creative**4**business

February 2012

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the first edition of **Innovation Matters** for 2012. I hope that you are both well and busy, but with enough time to read this of course. In the final edition of 2011 I mentioned a new website. This is still work in progress but should be complete soon.

Do you work in the public sector, are you disappointed by LEAN initiatives, are you still wondering how to improve your service? Well colleague **Dr Paul Thomas** has been using complexity theory to do exactly that. Visit my blog to see him in action on **BBC's Ban The Boss** programme. In next months newsletter there will be an update on his work at **Blaenau Gwent Borough Council**.
Please get in touch if you would like to know more about this.

This month Top Tips has been replaced by a new feature **'Dear Dave'**. This is a reference to our **Prime Minister David Cameron**. If you have any creative thoughts that can be applied to government or the economy wherever you are in the world, I would love to hear your thoughts for future Dear Dave columns.

The first article this month takes a very brief look at whether our **public sector** is capable of **innovating** whilst article two takes a swipe at all of the **fads** and **hype** around **best practice** that are connected to business creativity and innovation. The final article provides some **tips** that you can use as you wish to guide your **creative efforts** inside your organisation.

Don't forget that you can also take a look at previous issues of Innovation Matters by visiting our website and navigating to the archives page.

Happy Reading,

Derek Cheshire

Dear Dave,

Here is an opportunity to air creative suggestions that might help or even solve some of our issues. Although called 'Dear Dave' because of our Prime Minister you can send your suggestions for your own country.

In the UK we have approx. 10 million people over 50 in our workforce. Why not pay them each £1 million but with strings attached? Read the full article Creativity in Government in my blog.

Please send in your suggestions and they will be published in future editions along with any other ideas that we stumble across.

Can the Public Sector Innovate?

Here are some thoughts and observations which are intended to stimulate some thinking on the topic. There will be some generalisations and hence some exceptions can be found. In this context I define the Public Sector as everything that is not Private thus Education and Not For Profit are included also. Innovation is taken to be some sort of system where processes and behaviours are changed to create value and improve output rather than the shiny new gadget that has just come from a high technology start up company.

The big question is 'Does the public sector innovate?' and the straight forward answer is no it does not because it cannot. I know of examples of medical innovations within the National Health Service which are exceptions to the rule but the system as a whole does not innovate.

One argument that I often encounter when challenging people on this issue is that their work is governed by rules laid down by government, both local and national. If you provide a service then those rules normally prescribe what happens or must happen at the point of service delivery not what goes on within the body providing the service. So the world is your Oyster as far as Innovation is concerned.

So what prevents Innovation? First of all there are hundreds upon hundreds of self imposed rules or boundaries (see my article on Innovation By Breaking Rules) which are justified by statements such as 'That is the way we have always done things'. Why is that? What can be changed, rearranged or replaced to improve the quality of what is being delivered? How many people challenge the boundaries?

Targets are a huge issue. I encourage readers to read 'Freedom From Command And Control' and 'Systems Thinking In The Public Sector' by John Seddon who has a lot to say on this matter. Badly formed targets only encourage behaviour that is designed to meet targets, not to improve service delivery or create value. Many organisations (including private sector) have experienced the touch of Business Process Reengineering (BPR) gurus who have stripped down and rebuilt public sector systems that work poorly. John Seddon talks of 'value demand' (demand on a public service) and 'failure demand' (demand by way of failure such as complaints or having fragmented information). Our streamlined front/back office systems are candidates for large amounts of 'failure demand' and hence wasted energy (but they do meet their targets!!).

Another complex issue revolves around Human Resources and the Unions. I shall not blame either party but simply illustrate a situation that needs resolving. In much of the public sector, HR has been centralised as Employment Law has become more complex thus responsibility for some soft management issues has been withdrawn from the front line (and some managers may have welcomed this). HR has become more about Employment Law and not getting the best out of the workforce.

Even when an employer wishes to reorganise the workforce they come against the Union who are quiet rightfully there to protect the rights of workers. They often start their negotiations from the point of view of 'change is bad'. Another factor that does not assist is the fact that public sector recruitment and working revolves around the job description and person specification which HR would dearly love to change and the employee and the Union would not (unless there is some compensation). Why is this so? Why can't contracts of employment describe behaviours and responsibilities rather than actions and qualifications?

Currently in the UK, we are suffering significant cuts to spending in the public sector which should spur us on to trying something radical to maintain services to ratepayers and taxpayers. The current economic climate presents a possibly unique opportunity to sow the seeds of Innovation. The danger is that the public sector will be made weaker by simply chopping off bits and not reorganising the remnants or outsourcing to organisations that are still based on a front/back office system that has high failure demand. The justification is that this is what happens when public sector spending is cut.

The conclusion regarding the question 'does the public sector innovate' is still 'no it does not because it cannot' but also that 'it does not because those in charge (politicians and civil servants) simply will not'. We can do something about it, if somebody will let us.

Creativity, Brainstorming, Outcome Driven, Open, Customer Driven - STOP

Each day I see posts telling me exactly how to be creative, how to manage my innovation projects and who I should collaborate with. Each time the articles seem to become more prescriptive and hence more constraining. Taken too much further this would mean that all of those innovation gurus out there are actually stifling Creativity and Innovation. Remember, Charles Handy once said that guru is just a word that Americans use instead of charlatan!!

Innovation is about tomorrow and not yesterday or even today, so how can we predict in such detail? Surely Innovation is about attitude, behaviours, skills and know how? We take a look at where we might like to go and then apply ourselves to getting there? Maybe we take a circuitous route, maybe we never get there at all, but we usually go somewhere.

Is SatNav innovation applied to transport or is it restricting our enjoyment of travel? Would it be more

innovative to ban SatNav or maps? Perhaps we should ban private vehicles so that travel becomes a social experience as we are compelled to interact with each other?

I'm sure that the companies that we most think of as innovative such as Google, 3M etc don't have a complete documented system (if there is a manual they won't follow it) they just get on with it. The 'system' such as it is, is embedded in company culture. Those wanting to adopt someone else's Innovation best practice should be careful. Best practice is yesterday's implementation and taken out of context can be dangerous.

So throw away the labels and your best practice manuals and start experimenting (and throw away your SatNav if you dare).

Can Creativity flourish in your working environment?

Here are some top tips that you can use as a checklist to see if a) creativity could flourish if you are looking to embrace it or b) to find out why your best efforts at being creative might not be turning out as you had hoped.

Here are some rules for dealing with things on a personal level:

- Mindsets must change, even if the changes are small
- Explore the 'givens', the problem boundaries
- Look at the broad picture AND details
- Value play
- Build up, say 'yes and' not 'yes but'
- Learn to live with ambiguity
- Don't force creativity on people, nurture what is there
- Involve other people
- Be receptive, watch and listen
- Know what your objectives are
- Cycle often, close late - don't just plump for the quickest option
- Manage the process, if you don't it will be a playground

... and here are some things from the wider environment:

- Whatever you do must be fun!
- Manage interpersonal differences, they will come to the fore
- Manage status differences, these will appear too
- Manage expectations, be realistic but have goals
- Inhibition and risk need to minimised, people need to feel comfortable
- Minimise group and critical pressure, use the first checklist to help here
- Ban distractions, ban laptops and mobile phones for a day if necessary
- Logistics, pay attention to small things such as decor, refreshments etc

Pay attention to the above and you have a very good chance of succeeding.

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