

Title: Organisational And Systems Investments That Stimulate Beneficial Innovations

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Innovation As A Product Of Innovative People

One could get the impression from some sources that positive innovations directly arise from organisations and systems and their various machinations. However, bureaucratic abstractions cannot in themselves create, as this is a capacity enjoyed principally and fundamentally by humans. Consequently, no organization or system can be innovative unless it has people within it that possess the various personal gifts that might, in an overall sense, be called "innovation mindedness". Even with such people present, it may still be possible that the organization might fail to facilitate innovation if these human capacities are not properly harnessed and supported.

Beneficial Innovations Require Adherence To Ethics And Values That Uphold Human Dignity And Well-Being

It is quite possible for many innovative developments to have perverse consequences for human beings if there is no attempt made to test innovations against some standard of what is good for people. For instance, one sees many genuinely innovative forms of torture, yet the context and use of the human ingenuity involved is harmful and degrading to people and society. For this reason it is important to evaluate all innovations, not merely from the basis of their originality, but more fundamentally from the vantage point of whether they are in accord with how people should be treated in the most positive sense. In human service contexts this would normally have to revolve around whether their enduring effect on service users is wholesome and beneficial.

Modern human services have, from their origin, engaged in all manner of experiments, usually in the name of human benefit, that have often had perverse results for the people that were their experimental subjects. Equally, where innovations have been responsibly conceived of and carried out with rigorous attention to their ultimate consequences for service users, there have been many advances for which we need to be grateful. Even more to the point, if we do not pay enough attention to crafting beneficial innovations for and with service users, then many needs will go un-addressed, and at a cost to the life potential and best interests of service users. Thus, it is quite helpful to consider how this might be done more systematically and with careful consideration.

The Types Of Organizational Investments That May Eventually Yield Innovative Results

It is axiomatic that simply waiting for innovation to occur "naturally" would be an inferior strategy of innovation facilitation and cultivation, in comparison to one that created an intentional array of mutually reinforcing

innovation catalysts. For this reason, it is useful to consider the many points that follow as being potential candidates for a multi-path investment strategy that could be adopted by sufficiently motivated and resolved organizations. Naturally, the thoroughness with which these are pursued would greatly influence the quality of the outcomes that might eventually be attained. Innovation must be earned, much as any other advance, and there must be an acceptance that a relation will exist between the adequacy of the investment made and the yield that can be expected.

- **Attracting Proven Innovators With High Values Integrity**

While it is vitally important to recruit, uphold and support people with prospective innovation potential, it is even more important that those with proven and well-tested histories of innovation serve as the core from which novices draw their leadership and character role models.

- **Setting Innovation As An Enduring Goal And Priority**

It is inconceivable that innovation would receive the necessary support in most organizations that it would require if there were not a special resolve taken and reinforced repeatedly from the highest levels that innovation was a genuine priority worthy of organizational sacrifice to achieve.

- **Creating Concrete Instances To Define What Innovations Are Most Needed By Service Users**

It is difficult to effectively use scarce innovation resources if there is not an acute sense of where innovations are most urgently and fundamentally needed by people. However, once these needs are more clearly appreciated, then it is increasingly feasible to begin directing attention and resources to these directions. This deliberate linking of service user interests to a deliberate innovation agenda helps link organizational priorities to actual human need.

- **Exposure Of Potential Innovators To Innovative Thinking And Personalities**

The process of innovation is essentially a human developmental process and is consequently helped by educational and consciousness-raising supports such as contact with the thinking and people involved in innovations that are highly related to the kind that are needed.

- **Searching For Relevant Examples Of Needed Innovations**

Often, much can be achieved by closely studying innovations that already exist that may be pertinent to what is needed. These examples can serve as both a guide to the further evolution of innovations and as a stimulus for the kinds of core insights that form the basis of needed advances.

- **Consciously Challenging And Supporting Innovative People To Excel**

It is very helpful that innovative-minded people be deliberately encouraged to experiment in the needed directions. This reinforces the importance of innovation, the value of the innovators to the process of achieving service quality and relevance, and the commitment of the organization to getting down to business.

- **The Convening Of Innovators To Act As Catalysts With Each Other**

It can be expected that innovators will act to challenge and stimulate each other. Often this can result in many unexpected avenues being pursued that might otherwise have been discounted. Creativity is not merely a singular virtue, as it can be raised to new levels through the experience of small work groups, think tanks and teams devoted to advancement.

- **Creating Experimental “Zones” Within Conventional Systems Or Practices**

If there are not “places” in the cultures of organization that permit the holding of dissident and “unapproved” views as to what constitutes better practice, then it is predictable that orthodoxies and dogmas will take precedence over other possibly advantageous ways to do things. It is useful that these enabling opportunities be created.

- **Protecting Innovations Until They Are Strong Enough To Survive**

Innovations may well need to be incubated as they go through the often mistake prone “trial and error” period of their evolution. Few innovations emerge as fully polished and thus may need to be protected and defended until such time as they become more persuasive and compelling.

- **Creating The Political, Ideological And Technical Constituencies For Needed Innovations**

Innovators do not exist in a vacuum. They are as constrained by constituencies and vested interests as much as anyone else. By the same

measure, their creative capacities are much helped and unleashed by the presence of supporters. Often the politics of creating the support for innovations and an innovation agenda gets overlooked as a crucial part of the eventual outcome.

- **The Devotion Of Fiscal And Other Resources Toward Innovation**

It has always been the case that one gets nothing for nothing. So it is with innovation. There will always be a need to divert some of the resources of an organization, including non-cash assets such as time, talent and goodwill to supporting the work of innovation. Such an investment can certainly bring about returns to an organization, though rarely in any short-term way given the necessity to build quality solutions carefully.

- **Developing Organizational Leaders That Can Bring Out The Best In Innovators**

It would be quite desirable that the managers in organizations and innovators share a common sense of purpose and urgency when it comes to advancing the organizations innovation agenda. Were they to differ, it is quite probable that very little would be achieved. Consequently, the attraction of innovation oriented and supportive leaders to an organization would be very adaptive.

- **Educating The Uninformed Or Undiscerning As To The Significance Of Important Innovations**

Innovations do not usually get adopted by most people until they can see their relevance and practicality. Hence, it is often quite useful to prepare the ground for the easier adoption of innovations by educating people as to why an particular innovation is important and what its ultimate benefits might be.

- **Capitalizing On The Success Of Already Proven Innovations To Further The Innovation Agenda**

It is certainly advantageous to use the precedent of prior innovations and their eventual utility to make the case for the potential of as yet unproven innovations. This also part of the process of building an “innovation culture” that reflexively tolerates a lot of short term setbacks as being part of the long-term process of trial, error and innovation.

- **Linking Internal Innovators To The Supportive Networks Of External Innovators**

Not surprisingly, many innovators look to their “peers” for affirmation, support and inspiration. Often these peers may be outside the organization and even perhaps at great distances from them. Nonetheless, they typically share deep passions for their work, and quite naturally seek out the company and stimulation of like-minded people. Supporting these networks reduces their isolation and brings them into contact with often the only people who can challenge them.

- **Increasing The Appetite For “Significance” In Innovation**

Innovations can be minor or significant in the impact they can have. The higher the quality and relevance of an innovation, the more value it has. Helping people discover what would constitute even greater degrees of “significance” in innovation helps them define and achieve “better”. Not being clear as to what constitutes “better” makes it less likely that people will achieve as much in terms of the quality of their innovations. Sometimes this can be helped by exposing people to exceptional examples, as does the creation of occasions to critique and evaluate innovations.

- **Maintaining An Atmosphere Of Challenge To Unthinking Practice**

The culture of innovation is one in which a great deal of questioning of “status quo” assumptions is a “given”. It is through the ability to look at practices with new eyes that the much vaunted “paradigm shifts” become possible. Therefore, innovation is less likely to arise if people are punished for challenging practice and for introducing unfamiliar ways of seeing things.

- **Celebrating And Recognising Innovators And Innovations**

Innovators are people like everyone else and therefore will normally respond quite well to being appreciated and valued, just as they will diminish in the face of hostility, derision and other detractors to their work. Thus, there is good sense in taking the time to recognise their contributions and to show a sense of how their efforts are valued.

Innovation, Looking Ahead And Question Of Human Needs

We often cannot see the value of innovations in the present because we are usually so caught up in surviving the many responsibilities of the moment. Consequently, it is only by stepping back, and looking ahead, that we can bring perspective to bear on what might be important for us to do. This can take on a greater urgency in organizations founded upon service to others to reflect

upon whether or not the people being served are properly aided by today's patterns of working. If their lives seem unchanged by what we now do, then perhaps our strategies are not as successful as we would have hoped or imagined. If so, it may well be that this very lack of success is the proper spur to get us to innovate in ways that might be more beneficial to the lives of the people. Innovation for its own sake is trivial in comparison to innovation that benefit's people and their lives. Hence, our unease with today's self-evident orthodoxies may well be the beginning of fruitful innovation.