two.
3. **Ways to improve what's not working.** This leaves column three for ways to improve what is not working well. Think in simple terms. The fastest way to solve a problem is to say it out loud and then say, "We could improve this by..." Often your next thought is the start of an idea.

The key is to break a problem down into specific issues.

## 2 Finding a different way to do something

When you believe that you need a different solution, focus on finding a new way to solve the challenge. Repeat the previously mentioned exercise. Using a single page with three columns, use column one to outline what is working well. Use column two to outline what is not working. This gives you the facts of the current approach. Then use column three to question everything about both columns. Question things like:

- \* Why do we do it like this?
- \* What assumptions are we making? Are they still valid?
- \* How do others solve the same problem?
- \* What if we did it in a new way?

You are looking for new ways to solve the problem. Question everything until a new idea comes to mind. The difference between better ideas and different ideas is a key to innovation. Perhaps you can find the equivalent of the dual flush toilet ideas in your work. If you do, you can smile when you remember this story yet it may be too complicated to explain the whole story to others when they see you smile.

# 13. DEVELOPING Your Ideas

## Starting with the ‘aha!’ insight

Polaroid cameras are a great idea. They enable you to see a picture just seconds after it was taken. The insight for instant photography was conceived by the chemist, Edwin Land. It is said that his nine year old daughter asked, “Daddy, why can’t I see the picture now?” at a family function where photographs were being taken. He thought it was an interesting problem.

Although he had the idea for instant photography, it took him years to create the film and a camera to use it with. At first, our ideas might not seem as sophisticated as instant photography yet the process is basically the same. You may have the ‘aha’ moment when you create an insight to solve a problem you are working on. Realistically, it may take days, weeks, or more to bring it to life. Treat your initial idea as a starting point and enhance it to improve its probability of success. And, for this crucial step, you can use a one-page approach, a process that can be summarized into two steps:

### ① Describing the idea

In a couple of sentences, clearly formulate your idea as if you had to explain it to someone else.

- ★ What is the idea? How does it work? What does it involve?
- ★ Who will benefit? What purpose does it serve? What does it make possible?
- ★ What is better or different about it?

This is harder than it may seem. Once you have finished this simple exercise, ask someone who knows nothing about the concept to act as your audience. Explain the idea and notice their reaction. Do they understand your ideas or have no idea what you are talking about? Do not underestimate the importance of this stage.

### ② Creating the full opportunity

The second part of the process is to create the opportunity, and to expand your great idea to its fullest potential. To complete this step, you must describe your idea in action and in detail.

- ★ Find three options or features to enhance the value of your idea.
- ★ Think in terms of enhancing the idea in the short and medium term. What options do you have to enhance the idea at each phase?
- ★ How can you create synergy through partnerships or alternative ways of implementing the idea?
- ★ What is the bigger context? How can it create value for those who will benefit from the idea?

Finally, review your idea by exploring two questions:

- ★ What is great about this idea? *It is great because...*
- ★ What is weak about this idea as proposed? *It may not work because...*

To conclude, a great idea needs to be well communicated. Remember, your ability to sell the value of your idea often determines if you get the commitment or resources you need to make your idea come to life. Therefore, develop each idea until you feel it is ready for action. One way to test your initial idea is to describe it to a co-worker. As such, describe your idea in action, notice their response, and ask them for feedback. Finally, keep in mind this quote from advertising guru Bill Bernbach: “An important idea not communicated persuasively is like having no idea at all”.

### **About Polaroid, Creativity, and a Very Cool Building.**

I heard about Edwin Land’s daughter when I partnered with the Creatologist of Polaroid Corporation. Suzanne Merritt was one of two experts in creativity and innovation who ran Polaroid Creativity Lab. It offered training and facilitation services to a diversity of staff groups. It pioneered work in aesthetics (much like design thinking) and corporate anthropology.

I worked at the Lab for some projects. The Lab was housed in a large seven story factory built about 150 years ago. The walls are thick and solid. Located in Cambridge, Massachusetts, near MIT where so much innovation happens.

I noticed a historical plaque on the building near to one of the entrances. I read that one tenant was Dr. Land. As a chemist, he set up an office in the 1940’s. Dr. Land created a range of technologies before he began the research on mixing chemicals to create a film that would self-develop photographs. Many people are aware of the coating he created for sun glasses. As pioneer and expert in polarizing lens technology, Edwin Land,

then an undergraduate at Harvard University in Massachusetts, had his invention of modern filters to polarize light patented (1929). He then went on to produce them for use in sunglasses, automobile headlights and photography.

In 1937, the newly founded Polaroid Corporation sold its first pair of sunglasses. And this was only the beginning. At the New York World’s Fair in 1939, Polaroid showcased the first 3D movie glasses. While Polaroid Corporation was hugely successful for 50 years, it lost its key markets when digital photography eliminated the need for film. Oddly enough, a new generation of Polaroid cameras combines a digital camera with the ability to print instant photographs. Personal conversations with key staff said that Polaroid struggled once the elderly Land was forced out of his own company by professional managers.

I discovered an interesting personal connection reading that historical plaque on the building. In the 1880’s another inventor moved into this building. Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone. He advanced telephone designs for the US market in this building. It was fascinating to think that such inventors walked along the same hallways in this building.

Alexander Graham Bell moved to Cambridge from Brantford, Canada, my home city. Bell’s father moved to Brantford to teach at the school for the deaf. Bell did many experiments in Brantford in the process of creating the first telephone. He also made the first long distance telephone call from Brantford to Paris, Ontario about 10 kms away.

[www.bellhomestead.ca](http://www.bellhomestead.ca)

# 14. “I’ll Know a Great Idea WHEN I SEE IT!”

The first stage of solving a problem is to come up with ideas that could be useful. Often, we will come up with a range of ideas. This creates a second problem: how do we judge our ideas?

Great ideas do not always have to be big and bold. They can be simple and obvious. Often, we have plenty of ideas, we just don’t know which ones are worthy of our time and attention.

The first step in judging an idea is to decide what your goal is. There are three basic decisions you can make and each is quite different in its intent:

1. *Is your objective to assess the idea?* You have one idea and you can accept or reject it. This is a yes or no type of decision.
2. *Is your objective to enhance the idea?* You have an idea and want to judge whether you have a weak idea or a strong idea. If you can find the weak aspects of an idea, you can make the idea stronger.
3. *Is your objective to choose between different ideas?* You have a series of three or more ideas and want to select the best one.

When people discuss their experiences in judging ideas in groups, inevitably the process most often used is ‘stars’. You are told to put two stars next to the best idea and one star next to the second best. While a useful tool for school children, this hardly seems useful in professional organisations. At the heart of this approach, is intuition. While

there is nothing wrong with intuition, it may be useful to consider some basic criteria for judging ideas. A useful approach for judging an idea is to use *Six Thinking Hats* (conceived by Edward de Bono). By exploring an idea from different perspectives, people can change the way they think about an idea.

*The Six Thinking Hats* introduces the concept of using criteria. Here are two approaches for using basic criteria for judging ideas. *ALU* and *‘The Theory of It’*.

## ① Advantages, Limitations, Uniqueness

Divide a page into three columns and use these labels: *Advantages, Limitations, and Uniqueness*. Use the following thinking prompts to create a list for each column. Expand upon each section, as needed, before making a decision on the idea. It is best to complete the exercise and put it aside for a few minutes. You can then review your notes and make a decision.

### Advantages

*What is great about your idea? List the strengths, advantages, and positive aspects of your idea.*

- ✱ *Why will it work?*
- ✱ *Why is it needed?*
- ✱ *What is exciting about it?*

### Limitations

*What is not so great about the idea? What are its limitations? Be honest with your concerns,*



weaknesses, and shortcomings. After listing them, ask yourself: “how can we overcome this limitation?” This will help improve your idea.

you describe your idea or solution, create a vivid word picture of your idea in action. Describe its key features, elements, whatever you visualise being in place when this idea becomes a reality.

### Unique Connections

What is unusual about your idea that sets it apart from other ideas? This is not necessarily good or bad, it just is! For example, when

When you have completed this page, it is highly likely that your idea will be more powerful or useful.

ADVANTAGES	LIMITATIONS	UNIQUE CONNECTIONS
<p>What is great about your idea? List the strengths, advantages, and positive aspects of your idea.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why will it work?</li> <li>• Why is it needed?</li> <li>• What is exciting about it?</li> </ul>	<p>What is not so great about the idea? What are its limitations? Be honest with your concerns, weaknesses, and shortcomings.</p> <p>After listing them, ask: “how can we overcome this limitation?” This will help improve your idea.</p>	<p>What is unusual about your idea that sets it apart from other ideas? This is not necessarily good or bad, it just is!</p> <p>Describe your idea or solution. Create a vivid word picture of your idea in action.</p>
<p><i>Your ideas...</i></p>		

## 2 The Theory of 'It'

Have you ever said, "I'll know a great idea when I see it?" How would you describe ideas with this 'it' factor? Great ideas often have certain qualities or patterns. They have an 'x' factor, a special quality detected by your aesthetic sense. Learn to see the qualities in your ideas. This tool is based on using your judgment of three criteria. These can help you see ideas with 'it'.

This aesthetic response is a powerful, and often overlooked, motivation. When someone explains an idea and your first thought is, 'Wow, that's a great idea!' you are using your aesthetic sense. Great ideas often seem elegant and simple; they seem to make sense.

Here are three attributes we often use for ideas or concepts that give many people that 'wow' factor. Read these summaries about each pattern below and add your own examples to each. When have you noticed this attribute? Then consider how you could apply the same principles to your idea. For example, when you describe your idea, create a vivid word picture of your idea in action. Describe its key features, elements, whatever you visualise being in place when this idea is a reality.

### Simplicity

A great idea often seems like a simple and obvious solution. The power of simplicity is that we sense completeness, wholeness, and perfection. There is an economy we admire. The elegant solution may take more time to discover but in turn, it will endure the test of time and serve us best. *Where have you seen simplicity?*

### Utility

Utility delights us. We love it when something meets a real need and serves a function. It is

human nature to want to serve a purpose, to create something of value. Consequently, we are drawn toward those things that we sense serve a purpose, where form fits function. These are the things we value over time. Where have you seen utility?

### Vitality

Liveliness and energy are forces to which we are attracted because they are generative. Bright colors, dynamic patterns, and fresh ideas revitalize us and make us feel more alive. We are drawn toward those things that are life-giving and energizing. Where have you seen vitality?

### Using your judgment to enhance an idea

You can use these criteria in the following ways:

- ★ Could your ideas have more vitality, simplicity, or utility? What could you add to the idea to make it stronger?
- ★ When you hear an idea, consider these factors (vitality, simplicity, utility) to help assess its value.
- ★ When you explain your idea to someone, recognise that they will judge your idea. How can you present your idea to help them see the value in terms of vitality, simplicity, and utility?

Trust your instincts. You will know a great idea when you have one, and so will the people who hear your idea. Help them see the value in your idea by focusing on the attributes that make great ideas seem great!

*(This material is linked to Skill Three: Judging Ideas. This tool is called The Theory of IT and was conceived in the 1990's. It would now be a tool for design thinking).*

# 15. INNOVATION: Learning from Australia's Aboriginal History

In 1998, I spoke at a conference in Christchurch as the innovation expert. Professor Karl-Erik Sveiby was the knowledge management expert. I had read one of his books. Knowledge management is crucial for service innovation.

I later saw his new book, *Treading Lightly – the Hidden Wisdom of the World's Oldest*. He partnered with Nhunggabarra elder, Tex Skuthorpe. The book filters some Aboriginal stories through a lens of knowledge management. It should be part of everyone's reading. He makes a powerful distinction between tangible and intangible innovation. It is the difference between the way archeologists study artifacts and how anthropologists study people and systems.

Service innovation requires we think like anthropologist. It's the essence of empathy and human centred design. Anthropologists look at the world and see, feel, or experience what others see (and often what others miss) by...

- ✳ Creating an emotional connection that fuels the asking of questions of self and of others.
- ✳ Taking the time to see what we do not see at first. We have the gift of observation, but we must invest time to see what needs to be seen.
- ✳ Living with the problem to explore it. What is obvious is not always obvious at first.

It is useful to make a distinction between two aspects of all organisations. This is the distinction between what is achieved and how it was achieved.

**Studying what is achieved:** what problems do we solve or want to create? You can call these the 'A' Challenges. They are tangible innovations.

**Studying how they achieved it:** how can we work together effectively to solve or create the 'A' Challenges? Call these the 'B' Challenges. This is about collaboration and how efficiently people work together to create their achievements. The research tells us that the 'B' Challenges are far harder than the 'A' Challenges.

The Egyptians created massive pyramids ('A' Challenge) that we see as major achievements. The 'B' Challenge dictated the use of slaves under the guidance of many planners.

Consider the Australian Aboriginals who successfully survived as a society for about 40,000 years. They lived through fires and famines without dying out as so many societies did. Aborigines mastered the 'B' Challenge of working, living and surviving.

The problem is that our modern eyes failed to see the rule of law, or a system of education. It is easier to see a pyramid than the presence of spirituality. This is the job of the anthropologist. The distinction of 'A' and 'B' Challenges is useful for an anthropologist.

Sveiby explores the difference between tangible and intangible innovation. The tangible are technologies and products that we touch and feel. The intangibles are the systems, approaches, and strategies we create.

The research approach used by Sveiby was to combine Nhunggarra stories with as many different sources as possible: written sources, site visits, and interviews. The other sources are the journals by the first explorers, also archaeologists' accounts, and some reports by anthropologists. Several visits to sacred sites add observations, pictures, and field notes to the data that was studied. He concludes with a long list of intangible innovations:

- ✱ Rule of law
- ✱ Welfare system
- ✱ Zero per cent unemployment rate
- ✱ Lifelong learning
- ✱ Individual spirituality
- ✱ Learner driven education
- ✱ Context specific leadership
- ✱ Gender equality
- ✱ Medicinal effects of herbs
- ✱ Barter trade – national trade routes
- ✱ Consensus decision making
- ✱ Model for a sustainable world

### **Economic Principle: Intangible Economy\***

In 1993, Noel G. Butlin was the first economist to recognise that Aboriginal production was much more than food and tools – above all they produced services such as information, education, diplomacy, maintaining order, entertainment, feuds, art, and ceremonies for death and marriage. Butlin's conclusion was that the Aboriginal pre-contact economy functioned rationally to cater for a high

demand of services (intangibles) rather than material goods (tangibles). A simple calculation shows the possible extent of intangible production in an Aboriginal economy: between eight and 13 hours per 16 waking hours (50–80%) or roughly the same level as modern Western economies.

### **Insights are gold for anthropologists**

A man goes ice fishing and notices that fresh fish freeze instantly. He then ponders the idea of cooking food and freezing it quickly. His name was Charles Birdseye. He invented the concept of frozen 'TV' dinners and made them popular. Thinking like an anthropologist opens the door to discover new insights.

Insight is a necessary stepping stone in the direction of new ideas.

Insights come from harnessing your intuition and taking the time to observe and understand.

Insights attract your attention. They surprise you. They nudge you to pursue a topic further. Insights are not fully formed ideas, but great ideas always start with insights.

These are the raw materials for your ideas. Listen to your intuition and capture your insights.

Insights lead us toward ideas that can solve our problems, or create new opportunities.

*What have you become aware of? What intrigues you? What makes you question something? What do you notice? What has come to your attention?*

Harness your skills as an anthropologist.

\*See Reference section for source articles.

# 16. COLLABORATING: using the brains to storm a creative problem in commando fashion

## Brainstorming and the real story behind this highly popular process.

Generating ideas is easy when a team is focused in one direction. This was the conclusion of Alex Osborn, the director of the Buffalo, New York office of BBDO. He was looking for more powerful ways to find ideas to solve the tough problems of his advertising clients. He wrote about a process in his book, *Applied Imagination*. He believed that groups could double their creative output with brainstorming. He wrote: *“It was in 1939 when I first organised such group thinking in our company. The early participants dubbed our efforts ‘Brainstorm Sessions’; and quite aptly so, because, in this case, ‘brainstorm’ means using the brains to storm a creativity problem – and to do so in commando fashion, with each stormer audaciously attacking the same objective”.*

He went on to say that hundreds of such brainstorm sessions were held, and nearly all had been worthwhile in terms of the ideas produced. While this technique has been around for 70 years, is it obsolete? You may read criticism of brainstorming. In fact, consultants offer new and better ways to collaborate, but there is a problem with this criticism. The writers never read, *Applied Imagination*. Many of their improvements were already discussed...70 years ago. Sometimes the ideas are worth keeping. Here

are some guidelines from the original work to help you to ‘harness the brains to storm’ through your creative problems.

## Lessons from Alex Osborn:

For the record, the term *brainstorming* does not appear in *Applied Imagination* until page 297 of this 307 page book. The first 297 pages focused on many ways of solving problems and many recommendations for doing this more effectively. Osborn was very clear that most ideas will be created by individuals working on their own. Sometimes, individuals cannot solve the problem on their own and must collaborate with others. If you need more resources, it is important to consider how we collaborate.

The essence of creative problem solving that interested Osborn starts with a deeper exploration of the problem. This ensures that all issues are raised and opportunities are noticed. We know from other research that the key mistake we make in problem solving is getting the definition of the problem wrong the first time. Sometimes the best tactic is to brainstorm the problem, not solutions to what you think is the problem. This is about providing clarity and focus. It can be very difficult to fully grasp the implications of problems at first. Sometimes you simply cannot foresee all of the implications. These are called *wicked problems*.

## Brainstorming the problem

For effective brainstorming in groups, focus on the problem or objective at hand. Someone once said, “A problem well defined is a problem half solved”.

First, write down the problem in a sentence or two. Then, create a short list of issues which make up the problem. Writing these down makes the problem real. It also makes it easier to find more effective solutions.

Osborn’s focus led to a process called *creative problem solving* as it focuses on two stages:

- \* **Stage one is divergence:** our goal is to diverge, or broaden the range of possible ideas to solve the problem. This means prompting our thinking in new directions. Exploration is crucial. It helps to solve one of the flaws in problem solving: we quickly jump to a solution without looking beyond the easy and obvious ideas. There are many tools to push our thinking in new directions.
- \* **Stage two is convergence:** we review the full range of ideas, and then converge toward the best solution, the one that offers the maximum potential to achieve results.

Virtually all creativity sessions use this basic approach. Your success in brainstorming is building a tool kit of approaches to explore problems to create a range of useful ideas. Osborn provides a case study of a real session where the two steps are separated by a day.

Teams would brainstorm ideas on the first day. The ideas then sat for the night. With time for reflection, a team would then sort through the ideas to narrow down the range toward a solution. In the process of doing so, ideas were often combined or developed in new ways. This two-step process is the

essence of effective problem solving. It always has been and will be the same process.

## The often quoted guidelines for brainstorming

Alex Osborn also provided some guidelines for groups to use when brainstorming. He is very clear in saying that these are not rules. He suggests we apply them to ensure the effective collaboration of the team:

- ❶ **Quantity of ideas is more important than quality (at first).**
- ❷ **Don’t judge ideas until all are raised.**
- ❸ **Word your ideas in a positive and enthusiastic way.**
- ❹ **Record and save ideas. Some will be gems.**

These are the best ways to harness the brains of people to solve problems. Generally when people talk about brainstorming, this is what you will see.

## Common Brainstorming Mistakes:

1. Getting the definition of the problem wrong the first time. This means starting to work on solutions only to discover that the problem was not properly defined. As such, the exercise must be repeated once the team realises that it is heading in the wrong direction.
2. Quickly jumping to a solution based on *experience*. You have seen this situation: someone says something like, “I have seen this before and here is the answer”. I call this the curse of the expert, as the expert shuts down brainstorming to find better solutions.
3. When you converge towards a solution, you must notice the spin-off problems.

The result or impact of any idea creates other problems downstream. As such, whenever your team agrees to a solution, do not stop the brainstorming. Instead ask, “What are the implications of this proposed idea?” Often you will find even more effective solutions.

## Designing Your Next Brainstorm Session

Finding ideas that are useful is both highly creative and hard work. With practice, it becomes easier. In the Public Sector, we tend to do things in groups. Unfortunately, many brainstorms fail before they start. People either do not understand what they are to achieve, or they fail to prepare. Start the process as early as possible. Select your team, and ask for their participation. Here are some ways to run more successful brainstorming sessions.

### Pre Event Tips...

- ★ **Clearly Define the Objective before you meet.** Too often we have no clear objective in mind. Direction doesn't hinder creativity, it focuses it.
- ★ **Write a Challenge Statement.** Tell everyone what the objectives are. Draft a note stating, “The objective of the brainstorming session is to..”. Provide some details and relevant materials.
- ★ **Allow People To Prepare.** Allow time for people to think about the issues. Give them a copy of the ‘challenge’ and get their opinions. They may see the problem differently to you.
- ★ **Expect To Get A Result.** There is nothing more frustrating for innovative people than ending without a result.

### During The Event...

When people are prepared, amazing things can happen quickly. Here are some steps to follow as leaders of idea generating sessions. Get all of the obvious ideas written down quickly and concisely. Sometimes the group will see the best way from the very start. Usually not. Use these approaches to push your thinking for options, alternatives, and new possibilities.

- ① **Combinations:** Look at the various ideas you have, combine them, and then rip them apart. What new combinations can you produce? The magic is finding combinations that others have missed.
- ② **Connections:** This technique is based on a simple premise. Look at your situation and view it from another perspective. If you have a Health Care problem, how would the same type of problem be solved in a technology company? How would the boy scouts solve it? If you work for a social cause, how would an industrial goods company solve the issue? Look for contrasting situations, organisations, and environments and put yourself in it.
- ③ **Elaboration:** With the picture of a basic idea in your head, expand that into the opportunity. For example, imagine a picture of the idea to be a puzzle. What are the pieces that you need to fit together? No detail at this stage, we simply want to describe the pieces. For example,
  1. Start with your one sentence description of the idea.
  2. Describe the features of the basic idea.
  3. How could it work?

4. What would have to be in place to make it work?
5. How could you enhance the idea?
6. Are there related revenues, savings, options, or partnerships that we can make?

### Test your results by then asking:

- ★ Why is it a good idea?
- ★ What is the benefit from your perspective?
- ★ What is the benefit from your organisation's perspective?
- ★ What is the benefit from your stakeholder's perspective?
- ★ Have we developed it enough?

Brainstorming is not a team building exercise. It should be results driven to achieve your challenge. However, a lot of team building happens when you achieve your results as a team.

### Some interesting history on brainstorming

In 1942, Alex Osborn published, *How to Think Up!* and in 1953, he published *Applied Imagination*. At first, I wondered about the usefulness of ideas that old. I was wrong to question Osborn's insights. This work is often criticised by consultants and academics as they say there are better ways to generate ideas. This is misguided if you read the book. While we need to create many ideas, the objective is to solve a problem. I could not find any reference to any notion that the goal is simply about generating volumes of ideas.

In about 1955, Alex Osborn recruited a young academic, Sid Parnes, to study creativity at the University of Buffalo. In 2009, I attended a reception for the elderly Sid Parnes. The following is from an innovation column I

wrote about the reception:

### Honouring the original innovators

Sidney Parnes is an academic who needs more recognition. I attended a tribute conference for a true innovator. His story starts in the 1950's. Alex Osborn was the director of the Buffalo office of BBDO. For 20 years he managed teams (all men in those days) to create ideas for advertising clients. He noticed that teams generated relatively weak ideas. He decided that the current approaches were simply not generating big enough ideas

He began to experiment with different techniques to prompt people to create more effective ideas to help solve the challenges of clients. He also began to study these techniques.

Academic Sid Parnes was at the University of Pittsburgh. Osborn recruited him to come to the University of Buffalo where he was a member of the Board of Trustees. Sid Parnes quickly saw the value of creative thinking. He decided to make a study of it. He wrote research papers and spoke often on the topic. He thought it would be a legitimate area of study. Later, he proposed a two-year Master's Program at Buffalo State College. It was soundly rejected by the Board.

In true innovationalist fashion, he learned that he could appeal the ruling at a special meeting. He lobbied each voting member in person to show the value of studying creativity. He said what sustained him in the early days was, "A belief in the creative problem solving process and seeing it work over and over again". His efforts paid off. Five of his first students of creativity were in attendance at this tribute conference. This was the first of many battles he fought to bring the study of creativity in the mainstream.



Sid's work on creativity continued. His work inspired many modern thinkers on creativity and management.

The insight and foresight of Sid Parnes and Alex Osborn truly captures the essence of the innovationalist. Both made a long term contribution to the work and inspired many people through a relentless focus on communication: teaching, lobbying, publications, and conversations with thousands of people.

[www.CreativeEducationFoundation.org](http://www.CreativeEducationFoundation.org)

## Turning meetings into Idea Factories

We have the potential to create new ideas any time people come together. This can be a meeting. Brainstorming was conceived to make meetings more collaborative to generate ideas that solve problems. Design thinking is a process which requires a meeting, people coming together to create solutions to a challenge. It does not matter what we call these meetings. It may be a small conference or a co-creation paradigm shifting ideation collaboration jam.

When I began leading groups to ideate or create new solutions, I saw that people were often confused by the jargon involved with creativity and innovation. The clichés and hype got in the way of people being authentic and true. This prompted me to talk in terms of something people understand: we make things in factories. These meetings became a factory designed to create new ideas, like an idea factory. As with any factory, there are three phases in the process:

### 1. Selecting the proper raw materials

The raw materials are a team of people, a well-defined challenge (a clearly written description of a problem), and enough time to solve the challenge.

### 2. Putting the idea factory to work: creating solutions.

You must use the raw materials to create value inside your idea factory. Start with an overview of the challenge. Talk about what kinds of ideas you want to generate, new and original, or improvements. Provide some ground rules to ensure that people listen to each other, and are open to the contributions of others. You can also use more formal tools to prompt original ideas or a process like design thinking for an idea factory.

Work with your ideas while they are still fresh. A well-defined idea has a sense of energy and conviction to it.

### 3. Shipping a result for success.

Do not finish an idea factory without a result. This result should be a solution for your challenge. At minimum, it should advance your progress.

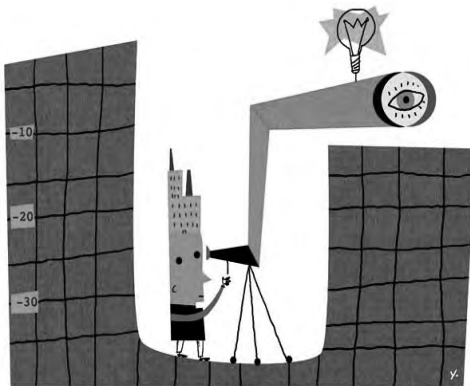
## I am an Idea Factory!

My first book developed the idea factory process over 160 pages. The Leader's Guide is for staff, managers, and team leaders who want to create productive teams. The book includes:

- ✦ Key insights for making collaboration more effective.
- ✦ A tool kit to get your ideas started.
- ✦ A strategic innovation framework for enhancing your effectiveness.
- ✦ A skill set you can adapt to help people be more innovative in their ideas.

See [www.PSIdeaFactory.com](http://www.PSIdeaFactory.com) Link to books. You can download a mini eBook, I am an Idea Factory! for free.

# 17. Every organisation needs an INNOVATIONALIST



Businesses were once organised with a simple model of manufacturing to service a market. Since then our business models have evolved to focus more expertise in hiring and retaining employees. A personnel function grew into today's strategic human resource function. Advertising followed a path starting with basic business announcements. As it grew more complex, a more strategic marketing perspective emerged.

The same can be said of many Public Sector organisations. Many were started as administrative organisations. Today many have internal functions that were not conceived about 30 years ago, including innovation departments.

All along managers talked of hiring people with the right skills and attitude to help them innovate. The problem is that this did not happen for most businesses.

I once watched David Suzuki, the scientist and environmentalist, talk about the challenges facing our society if we did not pay attention to the earth. He said what had to be said: our current way of living is not sustainable. He said this knowing he would be criticised by those who have a vested interest in the status quo. It occurred to me that in the world of ideas people need to do the same. We need people to become innovationalists. We need people to have the same conviction and courage to say what needs to be said knowing they will be criticised. What is long overdue is a specialist role that takes the key concepts of innovation and makes them meaningful to people. The innovationalist can learn a great deal from an environmentalist:

**Communication is crucial:** Attempts to innovate often fail due to a limited understanding of what it means at a personal level. I recently interviewed a woman at a company whose lobby was filled with signs stating: "Innovation is our future". I asked: "What does that mean to you in your job?" She had no idea.

**Be a role model:** People learn by watching others in action. I worked for a law firm in which senior staff mentored new employees by having them sit in their offices to watch and listen. The same should apply to the pursuit of innovative leadership of our organisations.

**Everyone is part of the solution:** Every organisation has two functions to create a profitable business. Both need to be innovative:

1. The business of the business: Innovative solutions are needed for designing services or products that customers will want to buy at a price that allows a sustainable future.
2. The business of managing people to effectively deliver services and products: other people provide the support and infrastructure necessary for success.

### **What needs to be said in your organisation?**

While the role of an innovationalist is not new, it is rare. A job description would include leading problem-solving sessions, coaching people to help generate more effective solutions, providing strategies to improve the efficiency, and effectiveness of the business and saying what needs to be said. Here are five ideas that an innovationalist may adopt to decide what needs to be said in an organisation:

1. Question everything to explore ideas: some people will judge you negatively for questioning everything.
2. Notice mediocrity: be resistant to indifference, status quo, and apathy. Some people will see little need to change.
3. Encourage courageousness: it takes courage to solve problems in new ways. Encourage staff at all levels to focus on both the alarm bells of problems and new initiatives to make systems, processes and services more effective.
4. Highlight myths: do not accept excuses for the status quo from government,

from suppliers or from your business. Managing to maintain the status quo fails to fulfill the potential of people and the resources of an organisation.

5. Focus on ideas, not stereotypes: no sector, organisation or job has a monopoly on creativity. Any thought that a traditional job, like accounting, cannot be creative is wrong. Accountants do not need to be artists, but they do need to solve problems effectively and make good decisions. This is idea creativity. The same applies to executives and the mailroom staff.



# 4

## Do people think alike? Harnessing the cognitive diversity in your people

*Some may believe that a single project manager and team should conduct innovative work from the original idea to the end state. This comforting idea is likely wrong.*

*If someone resists your change, they are not change resistant. They just don't like your proposed change.*

*Our problems have become so complex, and the penalty for not solving them so high, that we need to study the problem solver and the problems we need to solve.*

### ARTICLES

A Dangerous idea if we want innovative organisations

18. Cognitive Diversity: A case where informed discrimination may be useful

19. Do your training and management programs assume people think alike?

20. Creating awareness of cognitive diversity in Government

# A Dangerous Idea If We Want INNOVATIVE ORGANISATIONS

There is a festival in Australia that focuses on ideas. Not just any ideas; *dangerous* ideas.

The *Festivals of Dangerous Ideas* says they question our assumptions about the way we live, and demand that we recognise the potential for social change and challenge us to act.

Here is a story about a dangerous idea. It starts with a question: *Do all people think alike?* Research shows a measurable diversity in the way people think, solve problems, and deal with change. We know that cognitive diversity is real. If so, why is it so hard to find examples of how this knowledge shapes our policies and programs? This tells me that we design our management policies (and pretty much everything else) as if all people think alike.

Challenge my assertion if you can. In five years of asking for examples, just one person offered an example of an organisation that allows people to select the option that best fits their style of thinking. If we ignore these obvious differences, we then build cognitive bias into our programs.

## So what's the dangerous idea?

If we could change one thing to make all organisations more innovative what would it be?

What if we design organisations and the policies, rules, and strategies that guide them

based on the fact that people do not think alike? What if we use the research to create new models to recognise and leverage this difference?

- ✱ We would stop making people wrong for thinking in the style most comfortable to them.
- ✱ We would design systems that actually work for all people, not just some people.
- ✱ We would recognise and then leverage these differences as an expertise.
- ✱ We would match people to the challenges best suited to their style of thinking by making cognitive 'discrimination' seem normal and ideal.
- ✱ We would stop forcing one style of thinking on all people and wondering why it fails to work.

We should question our assumptions about the way we manage people. We should recognise the potential to improve how we engage with people. This is a challenge to act. Start with your team and those around you.

This is a dangerous idea. Why? If we look at our policies, we will likely see that they assume all people think alike. This is a very bad assumption.

# 18. COGNITIVE DIVERSITY: a case where informed discrimination may be useful

Most management recommendations implicitly assume that people think alike. Yet we know that is not true. Ignoring cognitive diversity is the equivalent to any other form of bigotry—be it racial, ethnic, or gender.

Have you ever thought, ‘Why can’t you think more like me?’

Some people question everything as this is the way they solve their challenges. Others see less need to challenge everything, and prefer to accept many things as they are. The trouble is that most of us assume that others think like us.

When I learned about cognitive diversity I was fascinated by the idea that people have different preferred ways of thinking that are consistent and predictable. My ‘aha’ moment happened when the implications of cognitive diversity explained why I got along with some managers and not with others. We had different thinking styles, and therefore, solved problems in ways that were foreign to the other.

I studied with Dr. Kirton. His work reflects cognitive style rather than behaviour differences. He developed an instrument and a body of work focused on cognitive or problem solving style. Our individual style is likely best shown when we work on our own: when we can complete a project any way we choose. If you like, the way we think while in the privacy of our own head is most likely the way we prefer to think. If you question most

things, you will. If you accept most things as they are, you will.

We do a disservice to people if we ignore cognitive diversity. We should see these differences as a starting platform, and then develop new ideas that are applied in practical ways to people who think in different ways. This is far better than having writers produce books or papers that reflect their personal style of seeing the world. In other words, their recommendations become a version of ‘one size – which is my size – fits all’ style of management. Ignoring this difference is much like a right-handed golf instructor encouraging people to play golf by only providing right-hand golf clubs. What if half of the group is left handed? Should we be critical of their inability to grasp the game of right-handed golf, or do we recognise that we failed to see the obvious difference?

At the very core of my argument are these observations:

- ★ Most people find it easy to work with people who think like them. They also find it more challenging to work with people who do not think like them.
- ★ Most management recommendations can be applied broadly as they implicitly assume that people think alike. As such, recommendations apply equally to those who question everything and those who do not.

## Assess your style of thinking

This informal way to assess your style can be highly insightful. These attributes describe the extremes of both styles of thinking. In the real world, people are a combination of both, with a preference for one style over the other. Some people will not have a preference: they

can bridge the two styles of thinking. Read both columns. Which seems closer to your style of thinking? Where would you see yourself on this continuum between a highly adaptive thinking and a highly innovative?



Attributes of Adaptive Style of Thinkers	Attributes of Innovative Style of Thinkers
<b>How they see each other</b>	
Adaptors are seen by Innovators as sound, conforming, safe, predictable, inflexible, wedded to the system and intolerant of ambiguity.	Innovators are seen by Adaptors as glamorous, exciting, unsound, impractical, risky, abrasive, threatening the established system and causing dissonance.
<b>In solving problems</b>	
<p>Adaptors tend to accept the problems as defined.</p> <p>Early resolution of problems, limiting disruption and immediate increased efficiency are important to them.</p> <p>They challenge rules rarely, cautiously, when assured of strong support and problem solving within consensus.</p> <p>They are sensitive to people, maintain group cohesion and cooperation; can be slow to overhaul a rule.</p>	<p>Innovators tend to reject the generally accepted perception of problems and redefine them. Their view of the problem may be hard to get across.</p> <p>They seem less concerned with immediate efficiency, looking to possible long-term gains.</p> <p>They often challenge rules. They may have little respect for past approaches.</p> <p>They may appear insensitive to people when in pursuit of solutions, so they often threaten group cohesion and cooperation.</p>
<b>In generating solutions</b>	
Adaptors prefer to generate a few novel, relevant and acceptable solutions aimed at doing things better. These solutions are relatively easier to implement.	Innovators generally produce numerous ideas, some of which may not appear relevant to others. Such ideas often contain solutions which result in doing things differently.
<b>In times of change</b>	
Adaptors are essential for ongoing functions, but in times of unexpected change may have some difficulty moving out of their established role.	Innovators are essential in times of change or crisis, but may have trouble applying themselves to ongoing organisational demands.



## Adaption and Innovation

Kirton studied how people in organisations solve problems and create change. He has a large body of work that many others have contributed to. He also created an assessment model, the KAI (Kirton Adaptor Innovator). As with all indicators that follow a continuum, every population has distribution that reflects the bell curve, that is, most people fall between the extremes. Fewer people are found toward the extremes that he labeled as, the adaptive style and the innovative style of thinking. The key to understand this approach is to recognise that our personal assessment provides a useful snapshot of our style, but our style is relative to those we work with.

For example, someone with a mid range assessment will be seen as having two behaviors – depending on who is making the judgment. Imagine we assess three people: A, B and C. A is the high adaptor, B is in the mid range, and C is the high innovator:

- ✳ Person A – who is high adaptor – will view B with a mid score as behaving like an innovator.
- ✳ Person C – who is high innovator – will view B as an adaptor as they are relative to their style of problem solving.

If B is a smart manager, he or she will recognise the implication of this: each person needs to be managed differently to allow them to maximise their effectiveness to the organisation. If A and C understand the issues highlighted in the chart, both will have a better way of managing their contribution, and dealing with people who think very differently to them. A little understanding can help them from thinking the other is from some alien planet.

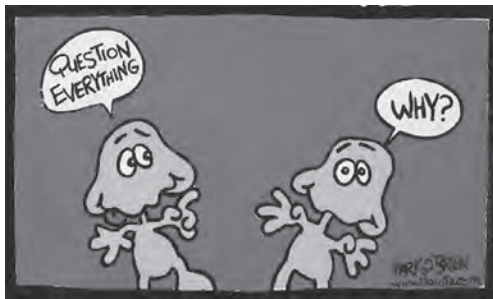
I think we should discriminate more: identify the types of challenges we have, and then

recognise the people with the right cognitive style to solve the problem most effectively. You could say, does the lie of the ball suggest a right-handed golfer or a left-handed golfer would be best to take the shot?

The bottom line for managers, and the people who forward advice in the form of books, presentations, or consulting, is to provide ideas and concepts that lead to decisions that make our organisations more effective. There is ample research that finds vast numbers of people in our organisations are not engaged in their job. To quote Dr. Kirton: “Our problems have become so complex, and the penalty for not solving them so high, that we need to study the problem solver and the problems we need to solve”.

We must develop our skills to understand the ‘problem solver’ in more sophisticated ways. As such, a little cognitive discrimination to match the right thinking style to the right problem, could greatly enhance your capacity to innovate. Engage people in a way that best suits their style of thinking. That’s a bottom line difference.

# 19. Do your training programs and management systems assume people **THINK ALIKE**?



You open the manual for a leadership program. On page one you read:

*“The authors of this program assume that people think alike, and think in the same way as the authors. The models and tools we recommend work well for us. As such, these ideas will work for you”.*

The reality is that a manual won't publish this warning. That is a shame as it's the truth with many training and management programs. I have worked in the area of cognitive diversity and innovation for 15 years. I recently found research that confirmed my belief that training often has a cognitive bias in its design and delivery. For example:

- ★ The person who creates a program has a specific thinking style.
- ★ This style of thinking creates the program, making it totally appropriate for people who think the same way as the program developer.
- ★ The program presenter can also bring

their own cognitive bias to a program in terms of what they see as important.

- ★ The presenter also creates a cognitive climate in the way they present ideas, engage people, and answer questions from participants.

Whether you use MBTI, KAI, or DISC, it's obvious that people do not think alike. Yet do we use this insight when designing training programs? The research suggests not.

Armstrong, Cools, Sadler-Smith in the 'Role of Cognitive Styles in Business and Managing' suggest, "Cognitive style refers to consistent individual differences in how individuals perceive, think, solve problems, learn, take decisions, and relate to others". If we know that there are consistent individual differences, should we not ensure our training and management programs recognise these differences?

Some training takes notice of the various styles of learning, but what about decision-making, problem solving, and collaboration? I see little evidence that we notice these differences. Let's explore cognitive diversity and training, starting with a practical example of this lack of awareness. It was a training manual for an executive leadership program. It talked about leadership and the need for leaders to set goals. The best way to do so is SMART goal setting:

**S—Specific and significant:** Your goal

or problem statement should be a clear statement of what you want to create.

**M—Measurable and meaningful:** Making goals measurable helps you see your progress.

**A—Action-oriented and achievable:** Your goal should focus on actions that you can control.

**R—Realistic and relevant:** Realistic is another word for achievable.

**T—Time-bound and tangible:** Set a deadline to add a sense of urgency.

About the same time I read a study by the Leadership IQ which said SMART goals do not correlate with success. Its study of 4,182 workers from 397 organisations found that eight factors predicted whether somebody's goals would help them achieve great things.

1. I can vividly picture how great it will feel when I achieve my goals.
2. I will have to learn new skills to achieve my assigned goals for this year.
3. My goals are absolutely necessary to help this company.
4. I actively participated in creating my goals for this year.
5. I have access to any formal training that I will need to accomplish my goals.
6. My goals for this year will push me out of my comfort zone.
7. My goals will enrich the lives of somebody besides me (customers or the community).
8. My goals are aligned with the organisation's top priorities for this year.

The report adds, "The typical goal-setting processes companies have been using for decades are not helping employees achieve great things. In fact, the type of goal setting

we should be doing is pretty much the opposite of what organisations have been doing for the past few decades".

The authors tell us to focus on HARD goals instead of SMART goals:

**H—Heartfelt:** My goals will enrich the lives of somebody besides me.

**A—Animated:** I can vividly picture how great it will feel when I achieve my goals.

**R—Required:** My goals are absolutely necessary to help this company.

**D—Difficult:** I will have to learn new skills and leave my comfort zone to achieve my goals.

Unless you believe all people think alike, why do we make such assertions?

SMART goal setting is a highly structured approach. This is useful for people who prefer structure. What about the others? They often feel repressed by the focus on highly structured goals. They may appreciate HARD goal setting as an option.

We cannot tell people that they are wrong to think in the style that is most comfortable for them. Why not provide both SMART and HARD models and encourage people to pick the model more useful for their style of thinking? I learned my lessons from research and workshops by Dr. Kirton who developed a body of knowledge called 'Adaption-Innovation Theory'. It focuses on cognitive style, the way we think, solve problems, and deal with change.

Kirton created the Adaption-Innovation Theory and an assessment tool (KAI) to provide a way to understand these issues. The theory is a continuum between two extremes in thinking style based on the need people have for structure. Two-thirds of people will fall between these extremes. A vast amount of research has been undertaken to create the original models. It may seem familiar

as the basic concept has been copied by numerous consulting firms. The following are some characteristics of these styles at the extremes.

### Adaptive style of thinkers

- ✱ Adaptive thinkers tend to accept the problems as defined.
- ✱ Early resolution of problems, limiting disruption, and immediate increased efficiency are important to them.
- ✱ They challenge rules rarely, and cautiously when assured of strong support and problem solving within consensus.
- ✱ They are sensitive to people, maintain group cohesion, and cooperation.
- ✱ Adaptors prefer to generate a few relevant and acceptable solutions aimed at doing things better. These solutions are relatively easier to implement.

### Innovative style of thinkers

- ✱ Innovators tend to reject the generally accepted perception of problems and redefine them. Their view of the problem may be hard to get across.
- ✱ They seem less concerned with immediate efficiency, looking to possible long-term gains.
- ✱ They often challenge rules. They may have little respect for past approaches.
- ✱ They may appear insensitive to people when solving problems, so they often threaten group cohesion and cooperation.
- ✱ Innovators generally produce many ideas; some may not appear relevant to others. Such ideas often result in doing things differently.

We do a disservice to people if we ignore cognitive diversity. You cannot blame an innovative thinker for questioning everything (including your program, tools and models) as this is predictable behavior.

We should see these differences as a platform and then develop training ideas to engage people from both ends of the thinking style continuum.

This is far better than a 'one size fits all' style of training. Ignoring this difference is much like a right-handed golf instructor who is hired to train a team to play golf. He shows up with right-handed golf clubs. What if some people are left-handed? Are you critical of their inability to grasp right-handed golf? Perhaps we should acknowledge the failure to see the obvious and bring some left-handed clubs.

We fail people when we fail to design programs that incorporate this diversity. In five years of asking for an example of an organisation that created options for those who want structure and those who resist it, I have only one—Weight Watchers.

A woman in Canada showed me two options. One involved using a spread sheet that requires you to cook and weigh your food. The other is a small booklet with pictures of food groups. You pick one item from each picture and your serving is the size of a small fist. The point is monitoring what you put in your mouth. How you define what you put on your plate is irrelevant. You pick the option that works for you.

That's my vision—education, development and even diet programs are developed and delivered by people who make it safe for people to think in the style most comfortable to them. Perhaps someday I will open a training manual to read:

*"This training program has been certified as 'FCB' (Free of Cognitive Bias) to remove any bias the authors may have. All models and tools have been tested by people from a diversity of thinking styles. We encourage you to use the tools most useful to your style of thinking".*

## 20. Creating awareness of COGNITIVE DIVERSITY in GOVERNMENT

Asking a question such as – *do all staff think alike?* – is rhetorical. The answer is obvious. If so, why do I not see more evidence that we understand these differences and ensure our programs are free of cognitive bias?

It is possible to filter programs and communication messages through a cognitive diversity filter. Here is a study of a government innovation paper that I was able to influence.

The Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation (CCAF) was asked to develop a discussion paper on innovation in the Public Sector. The initial working title was: *Taking Chances: Finding Ways to Embrace Innovation, Risk and Control in the Public Sector Organisations*. I was asked to review the document.

At first glance, I was surprised by the title. ‘Taking Chances’ links innovation to gambling. No one else seems to notice. The author was sympathetic and changed the title to *Innovation, Risk and Control*. I also critiqued a comment made a senior government official who suggested, “*It means that managers who start innovative projects see them through to a point there they are stable and sustainable*”.

This comment reflects an often quoted problem with people who create the ideas

and never seem to implement them. It is typical of comments such as, “She is great at coming up with ideas but can’t make them happen”. I challenged the implications of this comment for its cognitive bias. The final report changed the comment and referred to the work of cognitive diversity:

*“Some may believe that a single project manager and team should conduct innovative work from the original idea to the end state. This comforting idea is likely wrong. Because people have different thinking and problem solving styles, some are well suited to idea generation, while others excel in the follow-through required to complete a task. Innovative thinkers tend to question everything, have a strong desire for change, and excel in generating ideas.*

*But once the idea moves to a project design and testing stage, innovative thinkers should give way to people who solve problems in a more adaptive way. In effect, project managers should engage both innovative and adaptive styles of thinking – but in different mixes at different stages of the innovation cycle. If the mix is wrong, the project will be stressed”.*

A reference was made at the back of the publication:

“See M. J. Kirton, *Adaption-Innovation: In the Context of Diversity and Change* (Routledge,

New York: 2003). Kirton's Adaption-Innovation theory posits that people approach problem solving in two distinct ways: adapters thrive in a structured setting, while innovators do well with less structure and boundaries. (This goes to the heart of how peoples brains process information. It is important to note that no individual fits one model or the other, rather any person can be positioned on a continuum between the poles.)

Managers should recognise that innovation depends on finding and mixing people who are strong in both of these problem-solving approaches to varying degrees. Innovative thinkers are often willing to work with little structure and much ambiguity. Adaptive thinkers prefer precision, reliability, discipline, safety, and soundness. No creative idea can progress successfully without the problem solving abilities that both of these thinking styles bring to the table.

CCAF thanks Ed Bernacki for drawing our attention to the importance of this factor”.

All organisations could do this type of review. Do your policies and programs favor one style of thinking over another? You can study the attributes of adaptive and innovative thinkers and notice how your programs would be interpreted by both styles of thinking. This will give you insights for changes that should be made. This is the only way to harness the full diversity of people in your organisation on the challenges it faces.

### **Seeing the importance of cognitive diversity in public service**

Recognising cognitive diversity is important from a variety of perspectives in public service. Here are case studies from experience:

- ★ Customer Service Team at the City

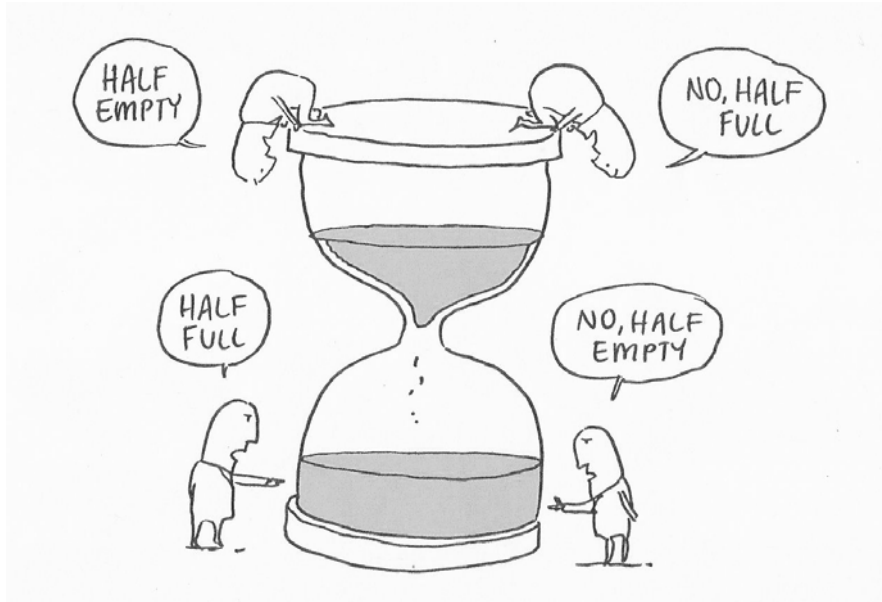
of Ottawa – after using the Kirton Adaption Innovation assessment (KAI), it was noticed that the service team was highly adaptive, much more than many of its ‘customers’. This led to role playing to better understand how to deal with those who are more innovative.

- ★ Ontario Government – a very high innovator employee (based on the KAI assessment) could not stay in a job for more than a year or two without getting bored. Over the years, she developed a reputation as a problem solver. She had 20 jobs in 28 years. She was in high demand for her expertise knowing her recommendations would be better managed by those already inside the Department.
- ★ Regional Health Board in New Zealand – in discussions on cognitive diversity, the Chief Medical Officer had a major insight. He said, “We have a problem with people who do not comply with their medical prescriptions. We have assumed they think alike”. This led to a fascinating discussion. Why would a highly adaptive patient not take their drugs? Why would a highly innovative patient not take their drugs? This opened the door to a more sophisticated problem solving process.

### **Understanding cognitive diversity in public service**

Recognising the implications of cognitive diversity should be a priority for all public service organisations. There are implications for the design of your services on staff and stakeholders in the community. These case studies reflect insights gained from applying this work in practical ways.

# We want people to have a GOOD ATTITUDE!



*“Why must you always question everything? You go off on tangents. You are critical of ideas, and often ignore the rest of us. The worse thing is that you always see the glass as half empty, not half full like those of us with a good attitude.”*

*“Going off on tangents is how you explore for stronger solutions. Seeing the glass as half full is not good; it means you are happy with the status quo. Questioning everything helps to squeeze out the value in an idea. Seeing the glass as half empty means you see twice as much potential. Seeing twice as much opportunity is positive. It comes from having a good attitude, not like how you stifle creative thinking.”*

Who has the ‘good’ attitude? The first is typical of those who are more adaptive. The second is typical of those who are more innovative. Who is right? Therefore, who is wrong? Who defines ‘good attitude’ knowing that people do not think alike? It is a useful conversation to have with staff and managers before future job performance reviews.

Graphic by Matt Golding [www.threefingers.com.au](http://www.threefingers.com.au)





# 5 Leading innovation: Where does your organisation need new ideas?

*Many senior executives have a way with words. It is far too easy for them to say 'no' to an idea without having to say 'no'.*

*To create change takes foresight to see where opportunity exists, ideas to fuel the change, and the conviction to manage these ideas into results.*

*Most new ideas come from people working on their own in pursuit of their everyday problems and challenges. Other ideas require people to collaborate and this automatically creates a second problem.*

## ARTICLES

A test for leadership and innovation

21. Leaders act on flashes of inspiration and discovery. Designing your Strategy Case Studies: Singapore Ministry of Defence, Air Force, Canada Communications Security Establishment, Health Canada, Australia ComSuper
22. Your Wakeup Call: Are you part of the solution or the problem?
23. Innovating HR: Forget software, innovate how we manage people
24. Innovation, change, and risk: Are you preaching the wrong message?
25. Lean thinking in the Public Sector. City of Melbourne.

# A test for **LEADERSHIP and INNOVATION:** What will you do when an employee comes to you with a bad idea?

While I completed my MBA in New Zealand, an opportunity arose to work with New Zealand Post. The postal business was in a state of flux as the government department had been restructured into a State Owned Enterprise (a business model in which it was expected to show a profit).

The project involved innovating new ways to deliver mail to the business sector. People in the marketing department, who were busy developing plans to market the numerous postal services, seemed to be too busy to look at a new concept.

On the last day of the project, the only person left to approach was Elmar Toime then, GM of Marketing. His office was on the executive floor. I asked if he could spare five minutes to review the concept. He listened for five minutes and said to continue. Ninety minutes later the meeting ended.

Overall he did not think it was practical to implement the idea but he was intrigued and wanted to spend more time with it. What he said always remains with me. He said, *“I wish more people would come to me with ideas, even bad ideas, because it means people are thinking. We need people to think”*.

He then asked if I wanted a small assignment to draft a short report about the idea.

New Zealand Post was later awarded the title of *Company of the Year* and Elmar Toime, by then the chief executive, was selected as the *CEO of the Year*. After a particularly profitable year, New Zealand Post lowered the cost of all domestic mail by 12 per cent. New Zealand Post has a formal system of studying trends and issues important to its business in the future. It keeps an eye on the impact of technology and change on its markets and services.

Looking back at our meeting, I recognised the value of his comments.

If he had used a creativity-killer line like, *“It will never work”* I would have left frustrated and reluctant to invest my time in thinking up new ideas. His support spoke volumes for his belief in new ideas. His leadership was more important than any formal programs the organisation could create.

To find innovative ideas takes people with the right tools and perspectives. After all, the best ideas are already inside most companies. We need to create the systems and processes to find, nurture and act on them.

*Source: I am an Idea Factory! The Leaders Guide. This is a toolkit for managers to better engage their staff to solve problems and create opportunities.*

# LEADING INNOVATION

## No simple formula for innovation

Since 2000, I have been involved with Public Sector innovation programs. I worked in the private sector but prefer the Public Sector. Why? Having worked in government and with people from the Public Sector, I like the passion and commitment I see. Prior to that, I was part of the *Total Quality Service* team at *New Zealand Post* working on strategies to continually improve current services and design new services.

With a strong background in marketing and communications, I keep seeing a problem: *many in the Public Sector have a poor understanding of innovation and creativity (the private sector is no better)*. I hear too many clichés, and not enough thought leadership and international best practice.

*There is no simple formula for innovation.*

Some say culture is the secret, or leadership is the key. Thinking that any single factor will make the difference is not useful. Innovation is a puzzle with many pieces fitting together. Understanding each piece gives us insight. Missing pieces can be a problem. This book refers to pieces about people and building their capacity to innovate that are often missing (not technologies or restructuring issues). It focuses on:

1. **Leadership:** Leaders need to lead innovation. Everything starts with leaders who walk the innovation talk. Section one provides a broad view of the innovation talk. Sections three and four focus on walking the talk.
2. **Motive and culture:** Culture is important. Yet, our focus on culture often overlooks how people are individuals who are motivated by different conditions. Motive is personal.
3. **Skills for managing ideas:** Our organisations are full of educated professionals. Do we also give people new skills for solving problems, managing ideas, and collaboration? Section two introduces an innovation skills framework.
4. **Style of thinking:** Do people think alike? Perhaps the most overlooked aspect of people management is the simple fact that people do not think alike. The irony is that our management systems often implicitly assume they do. Learn how to recognise cognitive differences and use them. Cognitive diversity is likely the biggest wasted resource in our organisations.

### Innovation is More Than Improvement

We need to remember the original definitions of this work. In 2001, I worked with the *Singapore Prime Minister's Office* to write a guide on innovation. We used this definition that I believe is far more effective than what I see today:

*“Innovation is More Than Improvement. Continual improvement and innovation work hand in hand. Improvements are important but innovations are like a quantum improvement that breaks new ground to create value in new ways”.*

Academics Anthony Arundela and Dorothea Huberc researched Australian Public Sector innovation in their paper, “*From too little to too much innovation? Issues in measuring innovation in the Public Sector*”.

What is deeply troubling is the weak understanding of innovation in the Public Sector. The authors talked to senior managers to measure their understanding of innovation. The report suggests, “*with multiple definitions of different types of Public Sector innovations, a common theme is that Public Sector innovation involves novelty and the intention of making something better, for instance, through new or improved services and processes*”.

Notice the word, *intention*; this is an *Alice in Wonderland* understanding of innovation. To suggest that innovation changed from the results of our ideas to being the intention to innovate reflects a major communication problem. Interviewees in the research were shown statements about characteristics of an innovation:

1. *It can fail,*
2. *It need only be new to their own branch, and-*
3. *It must be implemented.*

The report said, “*The first two characteristics were well received, but the last was frequently not understood and often forgotten*”.

Again, I see a major communication problem. If managers talk of innovation without seeing the need for implementation, then we must fix this lack of understanding. Section one starts to solve this issue by giving you new ways to view innovation for the organisation and for yourself. I also wonder about the value of talking about failure of new ideas (See idea 24).

## Can innovation fail?

I suggest no; rather you can fail to innovate. Technology can fail. Project management can fail. Marketing can fail. Problem solving can fail. This does not mean innovation has failed. This issue needs much more discussion. I agree with people like Edward de Bono who said in a briefing; “*Innovation is something you know in retrospect, once you create the idea, implement it, and see the value you have created*”.

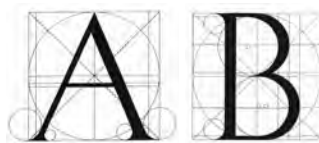
The real question is: why do we now consider every idea to be innovative?

## Innovation skills versus an Innovation Process

Section Two in this book focuses on a skills framework for innovation. Understand the distinction between *innovation skills* and an *innovation process*.

Innovation involves two problems. We can call them **Problem A** and **Problem B**. Let’s assume you are about to start an effort to find an innovative solution to a challenge.

**Problem A** is the problem of creating the solutions or ideas you need. This is the traditional role of R&D. A well-conceived innovation process can guide you through the stages. Every consultant and academic has a model. It is a problem solving process. It begins with the



problem, works through solutions, implementation, and then use. Most innovation processes are between three and five stages. The Idea Factory process is four steps. The Australian Public Sector suggests a five-stage process: *Idea generation, Idea selection, Idea implementation, Sustaining ideas, and Idea diffusion.*

Generally people collaborate to solve **Problem A**. This creates a second problem; how people will collaborate *effectively* to deliver the ideas you need to create. Call this the **Problem B**. If collaboration is not managed effectively, then too much energy is spent on 'getting along' rather than solving the original problem. Everyone knows the cost of poor collaboration. **Problem B** is often overlooked or poorly managed.

Solutions are found by focusing development efforts on two elements:

1. Innovation skill development to enhance the effectiveness of your efforts to innovate.
2. Recognising the differences in the way people think and solve problems.

Every process, such as innovation and design thinking, assumes that people have underlying skills for collaboration, problem solving, ideation, and idea management. This is a poor assumption.

There is great value in learning the underlying skills. They provide a foundation of problem solving insights and tools, and the confidence to use them. For example, we know that the ability to judge the value of an idea is important. There is a skill set for judging ideas. The reality is that too many idea sessions use a childhood technique for picking ideas; the star system. Group members are asked to put two stars beside the idea they like most, and one star for next. This is useful for kids in school, not professionals at work.

The second element is managing cognitive diversity, the theme of section five.

## The Paradox of Innovation Attributes and Skills

There is a major difference between the concept of a skill as a competence, and the attributes and attitudes necessary for innovative thinking. These qualities reflect the inner motivations of people to use these skills.

- ★ Challenges status quo
- ★ Sense of enthusiasm and passion
- ★ Visionary, makes connections others miss
- ★ Willing to experiment and learn
- ★ Recognises patterns and systems
- ★ Sees the big picture and the details
- ★ Tolerates ambiguity
- ★ Balance intuition and analysis
- ★ Collaborative yet individual thinker
- ★ Persevering and diligence



If someone makes connections others miss, questions things, challenges the status quo, and is individualistic, would your HR system label them as an innovator or someone who is negative, cynical, and in need of change?

## **Design thinking is problem solving**

The latest fashion is *design thinking*. It is a good tool for problem solving within the range of tools for innovation. Is it new? No. The label is new, but not what you do when you engage in design thinking. Some talk about *human centred design*. This extends work from the 1980's on customer focus and 1990's on corporate anthropology (which goes beyond asking people what is important to watch them use a product or experience a service to see what really happens). Depending on the approach to design thinking, many processes are taken from the body of work on continuous improvement and creativity.

## **Trust is the most effective predictor for innovation**

Respect for people and their ideas is important. Trust is the key.

One fact never changes: the best ideas come from the people on the job. The vast majority of ideas come from people solving the challenges of their jobs. They need a focus, skills, and an environment built on trust. This book was written to prompt new conversations to build the capacity of Public Sector to innovate.

# Managing for Innovation Self Audit

For each issue, indicate the level of your response to these common factors for innovation for your team, group, or organisation.

1. None: We have no initiatives to deal with this issue.

2. Reactive: We are reactive if the situation comes up.

3. Defined: We have a defined policy.

4. Integrated: We have a fully integrated strategy.

Indicate the level of your response or deployment of these innovation issues with an 'x'.		None	Reactive	Defined	Integrated
1	Senior Executive Leadership Senior executives define innovation and communicate this effectively				
2	Senior executives develop values that focus on innovation				
3	Senior executives demonstrate their commitment to innovation excellence in their day-to-day activities				
4	Organisational Culture Organisation translates its values into desired behaviours that encourage innovation				
5	Organisation recognises cognitive diversity as an asset and seeks to eliminate cognitive bias in design of management systems				
6	Organisation has communication programs to promote a culture of innovation				
7	Strategy Development and Deployment Organisation has strategies that focus on innovation and innovative internal systems				
8	Organisation develops action plans aligned to innovation strategies and goals				
9	Organisation allocates resources for innovation activities				
10	Organisation sets targets for employees linked to innovation strategies and goals				
11	Human Resource Planning Human resource plans are based on the organisation's innovation strategies				
12	Organisation develops mechanisms to involve and engage employees in innovation				
13	Organisation encourages cross-functional activities and learning for innovation.				
14	Employee Education, Training and Development Organisation determines education and training needs for its employees based on organisational innovation strategies				
15	Organisation delivers programs in problem solving, creativity, facilitation and innovative thinking				

# 21. LEADERS Act on Flashes of Inspiration and Discovery

## Thought leadership on leading innovation and innovation strategy

“Innovation is a lonely art,” wrote Robert Grudin in his book, *The Grace of Great Things*. He suggests innovation is a lonely art because “the leader who looks out to the frontier must face away from the people who follow”.

The decision to look forward to create strong visions for the future is something that many executives either avoid or relegate to strategic-planning retreats. Perhaps it is time to take a hard look at the critical issues of leading creatively on a day-to-day basis.

At the very heart of creativity and innovation are three basic skills that business leaders must master:

1. They must actually see what is going on around them.
2. They must interpret what they see for meaning.
3. They must decide to do something with what they see and interpret.

In each case, there are two different stages. The first is to explore the issue in terms of asking the right questions that lead to new insights. The second stage is having the confidence to act on one’s decisions and insights.

To explore this issue, I asked Sir Geoffrey Palmer, former Prime Minister of New Zealand, to consider one simple question: how do you know a good idea when you see one? He wrote to say, “Analysis and thought are critical to the recognition of a good idea, but they are not enough. They are a necessary condition not a sufficient condition. In the

end, good ideas often come from instinctive flashes of insight. Often, the best ideas are very simple. But when you have a good idea you know it with conviction even if other people do not recognise it”.

Leaders uncomfortable with their ability to recognise the potential for innovation when faced with it must measure the impact on their organisation if they fail to act. The objective of a recent project was to work with the staff of a large service organisation to enhance their skills and use of creativity. The assessment included charting the organisation’s climate and its support or hindrance to creative thinking.

We found that employees felt little need for creativity due to their perception that the work was mundane and routine. They lacked challenge. To introduce workshops on brainstorming and creativity without addressing the need for people to feel a sense of purpose would have been wasteful. This is particularly acute for knowledge organisations like the Public Sector. People with university degrees, good resumes and unique skills are well rewarded but often bored, exhausted and lacking a true sense of purpose.

The second element of Sir Geoffrey Palmer’s concern is vision. He said, “One important feature of good ideas consists of having a gift or ability to see how things may turn out, how parts of the future may unfold”. Creative leaders become masters of change. The ability to see opportunities and have the confidence to act are the keys for creative leadership.



People will make some mistakes, but from the mistakes, the creative leader gets insights to fuel new ideas.

Grudin recognised that leading in creative ways does not always lead to new discoveries: “Inspiration may be the revelation of something completely new, but it is also the rediscovery of something always true”.

To realise that something is always true is also a powerful conclusion in an era of management fads. At the very heart of creative leadership are people who look around their environment, interpret what they see, and act on it regardless of how lonely this may seem at times.

### **What’s your strategy for innovation?**

To guide your journey, it is important to define a way forward. Having a strategy for your team, group, or department is crucial. I would suggest that different people would define innovation strategy in very different ways.

1. Technology strategy – many people assume innovation is based on new technology.
2. Structuring or business model changes – some suggest that innovation can only happen with new business models.
3. Building capacity to innovate – the ideas in this book involve this aspect of people development.

I met with the Queensland Ombudsman’s Office to discuss its impressive innovation strategy. It is a small department of 50 people. It focused on three challenges:

1. **People innovations** – to build engagement and improve the way people work together and with clients
2. **Social innovations** – to improve relationships between people

3. **Business innovations** – to improve internal processes to enhance services

Implementation was very simple. Staff could volunteer to contribute to a challenge that most interested them. Each group was to define several initiatives each year that would contribute to the department. This is an ideal approach for a small group.

### **Innovation Strategy Frameworks**

For larger departments, shape your strategy to include the following elements.

1. **Opportunity:** Become excellent in four idea strategies

Nothing happens until someone creates an opportunity for something to happen. The element of opportunity is about setting a direction.

One organisation analysed the types of ideas that were generated and implemented by its ‘innovation program’ to discover that most ideas were not new and different in the traditional sense. The issue becomes whether it is useful to call every idea an innovation when it is clearly an improvement. Its review found different types of ideas were created.

**10% - Creating new stakeholder or customer opportunities.** Focus on the traditional concept of innovation in terms of shaping new and different services and approaches to serve our stakeholders.

**40% - Improving existing products, services, and processes.** Focus on effectiveness by applying ideas to make services better, both internally and externally to ensure they deliver value.

**40% - Eliminating non-value adding activities.** Focus on efficiency to ensure we continue to apply ideas to make our services better and more efficient.

**10% - Ideas benchmarked or copied.** Focus on copying ideas from others within the organisation and Public Sector.

This creates a fascinating model. It gives you four directions to create or source new ideas. Your role is to focus some effort each year on every target. These tactics are the opportunities you create for people to collaborate and contribute.

## 2. Culture and Motive

The many studies on innovative organisations point to a common conclusion: the single most important factor is trust. People must be free to contribute and collaborate. Trusting in the people around them is much like fertilizer that nurtures the growth of ideas and relationship. One of the best resources to better understand the factors that enhance and hinder a climate open to ideas was research by Harvard Professor, Teresa Amabile. Over many years she and her team researched these issues. She found that series of factors stimulate a climate for creativity.

- ✱ Supportive coworkers
- ✱ Access to resources
- ✱ Perception of challenging work
- ✱ Freedom to think and question
- ✱ Supportive supervisors
- ✱ Recognition and rewards
- ✱ Unity and cooperation

Two factors were found to hinder creative work:

- ✱ Political problems or issues: “turf” issues, lack of cooperation between areas, people play the “game” rather than create value for the organisation.
- ✱ Evaluation pressures: unnecessary pressure for job evaluations reduces forward thinking.

Two factors were major inhibitors for a creative workplace. These being the perception of:

- ✱ insufficient time to be innovative
- ✱ insufficient challenge for the need to be innovative

The single most common reason for staff apathy and indifference is the perception that, “I have no time to be innovative and it is really not worth it anyway”.

## 3. Staff Skill Development

The need to shape stronger solutions to make your team work more effectively needs to be supported with skill development. Innovation, problem solving, and collaboration training can be useful. Training in specific tools like Six Thinking Hats, or processes like TRIZ, or design thinking can be useful. Section two of this book profiles a skill development model.

## 4. Harnessing cognitive diversity

When you read the section on *‘Do People Think Alike?’* you will see that some people seem naturally suited to find ideas that are new ways to do things. Others are better suited to find ideas that improve or make things better. Many organisations already use a cognitive assessment but often fail to fully leverage the benefits of the knowledge. At minimum, ensure your management policies do not bias some staff. Review the article: *‘Do your training programs assume people think alike?’* Apply the same reasoning to management policies; do they suppress these differences or harness them? See Section 5 for more insights.

## 5. Communicating Innovation

By now, the need to communicate ‘innovation’ in deliberate ways should be clear. Simply putting words on a website is not effective communication. You must put something into the hands of people.

# Designing Your INNOVATION STRATEGY

Shape your strategy to include the following elements.

- ❶ **Opportunity:** Opportunity is about setting a direction and defining the actions to take.
  
- ❷ **Culture and Personal Motivation:** How much trust exists on your team? How can you enhance the culture of ideas?
  
- ❸ **Staff Skill Development:** What is your plan to develop skills for innovation, problem solving, and collaboration?
  - \* Basic Staff skills program
  - \* Team program for managers
  - \* Advanced program for internal leaders
  
- ❹ **Harnessing cognitive diversity:** People do not think alike. How will we recognise these differences and use them?
  
- ❺ **Communicating Innovation:** How will we talk the innovation talk?



# CASE STUDY

## Singapore Ministry of Defence / Air Force

*This overview is taken from an innovation guide written by Ed Bernacki for a yearly PRIDE Innovation tradeshow. PRIDE refers to PRoductivity and Innovation in Daily Efforts.*

“Creative ideas beget innovations. Creativity and innovation have unique and distinct features but they are two faces of the same coin. The process of creativity precedes innovation. Creativity requires the engagement of minds, while innovation translates ideas into reality and creates value. Creativity and innovation require different sets of intellect, approaches and skills.

“There is no shortage of creativity and innovation in MINDEF/SAF. Annually, about 5% of the Defence Budget is used to fund innovative R & D projects. It receives about 300,000 suggestions a year. There are several key drivers that create and sustain innovation. These are:

1. Common purpose and destiny that is shared by everyone in the organisation;
2. Total commitment to innovation at all levels of the organisation;
3. Conducive environment for ideas and innovation; and
4. Strong support and facilitation structure that turn ideas into innovations.

### Definition of Innovation

“Innovation may be broadly defined as increasing the value of what we do in a way which has significant impact on our business and business processes. Therefore, products and services that generate new value or add



value for the organisation are considered true innovations”.

### The Framework for Innovation

The infrastructure to support this approach for cultivating creative ideas and harvesting innovations is “The RACE for Organisational Excellence through individual Creativity and Group Innovation”. There are four entities in the framework and RACE is the synthesis of these entities. These are:

1. Roadmap to Individual and Group Excellence
2. Acknowledging Individuals and Groups of Excellence
3. Communicating Excellence
4. Enabling Individuals and Groups for Excellence

# CASE STUDY - Leading Creativity: Communication Security Establishment

*Military organisations regularly explore the creativity and innovation work. Laurie Storsater was Senior Liaison Officer in Washington and Chief of Staff at the Communications Security Establishment, Department of National Defence, Canada. Laurie invested in a range of creativity and innovation programs for more than 10 years for his staff; mainly engineers, technologists and analysts involved in information technology security and foreign intelligence collection. Laurie now is retired. Here is his perspective on the value of creativity and innovation.*

There is a lot of talk in government departments and agencies concerning creativity and innovation, and many have hired consultants to teach about it, or have sent their staff to training courses to learn about it. So far, so good, but without follow up, this will only help a little and only for a while.

What does work is figuring out how to “embed” creativity and innovative techniques in people’s minds. Over the long term, giving people practical tools — to assist their thinking and transform how they work — will meet the organisation’s requirements.

“Managers and staff have to understand how they and their colleagues think and make decisions. Likewise, they have to realise there are steps they can take to create, develop, and sell their ideas to their bosses and organisations. As departmental budgets and staffing levels shrink, and there are ever louder cries for Public Sector accountability and results, managing ideas at the office becomes critical.

Government workers spend hours taking copious notes at meetings. A hangover from

our school years, this is hardly cost effective given that these notes are rarely used for anything. Time would be better spent listening or reflecting “deeper” to develop new ideas, or refine incomplete ideas whose time has come. This brings focus to achieving the long term goals of the organisation.

*What do we need to do? And what works?*

First, you need to get a better understanding of the thinking processes of your team members. Which members are innovative and which are adaptive? You need both! The KAI cognitive diversity tool (Section 4) will assist in determining your current staff mix. The results may be a shock to you, but it’s worth the modest investment in time and cost.

Second, you need to train your team. Whether your staffers are new to the organisation or experienced in your department, hiring an innovation / creativity consultant is money well spent. The consultant will coach your team in thinking methods, idea creation, and management, and help sustain this process over time in the face of bureaucratic “idea killers”. He / she will also show your team how to make notes to record ideas and flesh them out. This will result in your staff collaborating better and solving problems more effectively.

Third, you need a notebook tailored to your organisation. Idea navigator guides worked for me and my teams both at headquarters and overseas. My copy served as a strategic idea planner about where we were going, what we were doing, and how we were getting there. I referred to, revised, and studied it daily — all that I needed in one place, easily portable, and not battery or power-cord dependent.

# CASE STUDY:

## How to Ensure an Innovative Program Survives and Thrives

*Christine Labaty was one of eight Senior Policy Advisors hired to join the Office of Health and the Information Highway (OHIH), in late 1999. OHIH was established to advance electronic health in Canada. She worked at OHIH for several years, mainly with its Knowledge Development and Exchange Applied Research Initiative. She left when the research initiative was closed, but returned to the electronic health file in 2007, when it and the new entity, Canada Health Infoway, moved to the Policy Branch of Health Canada. Her involvement over thirteen years allowed her to become an expert on the Canadian eHealth innovation experience, which was later studied by the World Health Organisation and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, with her involvement. She offers some lessons learned.*

The Office of Health and the Information Highway, where I worked, set off waves of innovation that lasted long after the office had been dismantled, and its staff scattered throughout the host organisation. When the Office was established in Health Canada in 1999, it already had considerable funding, a mandate to work with several innovative programs within Health Canada, and the approval to create a new organisation with hand-picked staff.

### **Hire innovators**

Innovators in public service are sometimes called intrapreneurs. Whatever they are called, they know how to get things done, even in a bureaucracy, and they are critical. Once selected, letting those innovators select their places in a new organisation is important – thriving on choice, they will naturally seek their best places to make a difference.

### **Ensure key partners make a commitment**

OHIH's main funding program, the Canada Health Infostructure Partnerships Program, had significant funding to allocate for transformative projects. It required a fifty-fifty investment by the province or territory putting forward each electronic health record or Telehealth Project Proposal. In Canada's decentralised federation, this was a key requirement, particularly in a shared jurisdictional area such as health care.

Taking this route ensures not only that the projects had any additional funding required any success was owned by the entity most likely to benefit from the innovation.

### **Put innovators together periodically**

That program held quarterly meetings, which gave the project managers and innovators from across Canada the opportunity to compare notes. Innovation within bureaucratic organisations can be challenging, and a community of like-minded colleagues to compare experiences or suggest solutions to your issues provides support.

### **Involve others in the host organisation in your program**

A possible role is to have them evaluate submissions for your program – that way, they cannot easily dismiss your program choices, or results. After all, they had a say in the activities supported! Conversely, be sure to balance their evaluations with those of others.

### **Have a champion – not only as head of your innovating organisation – but also within your host organisation**

Any innovating organisation needs a leader – yet internal champions may eventually be pushed aside. A well-formed innovative organisation can persevere, and succeed, even without its original leader; but a leader in the host organisation is needed to allow the start-up to form.

### **Make communications part of the work**

There is limited value to positive change if the story is not told. If it is too politically sensitive to take credit for the change, turn it around, and ask citizens if they think the change is needed, and feed that information back to politicians. Track progress, capture stories, and make them part of official

documents. Try to keep storytellers around until the host organisation recognises the merit of the work.

### **When it comes to Public Sector change, do not expect results in a short timeframe**

Results may not be apparent for many years, especially if programs were meant to achieve fundamental change in how the health care sector delivers services in fourteen jurisdictions. Systemic change in a country-wide system takes at least a decade, yet even starting the process is an achievement.

# CASE STUDY ComSuper

## Creating your Idea Management Process

PWC and Henley Management School sought to answer this question: *what makes an organisation innovative?* A challenge for doing so is how you qualify organisations worthy of study. In this case, they measured profits generated from services and products created over five years and compared this to total sales. They looked at 314 large corporations (from the Times 1,000 list of top corporations in the UK) and ranked them by sales of their ‘innovations’. This was deemed as indicative of executives who saw an opportunity, shaped a solution to match the opportunity, and most importantly, profited in the process. Simply launching something new is not innovation.

In-depth interviews helped unlock what these companies had in common. The results surprised the researchers. They found that top 20% turned their ideas into action using ‘*well-defined idea management processes.*’

The concept of *idea management processes* deserves your attention.

All public service organisations have processes and professionals to manage finances. We have Human Resources staff to shape systems to manage people. Yet, do we have processes to manage how ideas flow through our organisations? The research found that the top companies invested in four underlying capabilities related to systems and skills to...

1. Seek ideas and knowledge widely from customers, suppliers, employees, other industries, and competitors.
2. Allow ideas and knowledge captured to be shared, stored in user-friendly form, and made freely accessible.
3. Actively encourage diversity of viewpoint, talent, and expertise.
4. Delay the premature evaluation of new ideas by giving managers considerable discretion to pursue ideas without subjecting them to a formal appraisal.

These were four of ten *critical underlying capabilities* highlighted by the research. The majority of companies studied were large service organisations. As such, these same capabilities offer insights for the Public Sector as well.

### **ComSuper managing ideas for innovation**

ComSuper manages the day-to-day administration of superannuation schemes for the Australian Public Service and Australian Defence Force. It has about 360 staff. In 2013, it undertook a strategic planning process which outlined its purpose, vision, and four areas of focus:

1. Quality and efficiency of services
2. People and capability



3. Relationships with our key corporate stakeholders
4. Investment in our future

In identifying strategies to meet these areas, innovation was identified as a key activity to ensure it is sustainable for the long term. Executives saw that continuous improvement happens at the team level yet there was no consistent approach to capturing ideas and implementing them. Ideas that could not be easily or immediately implemented could be lost without a systematic approach to capturing, assessing, or implementing ideas.

Christine Svarcas, Branch Head of Business Reform developed an innovation strategy based on eight stages; in essence, an *idea management process*:

1. Challenge Definition
2. Idea Generation
3. Idea Vetting
4. Idea Enhancement
5. Solution Selection
6. Solution Development
7. Solution Education
8. Adoption

### **Strategic initiatives to generate ideas**

Each step included objectives and actions to develop the skills of people and opportunities to ensure ideas flow through that stage of the process. For example, tactics for step two, *generating ideas* include:

- ✳ Innovation Days and Innovation Workshops (with a particular theme or problem).
- ✳ An online ‘suggestion’ form via the intranet.

- ✳ A mechanism to encourage, acknowledge, and recognise ideas.

A fascinating aspect of this process is *Step 7 - Solution Education*. While the need to communicate the value of an idea is important (see Skill Three of Section Two), ComSuper will focus on the greater issues of buy in and support. There are three elements to this:

1. Value creation – the idea must create value (by making something more efficient or effective).
2. Value access – make it easy for people to access the value you have created
3. Value translation – helping people understand the value and how it fits into their lives.

For ComSuper, *solution education* comes down to the end user. In some cases, ideas impact its members. In most cases, ideas improve internal systems or processes. The end users are staff. Two important tactics are communicating the benefits of the change and training in the new process or system.

In summary, measuring the value of new ideas launched in the Public Sector is complex. Yet, every senior manager should be able to recognise if staff look for opportunities, shape solutions to match these opportunities, and most importantly, ensure that they create value for the end user in the process. This dictates the need for a quality idea management process supported by underlying capabilities. This builds the overall capacity to innovate.

## 22. Your WAKEUP CALL: are you part of the solution or the problem?

I presented a program to Public Sector managers from government departments at the Victoria State level. This group of 30 people is part of the Victoria Public Sector Continuous Improvement Network (VPSCIN). It is an innovation “community of practice”. Then headed by Frank Connolly, the VPSCIN had 4,000 members who are passionate in making their departments more innovative.

To open the session, I asked what they would like to achieve during the day. Some had the job of designing innovation strategies for their departments. Others wanted to learn how to be more innovative in their own work. Then something interesting happened. One-minute introductions turned into longer personal confessions as people poured out their angst and anguish in trying to be innovative. Their common complaint was the lack of support from their leaders.

Frank Connolly summarized this concern for the group when he said, “*Many senior executives have a way with words. It is far too easy to say ‘no’ to an idea without having to say ‘no’.*” Many in the group nodded in agreement.

He added that many senior executives see new ideas through a single lens called risk. He said, “*While the talk from senior levels is about being more agile, challenging ourselves and becoming more innovative, the words are rarely acted on. Ideas represent a change, and all change is viewed as a potential risk. Analytical skills are used only on the critical and risk side of the equation without considering the possibilities, benefits and*

*feasibility side, which would invariably allow more ideas to survive and thrive”.*

After a while, I began to feel that it was a group counseling session to help these mid-level managers find strategies to survive in their own organisations.

I picked up the latest issue of Australia’s BRW magazine. A story reported the findings of The Leadership Consortium, a group of corporations which collaborated to define leadership attributes missing in today’s leaders. The essence of the report is that these skills are not being taught in our MBA programs. While they focus on technical skills of finance and accounting, they do not focus on managing people and their ideas necessary to shape more innovative organisations.

The most in demand leadership skills include people management, fostering teamwork, bringing about change and innovation, and business ethics and communication. From the full list of 10 skills, over half relate to the tools of the innovation work. These include:

1. Management of creative and innovative people
2. People management (recognising that people do not think alike)
3. Solving problems creatively and analytically
4. Preparedness to question and test assumptions
5. Fostering teamwork
6. Direct change and innovation

These are the skills and attributes of innovators. They reflect two elements:

1. Skills to make your personal work more innovative through effective problem solving.
2. Skills to manage people to engage their full creative potential.

The lack of attention to these personal skills means that too many executives have too few tools to solve the challenges facing their organisations. This insight should put to rest the false truism that the private sector is more innovative than the Public Sector.

A key element of the innovation work is to sharpen our skills, and to solve our challenges effectively. This means making decisions on key initiatives to move forward. The more innovative we are in shaping solutions which:

- ★ Target the actual problem, not a symptom of the problem;
  - ★ Explore for the best options, not just the easy options;
  - ★ Take notice of the implications of potential solutions; and
  - ★ Require decisions made in a timely manner rather than waiting for a crisis;
- ...the more productive and effective our organisations would be.

### So what of today's executives?

Frank Connolly noticed that the level of management not represented in the group was senior-level executives. This lack of executive staff at innovation related events was a significant finding from the VPSCIN's recent two-year impact evaluation. This means there are many middle-level managers who learn to think in new ways and to apply new methods that the senior executives

do not understand, and as a result, do not support.

Another major finding of the evaluation was the level of frustration experienced by staff who wanted to try new and better ways of doing things, yet are constantly frustrated by managers who will not support them. Conclusions that may be drawn from this is that the most senior executives are too busy to continue to personally develop themselves, or they see little need to further develop their knowledge and skills. In a world that is changing and increasing in complexity, this is a concern.

Without their leadership to lead their organisations in new directions, the result will continue to be a frustration and a lack of engagement. No organisation, whether it is Public Sector or the private sector, can afford this.

### The Leadership Consortium Leadership Skills in Demand

1. Global perspective
2. Strong cultural skills
3. Management of creative and innovative people
4. Strong communication of company vision
5. People management
6. Solving problems creatively and analytically
7. Preparedness to question and test assumptions
8. Fostering teamwork
9. Direct change and innovation
10. Abide by business ethics

## 23. INNOVATING HR: forget software, innovate how we manage people

People need to know where and how they can contribute ideas to make their organisations more successful. Here is a perspective to prompt your thinking. Most new ideas come from people working on their own in pursuit of their everyday challenges. Other ideas require people to collaborate and this automatically creates two problems. Recognising this fact creates a useful model to plan for the two challenges we face. We can call these the **'A' Problem** and the **'B' Problem**. Make this distinction between the ideas and initiatives needed for an innovative organisation. Let's assume you are about to start an effort to find an innovative solution to a difficult challenge.

1. **The 'A' Problem** is creating the product, program, or service ideas you need to solve the challenge. This is like the traditional role of R&D or some equivalent in the service sector.
2. If you work on your own, you simply complete the task in any way or with any process you desire.
3. If you must collaborate with others to solve your 'A' problem, this automatically creates a second problem. The second problem is how people collaborate effectively to deliver the product, program, or service ideas you need to create. Call this the **'B' Problem**.

The difference is important. The research says we overlook the 'B' Problem. If efforts are not undertaken to ensure that collaboration is effective, then too much energy is spent on 'getting along' rather than solving the original 'A' Problem. Everyone knows the cost of poor collaboration: it is a meeting that takes two

hours to make a decision that required ten minutes of discussion. People leave frustrated believing that the final solution was not great, just acceptable to the whole group. Human resources, organisation development, and other internal specialists must manage the 'B' problems. Section five offers useful insights for helping people collaborate who do not think alike. Here is a great example of a government department creating a program to innovate its 'B' Problems.

### Canadian Food Inspection Agency solving its 'B' Problem

*The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) must attract, develop, and keep staff with the necessary skills to effectively deliver its mandate. Ed Bernacki delivered a presentation to its Human Resources Branch. It was piloting the HR Process Lab – a means to bring forward innovative ideas, and to allow for innovative “experiments” to develop new and effective processes for carrying out human resource management. These concepts were conceived by the Department. Ed was not involved in its creation. He shares this as a rare example of an idea to make human resources more innovative. This summary comes from a report produced by CFIA.*

### What is the HR Process Lab?

CFIA is a large Canadian government with HR professionals spread across the country. It created the HR Process Lab to encourage a culture of intelligent risk management and innovation. It's a virtual laboratory to enable creativity and innovation in HR management. It creates opportunities where you process “experiments” and the

generation of ideas can take place. The HR Lab approach is meant to:

1. Identify unnecessary rules and procedures, and
2. Produce enhanced tools and practices – for the good of employees and of CFIA.

The HR Process Lab has two elements:

1. **Innovation Experiments:** Managers can try new ways of carrying out HR actions, for example, in staffing, recruitment, or learning. HR advisors provide strategic advice to managers so they know the risks-pros and cons of their options.
2. **Invention Sessions:** Opportunities are created for diverse groups of people to brainstorm new ideas for HR management and to bring them to action.

Ideas are shared so that best practices can be used by others and to further an innovative culture within the department.

## 1 Innovation Experiments

**Objective:** to identify more innovative ways of making HR management decisions (on issues for which managers already have delegated authority).

A manager can try a new way of carrying out a human resources action, for example, in staffing, recruitment, or learning. Innovative ideas may also come from HR Branch staff, building on their knowledge of managers and employee needs. A manager does not need to seek permission to be innovative; the HR Process Lab gives all the permission needed, as long as values and laws are upheld. Managers remain accountable for their decisions, and are encouraged to seek the advice of their HR advisors, so as to best understand the risks-pros and cons of their options. In the process of working with managers across the department, an additional benefit for HR advisors is being

more aware of the HR information and tools that managers see of value. Three types of results were anticipated:

1. **Great idea!** HR will collect these best practices and share them so that others can benefit.
2. **Oops!** Experiments that didn't work. HR will share these so that others don't repeat the experiment, and to prompt thinking on other ways of achieving results.
3. **Policy update needed!** HR will examine ideas requiring HR policy changes and pursue an omnibus policy renewal exercise, as needed.

## 2 Invention Sessions

**Objective:** bring together people with a wide variety of perspectives (both within and outside HR Branch and CFIA, including unions) to brainstorm, share innovative ideas, and examine new ways of doing human resource management, and to move those ideas to action.

Anyone can organise and participate in an Invention Session. A manager looking to solve a problem or explore a new type of solution can invite people to get together, brainstorm, and then share the results. Guidance on how to organise sessions is provided. Some topics or groups may benefit from a formal facilitator (external professionals or volunteer). The HR Branch will also organise Invention Sessions on specific topics. A Session would begin with a very short explanation of an issue or of the purpose/goals of an existing policy or process. A facilitator would steer the group in brainstorming about different ways of meeting those goals, and draw out what works and should be kept, from what could be changed and how. All ideas are considered. Some ideas will result in changes that can be implemented right away – “just do it”, and/or

let the right people know. Other ideas will need further exploration.

### “Rules” for Invention Sessions

- ✱ Follow the basic rules of brainstorming.
- ✱ Name someone as the facilitator to keep the conversation on track.
- ✱ Come with an open mind and ideas.
- ✱ Focus on quantity ... quantity breeds quality.
- ✱ No criticism ... it can inhibit the flow of ideas.
- ✱ Unusual ideas are welcome ... they'll generate more ideas.
- ✱ Combine and improve ideas.
- ✱ Implement what you can, and let your manager and HR know of the results of your brainstorming so they can be shared and acted upon.

The HR Process Lab was a multi-year project to bring about a more innovative culture and approach to human resources management at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. In addition to more innovative ways of carrying out human resources management and the sharing of best practices, it is anticipated that the HR Process Lab will contribute to a culture where the HR Branch draws on its deep expertise to improve the management of its human resource risks. CFIA is better able to attract, develop, and sustain a human resources base with the necessary competencies to fully and effectively deliver its mandate.

*The two elements of the HR Process Lab focus on the 'B' Problem to allow for more effective solutions to its 'A' Problems. This type of program is strongly encouraged as it harnesses the brainpower and initiative of managers and staff.*

Idea: Ask 15 to 20 staff to comment on their personal experiences of trying to be innovative on the job. It is useful to discuss the results at the first meeting.

### What are your personal experiences of being innovative in your organisation?

1	Have you created ideas that were ignored or criticised by others?	YES NO
2	Thinking back on a situation, have you ignored or criticised ideas from others?	YES NO
3	Have you ever felt like an outsider in your organisation?	YES NO
4	Have you tried to offer new ideas and been told “we’ve tried that before” or “we don’t have time for new ideas”?	YES NO
5	Have you felt frustrated when trying to work with some people as they seem to question and challenge everything?	YES NO
6	Do you feel there is trust amongst staff / managers to raise new ideas?	YES NO
7	Do you feel that there is enough understanding that we solve problems in different ways?	YES NO
8	Do you have ideas that would make your organisation more successful yet are unable to have them heard or presented?	YES NO

## 24. INNOVATION, CHANGE, and RISK: are you preaching the wrong message to get innovation?

I received insight when I used a cognitive thinking style assessment. This tool helps people understand their style of solving problems. I dutifully completed 50 questions about my preferences and ways of working. One result that popped out was being labelled as a risk taker. In fact, I am an extreme risk taker. The assessment used these descriptors for people like me:

- ★ *Prefers to “rock the boat”*
- ★ *Irreverent to norms and rules — will take risks — often doesn’t see them*

I want to use this article to question the concept of risk taking and what this actually implies.

I think both descriptors are suspect. I have rocked the boat when there was a need to do so. I do not rock the boat for sadistic pleasure. I often looked at a situation and found a different way to solve the problem. My analysis suggested that the value of this new approach was superior to the old approach. I, then, find a way to raise the issue.

This leads to the second point: *“Irreverent to norms and rules – will take risks – often doesn’t see them”*. It is clear that most people would see this as a negative attribute, something akin to gambling or taking chances. I, often, test norms and rules to understand why they are the norms and rules.

I recently read an interesting article by Rosebeth Moss Kanter, former editor

of the Harvard Business Review. She commented on risk. She said, “Everyone applauds innovation. At least, they love it in retrospect, after it has worked. Before that, it’s just somebody’s wild idea that competes with every other wild idea for resources and support. What sounds great in the abstract seems risky when translated to a specific unproven idea”.

She added, “I’m often amazed at the lack of courage exhibited by so-called leaders who profess to value innovation”. She went on to talk about the need for courage to innovate. I agree. If we approach innovation in terms of having the courage to innovate rather than of taking risks to innovate, we could shape more effective strategies for innovation.

When you talk to people who conceive new ideas and raise them in their organisations, they often refer to how they found a better solution or they noticed something others missed. When I probe deeper and ask if they felt they took a risk in raising the idea, most said “no” and explain how the change produced benefits.

Creating a culture of courage for staff to raise new ideas is far superior to encouraging risk taking. It opens the door to big and small ideas. Success depends on a continual flow of ideas to tackle our challenges for change.

That takes courage.

## Expanding our thinking on risk: rewarded and unrewarded

I suggest you stop talking of risk and its importance for innovation. The standard line is, 'we need a culture of risk taking for innovation.' The implication is if we encourage people to take risks, innovation magically happens.

There is a paradox here.

When I interview people who create bold ideas, I ask them if they felt like they took a risk. Most say no. They often say they found a new solution for an old problem. I know managers who talk of shaping cultures of risk taking without knowing what people would do differently in a culture of risk taking. I suggest you stop talking about *risk taking* for innovation unless they can explain this in simple words. This is much harder than you may imagine.

Our current way of viewing risk is not useful. The most common result of dealing with risk is to say 'no.' I suspect that many great ideas have been killed without any proper analysis.

I confess that my understanding of risk is naïve. Yet, I was asked to teach innovation as part of a Certification in Organisational Risk Management. I saw how risk management and innovation are similar. Many skills and principles are identical. Both look to identify future possibilities. A simplistic perspective is:

- ★ The innovator wants to create possibilities for success
- ★ The risk manager wants to identify possibilities of failure.

A truly successful innovator wants to minimise the possibilities for failure as well. In challenging times, we need the insight from both disciplines to make the best

decisions for change. People need insight and understanding, not clichés and jargon. In the real world, I start with a simple model when we are solving a problem or creating an opportunity. We always have two options:

1. Do nothing
2. Do something

An issue I see often is that we focus on the risk of doing something and ignore the risk of not doing something. This is the risk of not solving a problem or not taking initiatives to create ideas to solve our challenges. This is the risk of the status quo. This is reflected by poor productivity and mediocre results in many organisations.

The research tells us we avoid making decisions to solve problems until there is a crisis. Once a crisis happens, we invest in riskier actions as we feel we need to act.

I use a creativity tool when looking for areas of risk. It is a model of 'light and shadow.' The most valuable guidance you can give others is to notice the shadows.

It works like this: when we turn on a light in a room, we see what is visible. This is like seeing the facts, predictable outcomes, what is said, and the explicit assumptions. Yet, when you look carefully, you also see shadows. These can hide behind predictable outcomes and facts. Shadows can be viewed at the unpredictable, unknowns, and implicit assumptions. (An implicit assumption is something that everyone assumes to be true without much evidence.) It can be the unintended consequences of a decision.

Both risk management and innovation share these common elements:

- ★ They depend on recognising patterns to see what is there.
- ★ They deal with uncertainty.



- ✱ They require a systematic process to succeed.

Both also share common pitfalls:

- ✱ Poor processes that limit their success.
- ✱ Organisational issues that block initiatives.
- ✱ Efforts that are not strategically aligned.

Done collaboratively, using a tool like ‘light and shadow’ can prompt your thinking to help:

1. Identify problems or potential events that need attention. Hence, you have an opportunity to create a solution to something that could lead to a failure.
2. Identify the weaknesses in the current solution. By doing so, you have an opportunity to create a better solution.

At the most basic level, we start with strategies to create success.

These strategies cascade down to tactical plans, and then someone’s ‘To Do List’. Well-conceived strategies make it easy for people to see how their day-to-day work contributes to the goals of the organisation. In other words, good strategy is a roadmap that guides people in their daily work towards success.

The risk perspective adds a useful focus on the challenges that can create failure. The shadow perspective asks, ‘what could cause your project or strategy to fail?’ Think of this as a ‘To Fail List’. This is not cynical or sceptical. If well-conceived it highlights perhaps three to five areas that make it easy for people to see the consequences if they are not managed or avoided. I have facilitated planning sessions using two flipcharts. One was for the strategies and actions to succeed; the other for what could make the concept fail. Putting these concepts together, your ‘innovation’ strategies contribute to your

success by leading you to innovative results, while your risk strategies contribute by leading you to avoid failure. If you avoid what can lead you to failure, you can succeed by default. This is not a flippant comment. It is backed up with formal research.

## Two types of risk

‘*Managing Opportunities and Risks*’ is written by The Society of Management Accountants of Canada, the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants and The Chartered Institute of Management Accountants. It is an excellent white paper that views the risk management process as a way to exploit opportunities to drive innovation. To quote the report, all managers can benefit by developing “*the capacity to minimise unrewarded risk — risks that have no upside even when handled perfectly, and maximise rewarded risk — risks that present opportunities for success*”. The very idea of splitting risk into two categories is powerful.

### 1 Unrewarded risk

Unrewarded risks are problems or challenges that simply must be managed well. If not you will have future problems. Unrewarded risks have little or no upside. Our goal is to minimise these risks. You can review these risks as an internal exercise using the model of light and shadow to prompt your thinking. For example:

- ✱ Strategic risks relate to an organisation’s choice of strategies to achieve its objectives.
- ✱ Operational risks relate to threats from ineffective or inefficient business processes for acquiring, financing, transforming, or marketing goods and services.

- ✱ Reporting risks relate to the reliability, accuracy, and timeliness of information for either internal or external decision making.
- ✱ Compliance risks address the presence or lack of systems to provide information about failure of management or employees to comply with laws, regulations, contracts, and expected behaviors.

## 2 Rewarded risk

The process of innovation is a key element for capturing value from risk we decided to take. After an opportunity has been identified, moving the idea to market requires a system. As the report says, *“Innovation is not just having a good idea at the right time, it is a system to improve the likelihood that these ideas will succeed inside the organisation and lead to success”*. Also, keep in mind that all organisations also need internal innovations. These change the processes for managing people to create value.

### Assessing opportunities

If we were evaluating opportunities in a business context we would consider:

- ✱ Assess the increased market share that can be captured.
- ✱ Calculate the likely profit from the innovation.
- ✱ Quantify the number of new customers.
- ✱ Calculate the potential sales growth that could stem from capturing the opportunity.

This is easier to calculate in business than the Public Sector where the issues can be harder to visualise. Measuring the increase in public good is complex.

The report continued: *“The ability to use tools to simultaneously recognise and assess risk and opportunity can enable an organisation to manage offensively as an opportunity rather than defensively as a hazard”*. The concept of “managing risk offensively as an opportunity” is powerful.

Those who create new ideas as opportunities for new products and services that produce public good can benefit from harnessing the expertise of accountants and risk managers to develop strong business cases for these ideas. This takes a dedicated effort to develop internal competencies. The rewards are obvious: a greater capacity to innovate. This should be a goal for all executives.

### Culture of Courage

I mentioned the futility of talking about a culture of risk taking. Its power to communicate and direct behaviour is so limited. My belief is that we need to reverse our approach. Instead of promoting risk taking, prompt a culture of courage. People understand the need for courage and conviction to step forward with an idea. When someone sees an opportunity to improve, enhance, or reinvent a process, service, or product, we need them to step up.

Keep in mind that the other option is doing nothing. Rarely is that the right option.

# 25. LEAN THINKING

## in the Public Sector

When I worked for New Zealand Post, we studied improvement tools and strategies to focus on the postal services. A key to our success was to ensure staff understood that we had two customers:

1. Those who purchased our services – some people buy a few stamps while some mail millions of pieces each year.
2. Those who work next to you – all staff are a supplier to someone and a customer of someone.

Most people will never see a paying customer but all deliver a service to someone inside the organisation. The principles are the same. The internal service must be efficient and effective. To this end, various Public Sector groups focus their efforts to innovate using the tool kit of ‘Lean’ thinking. The term ‘Lean’ refers to a basic absence of waste. It’s not an acronym. The work on Lean links to innovation:

1. Using Lean principles in the design of new services ensures efficiency and effectiveness is built into the system.
2. Applying Lean principles to a current design of a service opens the door to explore the implicit assumptions about the service that can lead to improvements.

The goal of Lean is to identify and eliminate unnecessary and non-valued-adding process steps that have built up over time.

Lean is a business technique used to improve the way we work. The Lean approach identifies and eliminates unnecessary steps,

streamlines processes for employees, and ultimately improves value for our clients and customers. It is not a new approach. Many of these type of tools were conceived in the 1940’s to help American companies improve their effectiveness to supply the war effort.

The only viable strategy to improve thousands of manufacturing companies was to improve the quality of management. *Training Within Industries* was set up as a government program to teach thousands of managers about problem solving, quality and lean thinking. It is fascinating to discover that most of today’s tools were conceived so long ago. (You can download the original publications at [www.trainingwithinindustry.net](http://www.trainingwithinindustry.net)).

An odd thing happened after the war. Men returned to the factories, often displacing the women who filled in during the war. The lessons from *Training Within Industries* were often lost in the transition. Yet, its core philosophy got the attention of those helping Japan rebuild after the war. It led to the evolution of the Japanese *genba* leader and senior management skills during the post-war occupation period.

A fundamental part of the Lean process is the ‘*genba* walk’ – a term derived from the Japanese word *genba*, meaning ‘the real place’ – which is the act of seeing a process at the coal face, understanding the work, asking questions, and learning about the process before any redesign, or adjustments, take place. This is the essence of design thinking.

In 2009, the City of Melbourne started using Lean. The implementation started out

cautiously with a few processes examined under the Lean microscope.

The Government of Saskatchewan introduced Lean to continuously improve its service delivery to the public. It developed a network of people with the skills to work with staff in various departments. Its approach for Lean invites collaboration between employees responsible for carrying out the work, customers, and other stakeholders along the way. These seemingly small steps can add up, and can dramatically improve service delivery.

### **How to think Lean\***

The obvious opportunity to use Lean thinking is when you know the way you're doing something isn't quite working, but you're not sure how to fix it, and you just don't have the time or the means to think it through. The Saskatchewan program encourages staff to consider when they find themselves.....

- ✱ Chasing information
- ✱ Jumping through multiple process and decision hoops
- ✱ Waiting a long time for approvals
- ✱ Becoming constantly interrupted
- ✱ Feeling your knowledge and work is not included in decision-making
- ✱ Finding that work gets lost between organisational silos or
- ✱ Encountering multiple understandings about how work gets done

These situations are an opportunity to apply the lean methodology. It is a straightforward process to help you streamline your work processes and think Lean.

#### **1. Identify the Issue**

What is the work process you want to improve? Be as specific as you can.

#### **2. Identify the steps in the process**

Outline all the steps within the work process, including touch points (every instance someone comes into contact with the product or service). Identify why each step and touch point is necessary. You may find it's easier to see all the steps if you map out the process on a large sheet of paper. Record how much time each step takes, and identify why it takes the length of time that it does.

#### **3. Identify outcomes**

Think about the outcomes — what is the end goal of this process? What do you hope to achieve? What do your clients and other end users expect? Determine whether the steps and touch points could be combined, moved, or eliminated altogether.

#### **4. Identify and eliminate barriers or issues**

Determine any steps or touch points that are causing issues or concerns. For example, is there a sign off that takes too long? A computer printer that is too far away from the employees who use it? Determine ways you can improve or eliminate these issues and concerns. Get people involved to share ideas and create solutions.

#### **5. Develop the future state**

Look at the data you've gathered and determine your future state. Will your clients and customers (i.e. anyone who requires outcomes from your process) get what they require? Will they be satisfied?

The Government of Saskatchewan employees have found Lean methods help them understand how their processes are working and how adjustments can be made to improve customer service, quality, and efficiency.

*(\*This section is copied from the Saskatchewan program. See [www.thinklean.gov.sk.ca](http://www.thinklean.gov.sk.ca))*

# CASE STUDY:

## Melbourne becoming a 'Lean' city

Whether we focus on Lean Thinking, Design Thinking or, Innovation, all start with the same premise: we need to solve problems in our organisations. All require a systematic approach to be designed and implemented across an organisation. The City of Melbourne is a case study of a well-conceived, developed, and implemented program.

The lean transformation started when CEO, Dr. Kathy Alexander was hired in 2008. Having experience with Lean thinking in a medical setting, she committed the City to improve efficiency and quality.

Lean Thinking starts with belief that we can improve our work by seeing what we do as a series of processes. The improvements centre on identifying these processes and then evaluating the effectiveness of these processes. Applying data and facts starts the analysis and a problem solving discussion.

Lean thinking brings a discipline to the review of existing processes of an organisation. Through the use of tools such as value stream maps, staff groups can identify the steps in process. Often the act of recognising each step leads to an 'aha' moment. For many of the processes at the City, mapping them revealed there was no standard way of performing the process or, if there was, often staff did not follow it. Few processes had good measures of performance. It was difficult to determine how well a process performed. Thus, much of the work focused on developing a standard or agreed way of working and supporting its implementation.

An early project returned \$800,000 in the first year. The City then explored other processes. By 2010, there was a deep commitment to Lean as an improvement methodology. It invested in an internal team, headed by Denise Bennett.

Lean thinking cannot be sustained by a centralised improvement team alone. Staff must be engaged, as well as leaders who are responsible for those who create real value for the customers of the organisation. Staff learning about Lean thinking starts at induction and continues through various levels. Training programs were conceived in house:

- ★ 700 staff took **Lean Basics**, a one-day course on Lean principles.
- ★ 100 staff completed **Lean Learner** which supports staff to tackle a Lean project.
- ★ **Lean Practitioner** equips leaders and senior operational staff to lead Lean within the City. About 100 staff enrolled in the 22-week course of classroom teaching, weekly homework, a lean improvement project, and an exam.

Denise Bennett added, "With thousands of processes across the organisation that represent endless opportunities for improvement, we constantly struggle with the question, 'Are we working on the right thing?' Improving one process inevitably reveals another three we could improve".

# 26. The BEST TACTICS for ideas

## Productive staff idea meetings

The thought of a staff meeting can send chills up your spine. An expert book says we should kill all meetings. Does this mean meetings are bad or does it mean we design bad meetings?

Staff meetings should be a key tool to foster collaboration and ideas. The original concept of brainstorming was a well-designed team meeting. When people come together and harness their brains to storm through a problem, great ideas are possible.

The strategy is creating opportunities for innovative solutions. Too few organisations create opportunities for people to innovate, and then wonder why innovation is so hard.

I was lucky in my first job. I found it easy to come up with ideas and often ran into my boss's office with my latest. My boss, perhaps to stop me from interrupting him, suggested I write the ideas down and we meet weekly to discuss them.

The benefits were obvious. The meetings were focused on new ideas that created value in some way. At times, we invited others to focus on a particular program or opportunity. These meetings deliberately created a safe environment for ideas. Even crazy ideas were discussed and some were eventually used.

Over time, these meetings created the expectation that creating ideas to improve our organisation was normal. We may have spent several meetings brainstorming a new idea for a program. Once it had been explored and reviewed thoroughly, the focus

of the meeting shifted to brainstorming the actions necessary to make it happen. Often this involved people who were far better at planning details to make new ideas happen.

Any organisation could copy this idea. Here is the secret for anyone wanting to harness the ideas of staff or customers: you must know how you will manage the process from good idea to launching the initiative.

### Focus on ideas

Let me be clear: idea meetings have a single purpose. Don't add five minutes to a regular meeting and declare, "It's time for ideas". Before you call people together, define your idea management process. What happens with the ideas people generate? You must consider this before you start. Rarely is an idea ready for action when it is first conceived, so consider how you manage your ideas through these stages:

1. Solving the original challenge. Prompt people to focus on useful solutions to the challenges facing the organisation.
2. Prompt people to generate some initial ideas and put them in writing. A sentence or two starts to make an idea feel real and brings clarity to the concept.
3. Develop the idea. Consider what is good about it; what else is possible if you move forward with it and why it may not work. Find any obvious flaws, which if corrected could make it a more powerful concept.

4. Judge the idea. Which criteria will be used to judge your ideas? Focus on the value that is created in comparison to the cost of the idea. Also, does it solve the original problem?
5. Brainstorm the key issues around implementing the idea. Implementation needs as much creativity as the original idea.

There is a sixth point as well. Ideas need more than a plan to turn into potential innovations. My boss would also work on his side of the idea: how to finance it. His ensured we also focused on the pragmatic side of planning. What were the revenues implications? What is the timing of revenues? How much money is required up front? How much staff time and resource would be required?

All work happened alongside the development of the basic concepts and plans. At some point, we had a major discussion about the concept to add one more test: did we really want to invest our time and energy in that idea? It had to have a revenue implication but it had to fun. In the end, we created new services and products. Back then we never called them innovations. In fact, we never used the term. It would not have mattered. We were creating great ideas and that was fun. Virtually all started with an idea meeting.

Design them well, and they will produce results.

# 27. The BEST TACTICS for ideas

## Harnessing the suggestions of staff

*Whether we nail a suggestion box to a wall or invest in an online idea management suggestion scheme, the essence of the tactic is the same. You want to harness the creative thinking of employees to create value for the organisation. Be warned of one issue. Suggestion boxes may be marketed as an innovation tactic, but the truth is they produce ideas that are improvements. This is another example of doublespeak. Research over 60 years suggests employee suggestion programs produce many useful ideas to improve efficiency and effectiveness, and every organisation needs lots of ideas to improve what it offers and how it delivers these services and products. If some ideas rise to the top that actually prove to be innovation, then this is a bonus.*

Managers often admit that their early strategy to be creative was a suggestion box. This was launched with enthusiasm. In time, ideas came in, perhaps a flurry of ideas to start. But then... the black hole of innovation opened up. Ideas are submitted and seem to disappear. Someone thought the ideas seemed irrelevant or they were mediocre. Soon the suggestion box became a receptacle for waste paper. It is moved to the storage room. The boss said we tried to be innovative, but 'creativity did not work'.

This is typical of organisations which try a suggestion box but forget to involve people in the process. To be successful, people must be motivated and pointed in the right direction! Here are some ways to beef up innovation from a suggestion box.

### 1. Focus the Search for Ideas

While there is nothing wrong with asking for new ideas, you are as likely to receive ideas on fixing the toilet as you are to receive ideas about new strategies. People need to focus their creative thinking on a particular challenge much like how a spotlight focuses on a particular spot with great intensity. You can run two campaigns at once. The first is for new ideas in aspect of the organisation (as you do not want to stop people from contributing). The second is focused on your challenges.

Your first step is to think about the areas or processes of the organisation that need new ideas. These do not have to be major problems, but they do need to impact the bottom-line. They should save resources or create new ones.

Make a list of 10 or so areas of 'opportunity'. These areas must make sense to the people. If they don't, you will not get much support. The best way to ensure that they do make sense, is to ask your staff, 'If we improve these areas, would that improve the organisation?' You can also test the plan by asking, 'If we ask for ideas on these topics, would people contribute?' These responses from even a few people may give you insights that can improve the process.

Use one or two challenges per month to start.

Develop a way to post each monthly issue or challenge on a real or digital bulletin board. Get creative. Give the program a name. Get



some artwork done like a poster. Plan how you will evaluate the ideas and how you will communicate the results back to the staff after each month. Launch the program and get people interested and involved. Your team meetings can talk about the challenge and why it is important.

### **Incentives are useful**

Lastly, what incentives will you provide? These do not have to be big but they must be meaningful. Remember that people want to be recognised for their contribution. There is a story about an American CEO who got excited about an idea and grabbed the first thing at hand and gave it to the employee. The employee looked rather puzzled at the banana. The CEO saw how ridiculous this looked and announced that he would start a golden banana ideas award.

Lastly, consider training that teaches people how to find ideas, how to write them down, how to develop them, and how to implement them. This type of training helps to solve problems and make better decisions. When people make better decisions, this creates an asset that will benefit everyone. Be aware that not all suggestion box programs are alike. Like any business process, innovative thinking put into the process can pay off once you harness the imagination of people and focus it onto specific problems. When you do this, you have a suggestion box on steroids!

### **More on Suggestion Programs**

#### **1 Ideas are free if you learn from the research**

There are several major problems with the notion of using money as an incentive. Two excellent references for anyone involved with suggestion schemes come from academics who studied 300 organisations

which have some type of employee idea program. Based on the research, the authors Alan Robinson and Dean Schroder make some very good recommendations. Both books are easily found online.

1. *Ideas are Free*
2. *The Ideas Driven Organisation*

In their book, *Ideas Are Free*, Robinson and Schroder concluded that money is rarely a motivator. They suggest most employees already have lots of ideas, know what to tell their managers, and would be thrilled to see them used. They claim their research found, "The more money a company dangles in front of employees, the fewer ideas it gets, and the more problems it creates for itself". Some of the problems include:

- ✱ People can get territorial when it comes to new ideas. Instead of building collaboration, the focus on money can cause people to work in secret to maintain ownership the idea.
- ✱ If efficiencies are found, this often compounds the problems with senior management who suddenly face the challenge that their management of the department seems inadequate.
- ✱ The challenge of measuring the value of an idea when the benefits are rarely easy to quantify. This costs additional dollars to develop sophisticated models to measure the value which often conclude that many of the useful benefits are intangible.
- ✱ Those innovators who are most capable and interested in solving tough challenges in new ways are often not the best people to develop the structures to launch these ideas. Often a more successful strategy is to engage other staff who are better at taking a new idea and turning it into tactics for action. This then complicates decisions

on who should be paid for investing their time and energy in new ideas.

From the studies of these programs, what people most cherish is recognition. I believe that this is particularly true of the Public Sector. People join the Public Sector with the intent of doing something of value for society.

## ② ‘What’s your biggest problem?’

New Zealand’s Industrial Research Limited hosted a “What’s Your Problem?” competition. The winning problem would be awarded up to a \$1 million in R&D services to develop solutions to the problem. Instead of looking for solutions, ask for problems. All organisations need an expertise in problem solving and a problem finding. Problem solving is well understood; problem finding is an expertise of linking observations together to form insights and questions that challenge the status quo. These work together. You cannot solve a problem until it is established as a problem worth solving. Problem finding is an expertise that can prevent major issues in the future. Nurture it.

## ③ Ideas America

Ideas America is an association for organisations with employee suggestion / idea management systems. Its members are professional managers and administrators of employee ideas, involvement and innovation systems in the public and private sectors. It started 70 years ago by providing quality educational programs, publications, benchmarking, and networking opportunities. I have spoken at several of its conferences in the USA. It provides training, research and statistical reports.

[www.ideas-america.org](http://www.ideas-america.org)

## ④ Performance Management and Recognition Suggestion Program

The working group, the US Government Interagency Advisory Group Committee published an informative review of programs in the US Government Departments. Here are some insights from this report, *A Users Guide to Successful Suggestion Schemes*.

The Federal Incentive Awards Program was established in 1954. The law established a Government program to encourage all employees to improve the efficiency and economy of Government operations. A comment from Ideas America (formerly the Employee Involvement Association) is most apt:

*“A suggestion system can be a success only when top management has precisely defined what the system is supposed to do. Management must decide on the prime system objective. Results will be achieved in other areas of benefits listed, but it is important to know first what management is looking for specifically and what it intends to evaluate system success on. One, and only one, objective can be selected as being the most important. All of the other system objectives are then ranked by management in decreasing order of importance. The priority ranking of objectives is vital because it provides immediate insight into management’s thinking and the system’s basic mission, therefore, affecting system design, and indicates the factors on which system performance...will be evaluated”.*

The report suggests the award-benefit ratio is a typical ratio of 1:30. For every \$1 spent on suggestion awards, the Government receives approximately \$30 in benefits. And, historically, about 25 percent of suggestions are adopted and rewarded. Significantly, the Government continues to benefit from many suggestions for several years.

# 28. The BEST TACTICS for ideas

## An in-house idea factory or innovation lab

A way to make innovation real is to create an innovation office staffed by experts. For example, the City of Melbourne invested in space and staff to lead the efforts internally. They develop programs and engaged staff in real projects to improve services. In the 1990's I did projects at the Polaroid Creativity Lab and Lucent's IdeaVerse. There are many interesting names for these centres.

The IBM Centre for The Business of Government released a report (November 2014) on 25 Public Sector innovation centres. These were found in all levels of government. The authors examine innovation offices to understand how they stimulate innovation. Offices with externally focused missions typically pursue three types of goals: to engage the public, to leverage strategic partnerships, and to impact specific issue areas. Innovation offices with internally focused missions typically pursue these goals:

### 1 Establishing greater efficiencies.

The recession, scrutiny of government spending at all levels, and technological developments have caused innovation offices to concentrate on cost-saving measures and the creation of greater efficiencies as a primary focus.

### 2 Creating culture change.

In creating opportunities for employees to collaborate and in recognising their

achievements, the innovation office also creates an environment where pursuing new ideas is valued, thus creating cultural change within the government.

### 3 Establishing clear innovation processes.

Innovation offices have established formal programs encouraging government staff to pursue innovative projects and take risks. They do this by teaching skills, techniques, and strategies, and establishing clear processes and protocols for those interested in developing new ideas. While rarely the explicit mission of the innovation office, programs like the Metro Government of Nashville and Davidson County's *Ideas to Reality* program aim to institutionalise innovation within government. Nashville's Co-Chief Innovation Officer Yiaway Yeh explained that *Ideas to Reality* is a way to sustain the city's innovation program beyond the current mayoral term and diffuse innovation throughout the government.

The authors identify six different models for innovation offices:

**Laboratory:** A group is charged with developing new technologies, products, fixes, or programs, sometimes in partnership with other groups.

**Facilitator:** One person or a small group works to convene departments on internal improvements or external projects.

**Advisor:** A small group or single person provides departments with innovation expertise, assistance, and leadership on specific projects.

**Technology Build-Out:** Innovation office tied to a technology function that regard technology as both a tool for encouraging innovation as well as the innovation itself.

**Liaison:** Groups that reach out to designated communities outside of government, most often to the business community.

**Sponsored:** Innovation offices sponsored in whole or in part by third parties—universities, businesses, nonprofit organisations, philanthropic foundations, or others.

*See reference section for details of the study.*

## How to set up your Idea Factory

Establishing a permanent, in-house Idea Factory is much like opening an in-house gymnasium. It should be managed in a similar way. The benefits of a work force that is healthy, fit, and alert are obvious. Yet getting people to start some form of fitness can be challenging. Thinking of the Idea Factory as a mental gymnasium is a useful way to review some important points:

- ✱ Creativity, like fitness, is not a “special event” or something that is done at a yearly retreat. It must happen on a regular basis to produce great results.
- ✱ The best equipment and training are needed to maximise the benefits to be gained from the investment.
- ✱ Coaching and one-on-one training can greatly improve the results by providing timely advice, motivation, and the assurance that a course of action will lead to positive results.

Creating space for an Idea Factory is a signal of change that can lead to a powerful force

within the organisation for change. Here are tips from, *I am an Idea Factory! The Leaders Guide*. These were conceived with a partner in the USA when we worked at various creativity and innovation centres. The idea has been used since the mid 1990’s.

- ✱ Designate a physical space for the purpose of creative thinking. Make it highly visible and announce when it is “open for thinking”. Have a party or reception to open it.
- ✱ Make it available to everyone in the organisation for the purpose of thinking or innovation, not just those perceived as having responsibility for being creative (such as marketing).
- ✱ Create a playful, relaxed environment with furniture and props.
- ✱ Encourage people to take photos of their session and post them. Create wall space to display photos of creative teams at work. Change the photos often.
- ✱ Create a Great Ideas wall. Post ideas that are not needed at present for future use, or to be adopted by another team on a different project.
- ✱ Offer regular workshops at lunch for anyone who is interested.
- ✱ Collect and post inspiring quotations. Change these on a regular basis.
- ✱ Circulate articles about creativity and innovation through the organisation.
- ✱ Let people use the space for personal creative projects. The more activity in the space the better. For example, a group of scientists formed a band at Polaroid that practised in the “lab” weekly.

# 29. The BEST TACTICS for ideas

## A new technology for notebooks and journals

What is very obvious is that any thought about the death of paper notebooks in this digital era is a long way from reality. The sale of notebooks, particularly premium notebooks like Moleskines, are increasing. A recent report from USA highlighted an interesting paradox.

When conducting market research, Moleskin found a direct correlation between sales of its black notebooks and proximity to an Apple computer store. That led CEO Arrigo Berni to conclude that his customers are, *“not people who are clinging to paper with a nostalgic feeling, but rather people that have both digital and analog as part of their lives”*.

This is a good thing. A recent academic paper asked whether students should use a computer in the classroom. It conducted experiments with some students who listened to a presentation using a computer to take notes while others used a notebook. In every experiment, students using a notebook learned more and retained more. The authors concluded, “Laptop use in classrooms should be viewed with a healthy dose of caution...laptops may be doing more harm in classrooms than good”.

What does this mean? We must look through the sizzle of technology to see the results it delivers.

Notebooks are as much a technology as something digital. They are tools that direct our thinking to achieve a result.

**Notebooks** – This is the most popular productivity tool in our organisations. These range from school notebooks to elegant leather covered journals. Most people give too little consideration to the notes they make.

**Time management** – Time management added structure to note pages to prompt daily, weekly, and monthly planning processes. While smart phones and tablets are ideal for planning meetings and timetables, interviews with bookstore managers suggests many people are moving back to 12-month paper planning calendar.

### **Public Sector Navigator notebooks**

Despite our technology, notebooks are still the productivity tool of choice. The Navigator guides and journals enhance the way people solve problems, collaborate and learn. The Idea Factory has sold over 50,000 journals designed for people who attend conferences. Many have been used in the public service. It has now created a Navigator for use by staff. These replace the notebooks people use.

## Design thinking in action

The Navigator is an example of design thinking in action. It reinvents the tools we use on the job. It's a low cost way to create tremendous awareness of the basics of innovation. They are customised and branded. Sixteen editorial pages can be customised to include existing programs. Topics include:

- ✳ Innovative thinking: what it takes to find new ideas, finding more and bigger ideas, and strategies for promoting your ideas.
- ✳ Resilience: how to avoid being killed by the creativity killers.
- ✳ How to make notes, capture ideas and sketch your ideas.
- ✳ Not another meeting. Turn some into an idea factory.
- ✳ Collaboration: working with people who do not think like you.
- ✳ 12 months 12 challenges – a personal Innovation process.

A Navigator Journal can be used in a variety of different ways:

- ✳ Distributed for use as a normal notebook. Staff read whatever appeals to them.
- ✳ Used as a notebook for internal training workshops.
- ✳ Managers can use the content to prompt a discussion on the challenges facing the team.
- ✳ Staff or managers attending outside conferences can use its ideas to get more value from the event.

## Bonus opportunity for internal innovation training

Managers can prompt discussions during team meetings with the editorial pages. For example, a manager can encourage staff to read a page prior to a team meeting. People can then discuss the key issues to learn from the editorial.

Some think notebooks are old fashioned. This simply ignores the research and reality that staff, managers, and even students still prefer notebooks. Smart phones and tablets (or whatever comes next) are useful tools, but do not replace notebooks. They are complimentary. People will continue to use both. This is a good thing.

For more information on Public Sector Navigator notebooks see page 125 or [www.PSIdeaFactory.com/journals](http://www.PSIdeaFactory.com/journals)

# 30. The BEST TACTICS for ideas

## Staff conferences and idea fairs

It is time to revisit the idea of staff conferences to encourage productivity, collaboration, and even innovation. Staff events are ideal for local government or departments of national agencies. Events are an underutilised tactic. With our focus on co-creation, we must expand on our thinking on events. Brainstorming is an event. Design thinking is an event. Meetings are events. Conferences are events. They do not have to involve hundreds of people and multiple days. They can be extension of larger staff meetings; 25 to 100 people. Four hours is enough to have a meaningful event. After speaking at 250 conferences and being involved with the design of many events, my two key recommendations are:

1. Design conferences to achieve worthwhile objectives for learning, engagement, and collaboration.
2. Focus on real outcomes; changing behaviours, solving challenges, and creating opportunities.

### New thinking on conference design

The vast majority of conferences are designed in the same way: *opening keynote, workshops, lunch keynote, workshops, and closing keynote*. There are other options.

Ignore any bad experiences you had with conferences. Also, ignore any criticism of Public Sector conferences as being wasteful. While the idea of flying off to some tropic island for a conference is appealing, forget it. Venues mean little. We need to expand our thinking on conference design.

In 2011, the *Business Events Council of Australia* published a highly insightful guide to the future of conferences. It suggests good conference design and includes the following activities:

1. Collaborating on new product or service ideas
2. Problem solving focused on the key challenges of the organisation or industry
3. Corporate planning to develop these strategies and plans
4. Team building to focus on team effectiveness
5. Work skills training focused on creative thinking
6. Improving organisational performance
7. Improving individual performance

Clearly these activities go beyond a day of speakers and workshops. This is why good design leads to productivity gains. This is the future of conferences. I authored a White Paper on *Public Sector Staff Conference Design* offers four models to prompt new thinking. (See Reference section to obtain a copy). Start your design thinking with one of these objectives:

1. *Conference for greater individual success*

Prompt people to review what made them successful in the past year and to look forward to define strategies to be successful.

## 2. *Conference for greater team collaboration*

Provide people with opportunities to collaborate with people they do not normally work with on challenges important to the organisation.

## 3. *Conference for identifying opportunities*

Harness the expertise, observations, and insights to create new opportunities for change and improvement. Some call these “Gov Hacks”.

## 4. *Conference to solve a business challenge*

Solve a challenge or ‘wicked’ problem with the expertise in the room.

locked up in the ideas of its front-line staff. They challenge us to unlock this potential.

Although all idea fairs are different, the basic concept is as follows:

- ✱ Host an idea fair every 3, 6, or 12 months. It can be a half or full day.
- ✱ Every department or team picks one or more ideas to present at the idea fair.
- ✱ Each ‘idea’ is given floor space.
- ✱ Staff design a poster, video, or demonstration of the idea.
- ✱ During the fair (over lunch) staff can explore ideas and meet the innovators.

## **Innovation Conferences**

The Public Sector – whether local government or national agencies – all want to improve productivity. This opens the door to developing special themes for staff conferences.

When the *Bank of Canada Currency Department* wanted to enhance its focus on staff ideas it used a half-day Ideas Expo to showcase staff ideas. I helped design the event.

## **Idea Fairs and Tradeshows**

The *Singapore Ministry of Defence* hosts a yearly tradeshow to share its ideas called, *PRoductivity Innovation in Daily Effort* (PRIDE). This started about 30 years ago. I created a small book for one event. See the Case Study.

Academics Alan G. Robinson and Dean Schroeder have researched such idea fairs. They have authored two very valuable books, *Ideas Are Free* and *The Idea Driven Organisation*.

They say eighty per cent of an organisation’s potential for improvement and innovation is

Idea fairs are relatively easy. Employees can stand in front of their exhibit and explain their ideas. It can build a culture of ideas. It is not only inspirational but may trigger more ideas as well.

## **The Big ACME Toy Company**

Another type of event is an innovation simulation. This is more than ‘gamification’ – this engages people in a meaningful way by playing a role in the simulation. The Big ACME Toy Company has been used with about 100 Public Sector groups as part of conferences or professional development. Teams become inventors who create ideas to save Big ACME. We explore creativity and collaboration. Companies such as Experience It and Eagles Flight are pioneers in this area.

## **Events are important**

There is no shortage of useful design strategies for conferences and idea festivals. They build collaboration. They prompt new learning. They can build friendship.



## The Greatest Challenge

### The Need for Public Innovation

*“Many senior managers do not give enough thought to the public purpose their agency serves. It’s challenging to focus on the big picture. Their instinct is to ‘fix’ the problem at hand, but quick fixes may be no fix at all. I believe there are many reasons for this.*

*“The relentless pressure placed on public sector leaders does not leave them much time to think beyond the crises of the day. This presents a number of risks. They tend to hold onto existing practices long after their useful life. They become vulnerable to expedient solutions and the “fashions of the day” without challenging their relevance or considering the potential for perverse effects. The quick fix of choice this year may be ‘lean’ or ‘commissioning’, last year it was ‘nudging’ and ‘design thinking’. Over time, public servants are losing confidence in their ability to solve the complex issues and the intractable problems we face as a society.”*

### The Honourable Jocelyne Bourgon

#### Public Governance International

Madame Bourgon held senior Public Sector positions in Canada, and numerous advisory roles with Governments in various countries. Taken from ‘Distinctively Public Sector’, presented to the Institute for Public Administration Australia in 2014.



# References, Notes, and Quotes

While this book is based on 30 Great Ideas, there are more than 30 ideas in this book. This section includes references and contributions to this book. References to White Papers can be found at [www.PSIdeaFactory.com](http://www.PSIdeaFactory.com) or email to receive copies [info@PSIdeaFactory.com](mailto:info@PSIdeaFactory.com)

## Opening Quotations

1. Sir Geoffrey Palmer, former Prime Minister of New Zealand, sent this by email. I asked people to explain how they know when an idea is good.
2. Andrew Demetrious, former CEO of Australian Football League, said this to a conference in 2014. We had an interesting conversation while we waited to speak at the event.
3. Innovation definition taken from, *Changing the Way We Think*, and an innovation guide I wrote for the Singapore Government.
4. A conference participant in New Zealand literally gave me the shirt off his back. He thought I should have this very cool Hawaiian shirt.

## Leading Innovation

A national accounting body introduced 11 types of innovation in a document: *Radical, Incremental, Breakthrough, and Open, Closed, Proactive, Active, Reactive, Passive, Eco, and Social innovation.*

The framework of 'leadership, motive, skills, and style' is the work of Dr. M. Kirton. *Adaption-Innovation: In the Context of*



"Never, ever, think outside the box."

*Diversity and Change* (Rutledge, New York: 2003). Dr. Kirton also conceived the model of 'A' Problems and 'B' Problems.

If you want to measure the capacity of an organisation to "innovate", what do you measure? *Henley Management College* in the UK and PWC looked at 314 large companies on the Times 1,000 list. It ranked them in terms of per cent of revenue from products and services less than five years old. This was indicative of the ability to see an opportunity, create a product, or service to fill the opportunity, and then profit from the effort.

**Culture:** Harvard Professor, *Theresa Amabile*, researched factors that hinder and enhance **creativity** in organisations. The *Centre for Creative Leadership* created an organisational climate assessment (KEYS) based on these factors. This measures the climate for creativity in a work group, division, or organisation.

Anthony Arundela and Dorothea Huber researched Australian Public Sector innovation in their paper, *“From too little to too much innovation? Issues in measuring innovation in the Public Sector”*. This is fascinating research. It highlights a flaw in the general understanding of innovation in public service. People had a weak understanding of innovation. In some cases, people thought having an idea is the equivalent of innovation.

**Section one:** This section comes with *Changing the Way We Think*, an innovation guide I drafted to help launch a national innovation program in Singapore. I use this work as it provides a simple, yet elegant, description of the core issues. Idea #5 *Golden Rules* was the first model I created based on my experiences inside organisations. This was reproduced many times. A poster version is available.

**Section two:** I extended the Singapore skills framework by developing a curriculum for each skill. This was done over 10 years, and used in many training and education programs. These pages come from the Training Navigator Guide, available from [www.PSIdeaFactory.com](http://www.PSIdeaFactory.com). Download a White Paper on *Innovation Skills*.

Skill One: Brainstorming. Source is *Applied Imagination* (1953) and *How to Think Up!* (1942) by Alex Osborn. Also see Idea 13. See [www.CreativeEducationFoundation.org](http://www.CreativeEducationFoundation.org).

Skill Two: *Six Thinking Hats* is a useful tool, created by Edward de Bono, as part of his work on parallel thinking. The book is widely available.

Skill Three: We need to develop new skills for judging ideas. I created a package to explore how we can judge ideas. There is no single best way to do so. Everyone judges ideas

many times in the process of developing an idea. At some point, we should involve a more formal approach. The usefulness of formal approaches often depends on the purpose of the evaluation.

Skill Four: Quotes by Bill Bernbach come from a book given to me by the head of DDBO New Zealand.

Idea 11: Thinking outside the box. This was published in 2002 and has been used by many since, from the US Air Force to Iranian.com. In 2011, I received this email:

*“I just have to thank you for writing this article which I found by google-ing “thinking outside the box”!*

*While working with my son on his college essay tonight. He was drawing a total blank regarding how to explain how he has been challenged to think out of the box. It was so difficult until I found this article, causing us to discover that he is undeniably an “in-the-box-thinker”. We laughed hysterically as I read your descriptions of in-the-box and out-of-the-box thinkers. This was a great and defining moment at our house. Thank you!*

*Sheri (from the USA)”*

Idea 14: *Advantages, Limitations, and Uniqueness comes from work by the Creative Problem Solving Institute. The Theory of It* was brilliantly conceived by Suzanne Merritt.

Idea 15: Read, *Treading Lightly – the Hidden Wisdom of the World’s Oldest People* (Allen and Unwin 2006). Karl Erick Sveiby also wrote several academic papers. This is good: *Aboriginal Principles for Sustainable Development as Told in Traditional Law Stories* (Sustainable Development 2009. Wiley InterScience). The comment by Noel Butlin is from *Economics and the Dreamtime: a Hypothetical History*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge (1993).

Idea 16: Everyone seems to be an expert on brainstorming, but few read the book. Read *Applied Imagination*. Try to find the 1953 edition. You will see that design thinking is an extension of brainstorming.

#### Section 4: Do people think alike?

If one idea could build our capacity to innovate instantly, it would be to harness the cognitive diversity in an organisation. We know people do not think alike. Fifty years of research has explored these differences, yet our management tools and policies are still designed as if all people think alike. These differences should be harnessed like an expertise. The *Kirton Adaption-Innovation* assessment (KAI) helps people see these differences. The assessment increases collaboration on teams by helping people recognise their style of thinking and how this differs to others. It creates a common language that is more sophisticated than *Emotional Intelligence*. I am certified to deliver this assessment. I have used KAI with over 100 Public Sector teams.

Idea 20: Case studies that come from workshops I have delivered.

#### Section 5: Leading Innovation

Idea 21: A quote from Robert Grudin comes from *The Grace of Great Things*, published by Mariner Books (1991). The innovation strategy from the *Queensland Ombudsman's Office* is based on personal conversations. The Innovation Strategy framework is useful for a team or department.

The *Singapore Ministry of Defence* case study is based on a personal project. The MINDEF PRIDE Day is an annual ideas event. PRIDE is short for *Productivity, Innovation in Daily Effort*.

*Communications Security Establishment* case study was written by Laurie Storaster. I worked with his team for three years.

*Health Canada* case study was written by Christine Labaty.

*ComSuper* case study was written after personal interviews with Christine Svarcas and Karen Milis of Business Reform Branch of *ComSuper* in Canberra in 2015.

Idea 23: Innovating HR case study of the *Canadian Food Inspection Agency* comes from the *Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation*; a Canadian non-profit research and educational foundation.

Idea 24: Innovation, Change and Risk. Learn how to talk about risk without using the clichés, such as, 'innovation takes risk taking'. *Managing Opportunities and Risks*, by the Society of Management Accountants of Canada, is an excellent document to study.

Idea 25: Lean Thinking. Thanks to Dan Florizone from the *Saskatchewan Government* for creating this idea. See [www.thinklean.gov.sk.ca](http://www.thinklean.gov.sk.ca). The *City of Melbourne* report was reviewed by Denise Bennett. This is a good program focused on engaging staff through training. It's a model for any Public Sector group.

Idea 26: My first idea meetings were with the *Ontario Soccer Association*. Instead of interrupting my boss with my ideas, he suggested I write them down and meet to explore each idea. The act of writing down the ideas added a useful discipline to our meetings. Soon other staff members joined in. These meetings became idea factories as we created many new opportunities.

Idea 27: My first involvement with suggestion boxes was with *New Zealand Post* in its *Total Quality Group*. We designed programs to

encourage staff ideas. I spoke at conferences for *Ideas America*. ([www.ideas-america.org](http://www.ideas-america.org)) Suggestion programs have been used for 100 years or more. Today we call them *idea management* systems. *Ideas America* compiles statistics on the effectiveness of idea programs. In 2017, *Ideas American* will host at the 75th conference.

“*What’s your biggest problem?*” Have a contest to find the most interesting problem. IRL launched the “*What’s Your Problem New Zealand?*” competition, in March 2009 by inviting leading New Zealand firms to describe a challenging R&D problem that, if selected and solved, would advance their business and contribute to the national economy. IRL offered the winning firm \$1 million for research.

Idea 28: The research paper is called, *A Guide for Making Innovation Offices Work* ([www.businessofgovernment.org](http://www.businessofgovernment.org)). The tips come from *I am an Idea Factory! The leaders Guide* from my experiences at the *Polaroid Creativity Lab* and *Lucent Technology IdeaVerse*. Purchase a copy of the book on the website.

Idea 29: Our thinking on our personal tools needs innovation. I believe that too much technology has been developed with little creativity to reinvent our personal processes. A time management diary became a digital time management system. Ironically, many people tried a digital monthly planner and then went back to paper diaries. I have invented a series of new ideas journals. See the website and [www.InnovativeConferences.com](http://www.InnovativeConferences.com).

Idea 30: If five people brainstorming solutions can solve a problem in an hour or so, what could 200, 500, or even 1,000 do in an hour? This idea prompted me to write a book on designing more innovative conferences. Read the White Paper on Public Sector staff conferences.

## Changing the way we think

The innovation guide I wrote was for the Singapore Prime Minister’s Office. Clarence Chia was manager of this PS21 project. It was a rare opportunity to create an innovation guide that ‘walked the innovation talk’ with its design and functionality.

The Australian Public Service Commission report was, ‘State of the Service Report 2014–15.’ It can be downloaded from [www.apsc.gov.au](http://www.apsc.gov.au) or [www.stateoftheservice.apsc.gov.au](http://www.stateoftheservice.apsc.gov.au). Considering that many Departments have innovation strategies, these findings show the need for more sophistication in our tactics:

“According to the agency survey, the majority of agencies reported that practices to encourage and support innovation were in use across part of the organisation. The majority of agencies, however, indicated that to meet organisational requirements in the next three years, they required agency-wide adoption of practices to encourage and support innovation. The lowest rated individual capabilities related to innovation were strategic planning and workforce capability. Similarly, most agencies had not yet identified the knowledge and skills that their workforce needed to support innovation. Some agencies, however, were addressing the issue.”

The notion of two strategies for innovation was crystalized with discussion with Madame Jocelyn Bourgon. She is a visionary on public administration. Our paths crossed over the years but came together in several meetings in Ottawa in May 2015. Read her articles at [www.nsworld.org](http://www.nsworld.org) or her book, *A New Synthesis of Public Administration*, published by McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2011.

## Design Thinking and Innovation Skills

There is a great deal of excitement about design thinking in the Public Sector. There is nothing magical about design thinking as a process to solve problems. The idea factory model is a similar problem solving process. It takes people who are skilled at creating ideas. Your ability to use design thinking, and all other tools and processes, will be greatly enhanced if you develop your core skills for innovative thinking. Section two introduces a skills framework. We can invest time to learn various tools and processes for each skill. Below is a way to view the design thinking problem solving process in context of innovation skills.

Steps in Stanford Design Thinking Process	Innovation Skills
<p><b>1. Empathize</b></p> <p>To design solutions for your users, you must build empathy for who they are and what is important to them by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observing their behaviour</li> <li>• Engaging with users and</li> <li>• Immersion to experience what your user experiences.</li> </ul>	<p>Understanding anthology.</p> <p>Idea 15.</p> <p>Notice your cognitive bias - Section 4.</p>
<p><b>2. Define</b></p> <p>The define mode is when you unpack and synthesize your empathy findings into compelling needs and insights, and scope a specific and meaningful challenge.</p>	<p>Understanding of problem solving.</p> <p>Idea 12.</p> <p>See website for book on Problem Solving, "I am an Idea Factory!"</p>
<p><b>3. Ideate</b></p> <p>Ideate is the mode in which you focus on idea generation.</p>	<p>Skill one – generating ideas</p> <p>Skill two – developing ideas</p> <p>Skill three – judging ideas</p>
<p><b>4. Prototype</b></p> <p>Prototyping is getting ideas out of your head and into the physical world.</p>	<p>Skill three – judging ideas</p> <p>Skill four – communicating ideas</p> <p>Skill five – turning ideas into actions</p>
<p><b>5. Test</b></p> <p>Testing is the chance to refine solutions and make them better.</p>	<p>Using Judging Skills to refine and perfect the idea.</p>

Stanford provides useful resources: [www.dschool.stanford.edu](http://www.dschool.stanford.edu)

# Becoming a Public Sector Idea Factory!

Ed Bernacki has seen both sides of innovation. As an employee who generated lots of original ideas, he had managers support new ideas and ‘damagers’ who killed or block them. He went on to develop tools, processes, and techniques to help people bring a new understanding to the challenge of how we can work together effectively to achieve bigger and bolder results. As an author of several books and the creator of the unique Navigator Guides series of idea journals, he ‘walks the innovation talk’.

## The Idea Factory Training Academy

These Idea Factory training programs are based on a foundation of innovation skills.

### *I am an Idea Factory!* Innovative Thinking Skills Training

Creativity takes much more than generating new ideas. It requires that we act on the best ideas to achieve a useful result. To do this effectively, people must turn creativity into a capacity to innovate. *I am an Idea Factory!* offers two perspectives – it provides participants with a useful tool kit for managing ideas, and it introduces key insights for fostering a more innovative organisation.

### How to stop killing ideas of people who don’t think like you!

Change would be easy if people thought alike. They don’t. All participants use the Kirton Adaption-Innovation assessment. A full debrief is provided to help people learn



how to use these cognitive diversity insights strategically individually and as teams.

### Idea leadership for managers and executives

Innovation demands idea leadership as well as people leadership. This workshop focuses on idea leadership and how it leads to productivity. It is ideal for management and staff teams, as everyone solves problems and makes decisions. To be effective requires that we can manage our ideas and change them into results.

The Idea Factory can collaborate to license or package the training programs for internal use. This involves intensive training of a team of leaders to understand the body of work, the training program, and how it can be customised. Each has high quality materials and will be customised in collaboration with the host organisation.

## **Communication of Innovation: Defining the Talk**

Do you have an internal communication plan for innovation? People need to understand what it means to be innovative. An Idea Factory communication strategy workshop can define your innovation talk, how you will talk the talk, and how you will walk the talk. This book contains many ideas for communicating innovation effectively.

## **Communicating through Publications and Idea Journals**

The Idea Factory has an international reputation for innovative journals and innovation books. Thousands of copies of various books and guides have already been used in the Public Sector.

Internal innovation guides or collections of articles can be branded and customised for Departments. Contact the Idea Factory for ideas and Public Sector examples.

## **Innovation Staff Conferences and Events**

Ed Bernacki has international expertise in designing conferences. His book, *Seven Rules for Designing More Innovative Conferences* was a top management book in Canada when released. He has helped Public Sector groups design staff, conferences and shape specific events for ideas and innovation. The Bank of Canada case study in this book is one example. The Idea Factory can provide its expertise in various ways:

- ✳ Staff conferences in need of new idea strategies for engagement and collaboration.
- ✳ Special internal conferences designed for ideas, creativity and innovation.

See [www.InnovativeConferences.com](http://www.InnovativeConferences.com)

## **A team building innovation simulation**

The *Big ACME Toy Company* is in trouble. It needs ideas to save the business. Participants are put on CreaToy Design Teams, given an hour of insights for collaboration, and then a toolkit to create ideas. Teams must then present the ideas they conceived to the Board (other participants). Only one idea gets funded. This has been used with numerous Public Sector groups. Great for a staff conference.

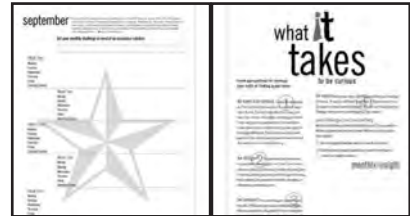
## **Public Sector White Papers**

Ed Bernacki created a number of White Papers to explore more ideas, case studies, and recommendations. These range from Public Service Staff Conferences to Innovation Communication Strategies.



# 30 GREAT IDEAS Helps You Shape 12 Challenges for 12 Months

The Idea Factory invents tools to shape the way we manage our ideas. The *Yearly Idea Leadership Navigator Guide* can help you tackle the challenges you face each year. The concept is...12 Months, 12 Challenges, 12 Ideas, 12 minutes. What if you define 12 challenges for the next 12 months and work on just one challenge each month by investing 12 minutes per day? To create and manage these new ideas takes



more than discipline and diligence – it needs a new type of tool for managing ideas. This is the perfect companion for reading this book. It is a unique 40-page idea journal created to help you focus on the important personal and business challenges. It includes:

- ★ Monthly pages to consider the important projects, decisions, and actions you must take in a particular week or month.
- ★ Twelve monthly articles on innovative thinking to help you manage your ideas.
- ★ Quarterly innovation scorecards to help you to review your results.
- ★ Idea note pages, enough to solve 12 challenges with 12 great ideas.

The Yearly Idea Leadership Navigator Guide helps you to focus on what you should be doing while you are busy doing everything else! It has been used by individuals and teams in various government departments. It can be ordered in bulk, branded, and customised.

**Laurie Storsater, Communications Security Establishment, Canada**

*“I liked the Yearly Idea Leadership Navigator Guide as it focused me on the top 12 priorities for the year, and the timelines required to get the jobs done. It’s pretty hard to ignore something recorded in your own writing! This obviously means that you have to make the guide YOUR own top priority personal calendar / to do list. It’s the one item that you grab when the fire alarm goes off. It prompts your thinking if you use it and refer to it daily.*”

*“I used it daily and so did a number of my staff members while in Ottawa and Washington (Fort Meade). I gave copies to my American colleagues and they used it as well, and gave me favourable reviews of it”.*