

A biography of Innovators

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Innovation is amongst the most frequently used term in management jargon of the last two decade. Everybody has a view on the subject and seems to write about it, and you wonder whether one listens to anybody else or reads everything that is written on the subject.

Canadian historian Benoit Godin states that the word 'innovation' first appeared in texts on law and meant 'the renewal of contracts'. It had no connection with creativity and merely meant 'renewal'

Google's useful Ngram Viewer, a database of word usage, suggest in 1800, the word invention was used four times as frequently as innovation.

After a century and a half, invention and innovation came to be equally used, and since 1970, innovation has overtaken invention and has been used more frequently.

**We humans think and imagine through
stories and metaphors.**

We believe that a super power runs this world, but for our daily living, we find it difficult to relate with this super power. It is an idea, a concept. Most of us need something physical and tangible to be able to relate to an idea.

Innovation is natural and human. But, we still need a way to think about the subject so that we can relate to it on a day to day basis. In this pursuit, metaphors and analogies can help us.

**Simple , is never simple enough when it
comes to the human brain**

Matt Ridley believes that the engine of human progress has been the 'meeting and mating' of ideas to make new ideas. It is not important how clever individuals are, what really matters is how smart the collective team is.

Serendipity, a word derived from the Arabic language, is the occurrence of events by chance that produce beneficial results. It is a crucial word for innovation.

Prof Carol Dweck suggested that there are people with two types of mind-sets: one – fixed mind-set people who believe their abilities are fixed and two – ‘growth mind-set people’-who believe that their abilities can be expanded and accept that this involves learning from mistakes and failures.

Leadership in an institution, company or laboratory is a formal position. The mere act of achieving an exalted status can cause a leader to give up the growth mind-set.

The reality is that holding a leadership position is like having a license to drive. It does not mean that you will drive skilfully under severely challenging situations. To do that you have to take risks and experiment.

**Leadership means creating for employees
a meaning in the work they do and
fostering engagement in their hearts.**

In organisations, leaders must create a charged up environment for employees to take chances and succeed.

Companies should celebrate success but should also celebrate authentic failures.

Innovation can only thrive in a climate that encourages risk-taking. Institutions need story tellers who can repeatedly narrate inspiring examples..

**The ancestor of innovation is thought.
Without thought, there could be no
innovation. In management, while
innovation attracts profound
commentary, analysis, awe and cynicism
all at once, thought attracts less
commentary.**

**You convert implicit into explicit learning
through articulation.**

Teachers who don't think that thought leadership is their core business are in danger of being considered lazy or indolent.

The important thing to note is that creativity is not as genetic as may be popularly believed. It is a lot more, the effect of the environment.

Curiosity is the engine of intellectual achievement and it is what drives us to keep learning and pushing forward, according to science writer Annie Murphy Paul.

Curiosity is one of the personality traits that gets short scientific shrift. Raw intelligence has been researched to death but our curiosity about the world remains a mystery.

Prof George Loewenstein argued that curiosity comes alive when ‘ we feel a gap between what we know and what we want to know’.

To stimulate curiosity, teachers should spend time asking the right question, one that opens up the information gap in the students mind.

Four lessons for modern innovation can be drawn: 1. recognise that knowledge is essential, 2. adopt a formal method for the development of an open mind, 3. learn the art of making free choices, 4. specialise deeply on a philosophical platform.

Every Indian has a rich environment for creativity : The 4 C s - chaos, challenges, communication, and channelization.

**Developing mental preparedness requires
four stages according to French
mathematician Henri Poincare:
Preparation, Incubation, Illumination and
verification.**

Large organizations think that encouraging failures would have an implication on its reputation and thus want to play it safe.

Three types of errors occur in organizations. First is the error due to sabotage or intentional concealment. Second, is an error occurs due to carelessness or bending of the rules, the third type is creative error.

**Three types of errors have been learnt
from creative errors : Technology
advancement, business models and end
consumer.**

Mature companies understand the impact of culture and team climate and have created mechanisms to measure and monitor these soft indicators which practically impact everything.

Innovators must recognise that there will be opposition to their innovation and they must listen carefully to the concerns of those who oppose them.

**Each innovation produces consequences,
some unknown and some known.
Progress necessarily means that while one
problem is solved, another may be
created.**

Every innovator is a hero to himself. They suffer from the conviction that their innovation is superior to others.

**Young people bring much needed
freshness and agility to business, older
folks bring experience and wisdom. There
are a few lessons**

**The first is that start ups can learn from
grown ups.**

**The second is that obstacles are essential
to spark innovation.**

The third is that star ups are best nurtured without their becoming overtly conscious of their potential future value.

The fourth is that irrespective of the growth that a company achieves, leadership always strives for a growth mind set amongst employees

Secret sauce of a grown up company's long life

- **Consistent purpose**
- **Focused at the core, experimental at the edges**
- **A clear identity of who they are and why they are in business**
- **A conservative approach to costs and finance.**

**Not being able to speak up in a company
creates a spiral of silence that can result
in disasters of massive proportions.**

**The innovation of a ball pen was led by
non pen people.**

**Narcissism is a good thing in small doses.
The limits that make it dangerous are
undefined.**

Indian start ups that have failed show some lessons and patterns: a lack of transparency, an inability of the promoter to accept differing opinions, a difficult relationship between the investor and promoter, unresolved conflicts, lack of trust and the promoter running a one man show.

**Bill Gross the founder of many start ups
found that : timing of innovation(42)
ranked first followed by team(32) and
finally the idea(24).**

To be confident as well as humble, a leader has to listen.

Listening to people means looking people in the eye, not interrupting them, saying in a simple way what you mean and asking someone to repeat themselves in case you didn't understand and to be focused.

**Apathy is a poison to innovation because
it leads to low expectations.**

**Ideas don't have border controls and
visas.**

