



Innovators share the lessons they've learned during 2008

By Chuck Frey

In December 2008, I posed this question to InnovationTools readers:

"What is the most important lesson you learned regarding innovation during 2008?"

Over 60 of you shared your thoughts and insights, which more often than not focused on the challenges of innovating in a world that has radically changed since the global recession hit in the last few months of 2008. Thank you for sharing your insights!

The hard work of innovation

The most important lesson I've learned over the past year is really the reinforcement of a lesson I've learned over and over again. Real innovation comes from one and only one thing: hard work. There are many concepts, tools and methods that we can use to facilitate the process of innovation, but at the end of the day it comes from smart, curious people doing their homework, looking for problems, and studying the world in search of solutions. Real innovation requires that we fill our heads with lots and lots of information on many, many subjects. It requires voracious reading, never-ending questions and intense research. The more information we take in, the higher the probability that our subconscious brains will make the imaginative, non-intuitive connections between the information to develop an innovative solution. Without this investment, the rest of our investment in innovation will be in vain.

-- David Silverstein, Breakthrough Management Group International

Want innovation? Then you need to invest in it

Innovation does not happen for free. If you want innovation in your organization then you have to plan for it and pay for it. The innovative leader needs to set goals and targets for the areas where innovation is needed. You need to allocate time, money and people to the tasks of generating ideas, evaluating ideas, building prototypes and then bringing new products, services or methods into practice. It is not enough to ask your people to be innovative. You have to give them clear goals and direction as to what innovation looks like and where it is needed.

-- Paul Sloane, Destination Innovation

How to plan effectively for a successful innovation initiative

If an organization is serious about establishing a culture of innovation, its senior team needs to go off line for at least a day and get aligned about their vision, collaboration, roles and responsibilities to support the effort. The meeting needs to be skillfully facilitated and attended by every member of the team. The outcomes of the meeting then need to be communicated to each of their direct reports in a clear and timely way. Miss these two steps and you leave the door open for confusion, wheel spinning, blame, frustration, and wasted effort for the duration of the project.

-- Mitch Ditkoff, Idea Champions



The critical role of IT in innovation

The front end of innovation tends to be dominated by strategists and designers, who choose a business imperative and collaborate with customers to formulate a new offering. The missing person in this power structure is the IT lead.

This year I saw several examples of firms which (a) were clear about IT constraints as part of the exploration team goals, and/or (b) had an IT architect attached to the project from the outset. This kind of transparency/concurrency results in much faster development cycles and much happier project teams. My intuition is that these projects have a better chance of success – even if we can't yet quantify the eventual business impact.

Another lesson: Speed has wonderful benefits for production systems (witness the success of JIT systems). It turns out the same is true for innovation systems. During 2008, we studied 56 recent service innovation projects at Fortune 500 firms. The 15 projects with the "most successful" outcomes were completed in an average of 11 months, whereas the average for all other projects was 18 months. When we looked at the top half in terms of success rates, the disparity is similar: 13 months compared to 22 months. Organizations that innovate with speed use special "speed" protocols, in much the same way that an Indy racing car crew has special methods for pit stops.

-- *Tim Ogilvie, Peer Insight*

The importance of daily personal innovation

The most important innovation lesson of 2008 for me was the importance of every day innovation. Too many people get caught up in the angst of innovation when forced to take on a big challenge because they don't know how to get started. This is more often than not because they have not done the right preparation in advance. A great athlete doesn't just stroll on to the field of competition after spending the past two years perfecting their imprint on the couch. Every day is a training day for the big event. So to should it be for the innovation practitioner. Innovation professionals need to develop the discipline of integrating innovation practice and thought into all their activities every day. By exercising the muscles of innovation, we can be ready when the big challenges arise to respond with agility and execute to our best potential.

-- *Jim Todhunter, Invention Machine Corporation*

What's needed: A greater focus on innovation execution

Sadly I have seen that innovation continues to have an incremental impact on the business for its longer term sustainability. Of course there have been distinctive, radical and disruptive activities that often get bundled up in the innovation wrapping paper but why is it still just incremental for me?

This lack of innovation sustainability in the majority of cases needs a dedicated focus on capability and competences. We still lack the momentum of treating innovation as a clear corporate business process that is systematic and methodical. We lack a repeatable innovation engine. We still don't provide enough capacity for people to innovate. Luck is still playing too large a part in discovery. We still can't come to grips with measurements and reviewing the inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes in less emotional ways. We still see that constant pushing of personal agendas for pet innovation projects, often in total conflict with strategic alignment and resource allocation. We still don't focus enough on execution; the back end needs greater focus. Finally, even if the strategic direction is truly known for many in an organization, it certainly is not known how much of the innovation activity going on contributes to this. In short, there is an awful lot of work to do to embed innovation

Innovation will continue to require significant leadership focus, integrated processes and sustained commitment so ALL can understand it far more and see the part they are contributing -- a clear vision of innovation's contribution and why it MUST become part of every person's daily ways of needing to work. To achieve this innovation needs to be far more dynamic, so all involved can contribute in the following ways:

- So they can all see the innovation space that exists so they know their part,
- Have solid supporting routines to keeping these spaces open through a combination of their growing competences, knowing and learning from others,
- Appreciating what can come from valuing mutual respect and other peoples expertise and skill sets, so they can appreciate and enjoy how it all fits together as a team activity,
- Wanting innovation to be successfully delivered as part of their second nature, so as to constantly learn and make innovate more repeatable and lastly

- Be better equipped to deal with the inevitable surprises that we are all presently dealing with.

Innovation comes closer to operational excellence if you focus more on the effectiveness of learning and competences needed to equip people to address rapidly changing environments through innovation and we are certainly facing these times of uncertainty as we enter 2009. Can we learn to unlearn and then re-learn in different, more dynamic ways in 2009? We need to.

-- Paul Hobcraft, HOCA International

Leadership is critical to innovation success

My biggest lesson is that nothing is more vital to an organization than picking the right person to lead their innovation efforts – a company's program will flourish with a knowledgeable visionary around what is possible through the innovation toolset – and will die with a closed-minded traditionalist who is unable to drive necessary change.

The most important attributes of an innovation leader are purpose, process and passion. The first guides the company to define what needs to be achieved and done. The second is the toolset that will lead the company in how to achieve its innovation goals describes how to do it, and the last attribute, passion, ensures that it gets done despite cultural and structural barriers that exist in place. To have one attribute without the others is to handicap your company's ability to be successful. Most companies will not have someone internally who possesses all of these traits and skills – it is important to not compromise, however, and to obtain them wherever you need to source them from.

-- Boris Pluskowski

Senior leaders need to spend more time thinking about the future

The main lessons that emerged from my work related to innovation this past year are that many companies, big or small operate without having a real business strategy. Many people mistake tactical plans and surviving the next quarter or two for a business strategy. Most business leaders are focused on operational excellence and maximizing the effectiveness of their processes. While that effort is certainly required, it is not going to lead a company toward future successful endeavors. My personal experience has shown that senior business leaders need to spend much more time throughout the year thinking about the future of the company and allow their junior managers to focus on tactical execution.

Secondly, business leaders should be looking at growth platforms as the basis for their future growth, and not the next product or extension to a product. Growth platforms are built from a combination of a company's assets, capabilities, channels and customer insights to fulfill consumer desires better than the competition. In fact, people only NEED food, shelter, and clothing in order to exist and once they obtain the basics they move into the realm of desire. Growth platforms must address all of the human factors inherent from design thinking, including physical, social, cultural, cognitive and emotional demands in order to define and meet consumer desires.

Lastly, never forget that money makes people do incredibly stupid things. Wall Street's collapse this year will not be the last. It may take an entire generation, or maybe a decade, but Wall Street WILL collapse again. While capitalism is still the best option available, there must be oversight to keep people from destroying the very thing that allows us to enjoy freedom and economic success. As Ronald Reagan once said, "Trust but verify."

-- Roy Luebke

Ignore the panic and look for "nuggets of opportunity"

My biggest lesson learned for 2008 was that it became very obvious as the economic crisis worsened that most organizations who claimed to be "innovative" simply didn't have the processes, culture, resources or leadership support behind the claim. Perhaps I was overly optimistic that we had actually turned the corner. Thankfully, there are still a few outstanding exceptions that continue to view their innovation efforts as a market differentiation point and competitive advantage during and (especially) after the current recessionary period. The biggest surprise, coming right at the end of this year, and maybe at the bottom of this recession, is that some small- to medium-sized organizations are showing increased interest in maturing their existing innovation efforts or even starting an innovation program from scratch. My advice: Ignore the panic and hunt for the nuggets of opportunity!

-- Paul R. Williams, Think For A Change, LLC

2008: The year innovation got tactical

For years “innovation” has been the sole purview of the boardroom, C-suite, corporate strategists and professors. In my mind, 2008 marked a turning point of Innovation going “tactical.” In other words, middle managers and line of business professionals have started to see their day jobs transformed as they adjust to a constantly changing environment. Job functions such as customer feedback and new product development are leading this movement, which is driven by the availability of Web 2.0 (aka Enterprise 2.0) toolsets for innovation management.

-- Matt Greeley, *Brightidea, Inc.*

The failed promise of idea management

I think the key lesson learned in 2008 is that organized and effective innovation remains elusive, and that few companies have found the keys to embedding it in the lives of their employees.

Idea management was to have been a solution to that problem, but after six or seven years of working in that field, I have to say that idea management has proven very worthwhile for cost savings and continuous improvement, but not for innovation. Yes, there are some exceptions, but idea management has not penetrated nearly to the extent expected, and, gasp, I don't think it will.

This may raise a storm of protest from those who promote their software products for innovation, but they can't deny that the number of companies adding such software each year is in the tens, and not in the thousands. Something is clearly not right. I do give credit to Spigit, which has changed the dynamic of idea management from filling out forms to game-playing, but there is the danger of creating a huge waste of time.

Here is my prediction for 2009: We are going to see a major new entry in the innovation field that will turn the whole corporate innovation process upside down, leaving some of today's innovation software vendors shaking their heads, wondering why they didn't think of it. Stay tuned.

-- Bill Shockley, *Shockley Consulting LLC*

The never-ending quest for knowledge and ideas

Innovation requires the willingness to see what's familiar in a completely different and unexpected way. The basic building blocks for everything in the universe already exist, whether it's the materials for new technologies or the neural networks for breakthrough thinking. The challenge in innovation is to allow possibility to undermine certainty. I think innovators are people who are more intrigued by “don't know” than by expertise and have the skills to invite others into a journey of mistake-making, collaborative learning and problem-solving.

-- Francine Campone, *Ed.D., PCC, reinventinglifeandwork.com*

Elements of a successful innovation process

To gain success in any innovation process you must obtain the following:

- Commitment from high management
- A strong ideation process
- Engagement from the participants (and their managers)
- Sufficient budget (money and time)
- A streamlined process to turn concepts to production
- A certain appetite for risk

Producing ideas can be easy! Having all the planets aligned is something else!!

-- Philippe Deslauriers

The role of teams in successful innovation

This year, I realized more than ever before the importance of teams to successful innovation. Succinctly, I can say that it all boils down to the team. As I watched the global economic meltdown and the failure of bailout packages, that truth became more and more obvious. Successful innovation requires teams to be homogenous in vision and outlook though they may be heterogeneous in composition.

-- Abiodun A. Egbetokun, *National Centre for Technology Management, Nigeria*

The long road to innovation

What I learned this year is that there is a long road between what seems like a good idea to production and finally utilization. What makes it harder is that without the passion of the idea, the production and utilization often fail or get lost in translation, particularly when it goes through many hands. For innovation to work in a large corporation there needs to be consistency from idea to implementation and beyond, or at least a true recognition of the idea and concept to guide the process of implementation.

-- Mica Julien, *Level 23*

To innovate, we must invest in cultural change

I started a new role in my company's innovation team this year, so I feel like I've been on an endless learning curve for the last three months! The key thing I've learned is that people in our business have the creativity and the capability to be innovative about how they go about their jobs - but the biggest challenge to moving people into a place where they feel they can do this (in terms of skill, recognition, time, etc.) is the amount of investment we are willing to make into changing our culture. I've learned it's not necessarily about teaching people to be innovative, it's about giving them the right tools they need and giving them a space and empowerment to unleash their creativity.

-- Kathryn Marshall, *Capital One*

Don't forget that incremental innovation can be valuable, too

In May 2008, we formed a new team called "Future Creations." For all practical purposes, it's an innovation team, but the branding itself was key to even getting it off the ground. At Arla Foods, like in many other companies, innovation is a term that is overused and misunderstood. In setting up Future Creations we are adamant that the key word is creation (as opposed to creativity). Which brings me to the big lesson I've learned about innovation this year. It's not how many ideas you have, it's not how "creative" or "innovative" or "breakthrough" they are. It really is about making it happen, developing the idea against the tide of internal systems and inertia, launching the idea into the marketplace and turning it into profit. I've learned that a line extension (e.g., a new flavor variant) that quickly becomes a profitable product for the company is a much more valuable "innovation" than a breakthrough product that needs investment over years before it become profitable.

-- Arun Prabhu, *Arla Foods UK*

Innovation vs. cost management

Living in a country where crisis and chaos has been "the rule" for more than ten years, the most important question has been how to keep the balance between innovation and cost management? Innovation has been the way to survive and bring new ideas to business, balanced with cost strategies for our company. At the beginning, our driver was cost management, but with time, during the last five years, we have learned that the only way to keep growing was to innovate in products, processes and business model.

-- Jesús Sánchez Martorelli, *La Oficina de Hoy C.A., Venezuela*

The power of affinity diagrams

My most important lesson of 2008 was learning to use affinity diagrams: I wrote an entire post about it here

<http://hdbizblog.com/blog/2008/01/25/how-to-get-the-most-out-of-brainstorming/>

When there's lots of "stuff" coming at you, it is hard to sort through everything and organize the information in a way that makes sense and helps you make decisions. Whether you're brainstorming ideas, trying to solve a problem or analyzing a situation, when you are dealing with lots of information from a variety of sources, you can end up spending a huge amount of time trying to assimilate all the little bits and pieces. Rather than letting the disjointed information get the better of you, you can use an affinity diagram to help you organize it.

An affinity diagram helps to synthesize large amounts of data by finding relationships between ideas. The information is then gradually structured from the bottom up into meaningful groups. From there you can clearly "see" what you have, and then begin your analysis or come to a decision.

Affinity diagrams can be used to:

- Draw out common themes from a large amount of information
- Discover previously unseen connections between various ideas or information
- Brainstorm root causes and solutions to a problem

-- *Stephen P Smith, Personal Development Agent and Conversation Catalyst*

The importance of higher-level thinking

After years of experience, it has been startling to discover that there is so much beyond brainstorming and the clustering of ideas by association, which I have seen different consultants do with varying degrees of success. Success might here be measured in terms of engaging people, gathering a rich variety of ideas and making use of diversity, achieving innovative outcomes, developing team capacity and so on.

Way out beyond any of this is shifting perceptions and changing the way people think, toward a more integrated and holistic grasp of the system in which the opportunity is embedded. Being able to combine all of the diversity into a narrative composition and then to use the structure behind that composition as a tool for generating an overall understanding moves people from being within the challenge to being able to act upon it. Logovisual is promoting techniques of higher-level thinking that have a direct contribution to make to creativity and innovation in all domains (see <http://www.logovisual.com/>).

-- *John Varney, Centre for Management Creativity (UK)*

Create an innovation war room

At the beginning of the fourth quarter, 2008, my team of U.S. Marines turned business professionals instructed the leadership of a church organization on our "Business Warfighting For Great Teams" strategies that we have been using for years. Our cutting-edge military-style ideation and methodology, "The Battleplan for Preemptive Strike," teaches how to use the lessons of Pearl Harbor and other military engagements to develop integrated, talented management initiatives for the organization. The strategies includes the development of a real-world "war room" and the tactics of the battle plan: establish achievable aims, identify means, ensure intelligence, enforce security, engage the strike and flawlessly execute the exit strategy using 32 solution-centric guiding precepts to face fierce challenges in short time frames using the process.

At the New Covenant Church of Philadelphia, the senior pastor and Chief Executive Officer Bishop C. Milton Grannum set aside a specific room on the same floor of the building as his office for directing the organization's strategic organizational renewal efforts. The organization's new "war room" had the same critical importance as Winston Churchill's cabinet war room in London, used to direct military strategy during World War II. Bishop Grannum's Innovation War Room was a simple but highly effective device that guided the church's appointed leadership team to focus on establishing the strategy forward to reinvent the business model and find bold, new growth opportunities. And, its impact on the organization's strategies – and, ultimately, its performance – is still being felt today.

Late in the month of November 2008, even in the face of formidable pressures and economic challenges, New Covenant Church braved the climate and made the decision to bring in yet another trainer, speaker and renowned author Dr. David Ireland from the region only to learn that they were on the right path to extend the organization's life cycle. This church continues to be one of the most progressive thinking faith-based organizations in the region. The reason: the CEO fully understands that the time to input integrated talent management to boost the organization's human capital is when most organizations are calling on "cost cutting" as its strategy in the face of adverse conditions.

-- *Damian D. "Skipper" Pitts, The Bison Group Corporation*

The principles of innovation are not new

To me the most important lesson is that some management writers developed innovation principles 20 years ago that are still valid. Peter Drucker, for example, reports in his book "Innovation and Entrepreneurship" that there are a series of possibilities to derive innovative products and services other than trying to have ideas. I am convinced that we are able to improve our products and services a lot just by analyzing what is not working well today.

-- *Jürgen H. Städtner, Cridon Information*

Innovation: Combining existing technologies in unique ways

Innovation does not necessarily have to be based on radically new technologies -- indeed most modern products are created by bringing together and developing capabilities which already exist. The creative genius lies in the way existing technologies have been brought together to create something new.

-- *David Hughes, The Business Innovation Group*

Ideas can happen anywhere, at any time

I learned that ideas come occur/develop/come to life in many different places and at many different times. I sometimes get ideas when I listen to something or someone, but also when I go for a walk or a run, when I take a shower in the morning, when I read, when I write, and simply when I use my eyes to look at things.

-- *Frank Calberg*

Innovation is a means to an end, not an end in itself

Perhaps the most important innovation-related lesson is related to the term "innovation" itself. This term brings to mind the need for accurately articulating our objectives. All too often, we will not think our goals through with clarity, and will get caught up in, and carried away by a trend that seems glamorous and exciting. Innovation is a case in point.

All this talk centered on innovation makes it appear to be the objective. This is clearly wrong-headed. Innovation is wonderful, but we must bear in mind that it is obviously only a means to an end, not the end itself. Change for its own sake is not what we're really after. What we want is improvement! (And sometimes, leaving well enough alone is the choice that is superior to all the other available options!) As an old German proverb puts it, "To change, and to change for the better, are two different things." (And this thought, I'm certain, is not at all new!)

-- *Sigmund Halpert, New York City Human Resources Administration*

Select innovation best practices that fit your organization's culture

If you look at what 20 authors or companies recommend as an innovation "best practice," you'll get about 20 different answers. Several are likely to conflict with one another. It's important to first understand your own organization's innovation archetype, before seeking to apply best practices from another division or company's experiences. That way, you can select practices tested in organizations more like your own, and you are likely to have a higher probability of success in your organization.

-- *Jeff Murphy, Johnson & Johnson*

Define innovation in terms that people understand

One lesson learned is that the past year has seen a greater depth in quality academic studies, articles, and blog entries that are useful and specific. In working for internal and external clients, I found a vague suspicion about innovation, reflecting a trend that innovation has become such a widespread term that it means so much and so little. Along those lines, many clients did not want to necessarily hear of innovation, for example non-profits had a hard time with "social

innovation," but wanted rather to hear innovation put in the language of their particular domain. After explanation, they then were open to seeing new processes as "innovative."

One other insight is an awareness that three previously separate fields, futures studies, design, and innovation, are melding, deliberately or not, to provide a richer set of options and solutions for clients.

-- *Jim Burke, Northrop Grumman Corp.*

Creating a culture that is open to ideas

The mind is like a parachute. It functions only when it is open. The three main characteristics to be linked to creativity are flexibility, persistence and the ability to re-combine elements to achieve insights. Also key is the ability to breakdown huge systems into smaller inter-related subsystems and determine how they function together, then to re-combine these to form a comprehensive "whole picture" framework to work with.

One of the more important actions that an organization can take to make the creative process more likely to occur and even flourish is to create a climate that is conducive to the free flow of ideas. The environment under which people work can act as a stimulant to bring out their innovativeness. Inhibition and misconceptions act as roadblocks. Aimless and undirected activity does not bring about innovation. Endeavors must be planned and organized. Motivation is essential to successful innovation and reward is the single most important motivator.

An organization will always shine when an employee suggestion and rewarding scheme is in the frontline.

-- *Mirza Kazimulla Baig, Almajdouie Group*

Translating innovation goals into action plans

There are many lessons we learn on an ongoing basis, but this year reinforced one thing that I've often taken for granted: The ability to translate the innovation goal into the right work that needs to be done to achieve that goal. An organization can have the best strategy in the world, and the best capabilities for execution in the world, but if they cannot connect the two, then they will fail.

This is more difficult than it seems because this connection is often intangible. For example, a designer can come up with many creative concepts, but may lack the ability to see which one will help to realize the strategic goals. People often inadvertently apply different criteria to different disciplines, when I think there is a great opportunity for them to be more similar. Criteria for the skills within a craft should certainly be different, but the goals they need to achieve should be aligned to the strategy, whether the discipline is design, engineering, etc.

Within that there are many little things, but that one proved to be the fundamental driving force behind them all. Next year, I'll be working extra hard to crack that nut!

-- *Ellen Diresta*

Too many people still don't "get" innovation

The chief lesson I have learned in 2008 is that while many enterprises (and supposed innovators) moved much more toward innovation, many also still don't get it.

Too many, especially those at the SME level, say they have to be innovative and then immediately put that in an old construct, such as new product development or some kind of skunkworks. Both of these have clearly been proven to be relatively ineffective (overall innovation success across all industries is less than 5%).

Also, it doesn't help that many companies simply see innovation as a marketing ploy -- everybody says they're innovative and their product, even if it means moving a button from the left side to the right side of some machine, is now "innovative and new." It has become a kneejerk marketing message, like the old "new and improved," and the word has been denatured considerably because of it.

At the enterprise level, innovation and creativity is much better understood, but many don't understand it yet at a deep fundamental level, as evidenced by how so many fled from innovation amidst the economic turmoil in the last quarter.

On the bright side, it appears that in 2008, people began tentatively to recognize that creativity is a process, and not some kind of magic dust possessed by a few. Further, they are starting to recognize that creatives should be nurtured and integrated into organizations, not shut up in some room where they won't do any harm, or dismissed because they are "inefficient."

-- Tony Wanless, Knowpreneur Consultants

The innovation equation

That it is all about $1 + 1 = 3$ and the synergy of bringing people together collectively! It really is about the people and the leadership that creates the environment for people to align around their passion and challenge them to fulfill their potential.

-- Kimberly A. Johnson, Johnstech

Organizations need a broad portfolio of offerings to survive, thrive

One of the things on my mind is about dealing with uncertainty. In the last year, even some stellar organizations -- Southwest Airlines, Toyota, Starbucks, Goldman Sachs -- were hit hard by the downturn. A message I take away is that organizations need a broader portfolio of offerings to hedge against volatility. I think that with the rise of developing countries there is going to be longer-term pressure to offer value and yet not be commoditized. Exciting times for fresh approaches in design and innovation!

-- Lyndon Rego, Center for Creative Leadership

Keep feedback loops short to innovate faster

This year, it was all about keeping short feedback loops. By doing so, we reduced the risk and increased client engagement. What I mean is this: By reducing the cycle-time between idea => innovation => implementation => reflection, we increased the usable products and services we developed for our clients. And by keeping to short, quick feedback with clients, we were able to produce stronger, more applicable innovations.

Longer feedback cycles amplify any potential errors in the resulting innovation, sometimes pulling it completely off-track. Short cycles keep innovations on track, and even allow the end product to migrate and improve as external forces change. Short feedback loops. That was what 2008 taught us.

-- Mark Alan Effinger, ThoughtOffice Corporation

IT constraints are a key input to successful innovation projects

I think the biggest lesson I have learned goes back to a search for creativity while maximizing productivity. It often seems as if ideas and thoughts do not follow any set pattern and will come up at any time and within any context. Over the years, I have always gone back to moments like that to try and discern what may or may not impede the "flow," the elusive state where thoughts seem to just gel and come together with a singularity, at that point one may feel a touch of genius and relief to know the moment was caught.

Catching the ideas has always been the goal of my work with software and computers to make the flow as unobtrusive as possible. I started with mind mapping systems. I primarily rely on MindManager 8 and XMIND for their complete feature set and export capability. The ability to quickly record ideas and reorganize them at will is the key to flow as sometimes in midstream a thought takes a different path and ideas must be rearranged. These two programs allow you to mobilize a thought or task at the drop of a hat. Speed and ease of use are key to capturing the moment and a naturally intuitive interface is the element that allows that. I like to change formats and colors once the initial inputs are drawn as visual cues, they have an ability to create more pathways that are not necessarily evident when one first puts ideas to "paper."

I also use a Tablet PC and a new program by Microsoft Research called InkSeine. It was created as a strictly pen-based application that would tie web research and other information into your drawings. I have done full presentations on the fly with this wonderfully agile tool. Included in InkSeine is a "camera" to allow you to embed anything and everything to key you into visual cues.

Once I get things the way I want, the ability to export to Word then comes into play as I formalize the paper/presentation by normal means. Being able to conceptualize from a visual standpoint allows you to flesh out the details. This is the distillation of years of tinkering and this year I have put it to use multiple times with great success.

-- Alan Yoshioka, ENVIRtrade, Inc.

The three key factors behind innovation

It takes at least three things to create and sustain the innovative culture: Focus, people and time. Evaluating, concentrating and manipulating these three factors, you can usually achieve any task and often in ways which you might not expect. By bringing together a diverse range of people and creating an area of focus - a topic or challenge and then apply a finite amount of time by setting a deadline - you'll get results and probably some very interesting innovations into the mix.

-- Rod Walkenhorst, innovation student, Swinburne University

To innovate, think INSIDE the box!

Most innovation does not come from "thinking outside the box" (the most over-used term of 2008), but instead from "thinking inside the box."

The most innovative solutions are usually discovered trying to surmount some set of imposed constraints. So rather than saying "be innovative" or "you have total freedom" to a creative team, think about what you want to achieve and define a successful outcome the best as you can when briefing the team. Then stand back and watch the magic happen, answering questions as they arise and pitching in to help overcome obstacles where you can.

-- Braden Kelley, Business Strategy Innovation

How constraints fuel innovation

Constraints are good! They're a spur to the creative process. I've long felt that a highly motivated individual, group, or company with a limited budget, binding restrictions, and a tight deadline will often out-perform their "fatter" counterparts who have lots of money, unlimited manpower, few restrictions, and squishy deadlines.

In the current economic environment, we'll see that just about everyone will have to adopt this more modest (but in my opinion more productive) path to innovation. Remember: it's preferable to have a philosophy to out-think the competition than to out-spend them.

-- Roger von Oech, author of *A Whack on the Side of the Head* and *A Kick in the Seat of the Pants*

First understand the nature of the problem – then brainstorm

Einstein supposedly was asked, "Professor, if you had one hour to save the world, how would you use the time?" He supposedly responded that, "I would spend the first 55 minutes trying to understand the problem and the last 5 generating solutions."

I didn't just learn this in 2008, but have had it reinforced several times with clients. We live in a "brainstorming" culture popularized by Osborn years ago (though he also actually advocated problem understanding) and want to leap at solutions when presented with some challenge, assuming that it must be the most productive "frame." Then, sometimes, we are somehow surprised that the quality of ideas is sorely lacking. Thus, we may think our "creativity" was inadequate when the real culprit was the lack of sufficient, "front end" analysis and framing.

-- Arthur ("Andy") VanGundy

Innovation as a continuous process

Innovation is not a milestone but it is a continuous process which one must implement to be cost-effective, to have an edge or an advantage over competitors, and to build new portfolios for customers.

Also, one should question the existing processes to find out the loopholes and then suggest creative ideas to improve it. Each idea should be brainstormed by a group of people and best should be selected and implemented to improve any such processes.

-- *Bhavesh Mehta, Amdocs*

Five crucial elements for innovation to flourish

We have studied hundred global firms to identify the innovation best practices. We found that there are five crucial elements that are needed for innovation to flourish:

- Leadership that is supportive of innovation
- Strategy that eliminates the fear of failure
- A culture that nurtures innovation
- An innovation process that people follow and pursue rigorously
- A creative individual
- The culture should eliminate barriers to innovation and promotes enablers for innovation.

-- *Dr. B. Bowonder, TMTC*

How flexibility of thinking helps to prevent “stupidity”

Flexibility of thinking is the most crucial tool for overcoming adversity, stupidity, nurturing new ideas, and for spotting new opportunities. In my book, *Overcoming Stupidity*, I define stupidity not as being caused by low intelligence (we all know clever people who do stupid things), rather it is created by “inflexible thinking without asking questions which leads to negative value.” 2008 has seen a lot of global stupidity, seemingly caused by inflexible thinking without asking questions.

-- *Andy Green, Flexible Thinking Forum*

People: The hidden key to innovation success

The problems with innovation do not lie within finding the optimum system for running it, but rather the hurdle lies within the persons who are involved. We know we should act in a certain way – but we still do not do that, often due to reasons that are hidden in the rewarding system in the brain somewhere. (Perhaps one clue is that we only have MBAs and not “MBCs” running the companies (in other words, people with a Masters in Business Creativity, rather than Administration!)

-- *Bengt Järrehult, SCA Hygiene Products & SCA Packaging*

The role of personal commitment in innovation

Creativity is an ongoing process nurtured by our state of mind, energy, curiosity, action and reflection. The greater the commitment to challenge, practice and explore practical applications, the greater the learning and potential for success.

-- *Gary Spinks, Cornea Consulting*

Innovation sometimes comes slowly – and that’s OK

We are often mesmerized by the rapid pace of innovation in the industry of high technology. My insight came as I realized that it is just as important to try to understand why sometimes innovations come very slowly. I was surprised to find several industries where the dominant design has not changed in over 100 years. In 1848, hydroelectric power was a growing industry in the United States. James B. Francis improved upon existing designs by inventing a high efficiency reaction turbine that carries his name, the Francis turbine. It rapidly grew to become the dominant turbine design in use by

hydroelectric dams. The China Three Gorges dam project, the largest hydroelectric power plant under construction today, still uses turbines based upon the design of James B. Francis.

-- David Kern, PhD candidate, Old Dominion University

Overcoming the existing paradigms of industry is harder than we thought

The innovation projects we did in 2008 showed yet again, how strong a hold the existing paradigms of an industry have in the minds of executives. Even if one team of executives comes up with ideas for new, more radical initiatives there is another set who have not been part of the process, who question the likely success of these on the basis of the dominant logic of the industry.

The key lesson for us as innovation consultants is that to deliver results, we need to keep reminding teams of the original project intent to seek breakthrough solutions and not incremental solutions. Also, we need to help the project champions keep the faith and not let the fresh ideas and initiatives get derailed.

-- Hamsini Shivakumar, Leapfrog Strategy Consulting

Freedom of experimentation is crucial

I come from a family of artists, but somehow this gene was lost on me. Over the holidays I spent some time discussing what innovation and creativity means to them, as artists. What was striking to me is that they all agreed creativity is more about the process than the result. Their motivation comes from trying new ways to manipulate, arrange, and ultimately transform various materials. Once a discovery is made, the outcome is not the treasure, but rather what was learned in the process. It is that freedom that allows them to be creative and innovative.

As a businessperson, my job typically requires me to manage risk, limit resources and maximize output. In contrast, what they were describing requires the use of resources, without knowing what the output will be, which increases risk.

At first I had a difficult time reconciling the two paradigms. But now, I think a balance between the two is what is required for real transformational innovation to occur in an environment where profitability is the ultimate goal. Innovators need to feel they are free to experiment and learn from the results, without the pressure of producing a useful result in the short run. What is learned becomes the building blocks for future hypotheses that may aim for a particular outcome, but could very well result in something unexpected. That type of thinking needs to be permitted and encouraged.

The innovators are creating a pool of possibilities from which to start. It then takes a different set of resources, with a more practical mission, to continually scan and harvest these results for use in more focused trials to achieve a targeted outcome. This is a long-term view that is not easily tolerated in a business world that sees itself publicly measured every quarter. The temptation is to skip the innovator step, that comes with risk and expense, and get right to producing new innovative and profitable results. I'm not sure that is as fruitful, or as profitable in the long run.

-- Gretchen M. McDermott, Unisys Corporation

Be patient when training others in innovation principles

You need to be patient! I live and breathe creativity and innovation, but for my participants sometime it's the first time they are hearing about this. It takes time to absorb the subject. The participants have to learn, and learn, and learn, and to do their homework in order to start to understand the subject. So it needs from you patience, determination and endurance.

The audience must enjoy the course. During the course if they are not laughing then you misses something.

Creativity is making mistakes. You need a lot of ideas in order to choose a few to continue with.

You must learn to listen. Everybody can come up with a great idea. All you need to do is to listen, write them down and afterward choose the better one.

-- Schlomo

Strength in diversity

I am a customer experience "expert." I was fortunate to attend the 2008 Industrial Designers Society of America (IDSA) National Conference. The short lesson I learned is that hacks like me - who rely upon common sense to create remarkable customer experiences - are sunk if the rigor and methods that real professionals, like industrial designers, apply to product design are ever applied to service and experience design. It is already happening, of course, but the good news is that there are still a majority of businesses that fail to understand that the customer is the reason for the existence of the business. So, hacks like me are safe for a while, and the elegant and effective experiences that real designers create for client organizations give me more common sense with which to work.

The bigger lesson I learned is that the old saws about multidisciplinary teams having strength beyond siloed experts, about strength in diversity, and about collaborative cooperation trumping heroism are as true today as ever. The IDSA fosters a vital community that seamlessly and inclusively combines the old sages with the youngest students, the academics with the industrialists, the artists with the scientists.

Both lessons can be applied in many situations, and the ideal situation for a company seeking to innovate in its customer experience is to include a broad spectrum of its people in design and evaluation of customer experience proposals, and to include all of its people in implementation of the chosen solution or enhancement. Inclusion is key; it fosters ownership and obviates most "change management" issues. Including customers is ideal, yet problematic. Ideal, since it provides the first-person "voice of the customer." Problematic, because an idea voiced is too often perceived as a guarantee for performance made by the organization. Simpler is to include a sufficient breadth and depth of the organization's people. After all, the people are customers, too, and it is very likely that internal people know as much as a customer sample, without the problem of perceived promises made by the organization to its sampled customers.

-- Jim Graham, *Maximum Business Advantage*

Innovation can't happen without alignment

Lesson # 1: It's all about "alignment." If a company or organization can open the silos so that their key people really agree on their priorities for innovation and growth, then there's a strong likelihood that an initiative to find and act on growth options will be successful. On the other hand if key people who own different functional areas don't agree, play politics and maintain their silo mentality, then any initiative, no matter how brilliant, is doomed to failure.

Lesson #2: A best practice to translate an innovation plan into action is to follow Dr. Deming's PDCA (Plan, Do, Check, Act) approach and use the A3 Planning Process to formalize a plan, commit resources, gain alignment and monitor progress.

-- Charlie Alter, *Bentbrook Advisors LLC*

Teach employees process thinking and encourage ideas

Most innovation programs address new products, new marketing channels, or company-level processes. This approach fails to recognize every member's day-to-day work, and the two questions every member (a.k.a. "employee") asks: "Why won't they...? Why can't we...?"

The answer to these two questions is simple, self evident, and easily implemented: Enable every member of the company to learn basic process thinking and develop a process-improvement point-of-view as the uniform basis for thinking up, writing down and presenting their ideas for improvement (IFIs).

Key points for putting "Ideas Process Leadership" (or IPL) to work include:

1. Recognize that all knowledge work, every job, is a process and can be viewed for innovation using a simple knowledge work process model.
2. Every process can be improved, and the people doing the work know how.
3. IFIs (ideas for improvement) will flow when leadership members teach process thinking and process point-of-view to other members of the company.
4. The flow of innovative ideas will continue when there is authentic and ongoing leadership support for adding ideas presented to the organization's knowledge management system: (a) ideas implemented; (b) ideas being developed for implementation; and (c) ideas that cannot now be implemented or developed for implementation but need to be saved as knowledge resources for future review and possible development.

IPL moves innovation to the front line, and makes continual improvement and constructive change (cornerstones of innovation) the everyday responsibility of every member of the company.

-- Richard S. Webster, Ph.D., PRM Institute

It's time to get serious about innovation

The current economic meltdown is a clear and painful lesson that organizations should not wait for the complete collapse of their decaying business models to make innovation a strategic priority. Innovation demands a deeper commitment and a holistic approach to ensure that it is sustainable over time. And now that we're facing what GE CEO Jeff Immelt has described as "a reset" for the American economy in 2009, perhaps we will learn once and for all that innovation is the best chance we have to create more vibrant institutions in the years ahead.

-- Jeff De Cagna, Principled Innovation LLC

Build senior management support for innovation

I have been somewhat of a one-man innovation team for some time now (problem solving is one of my recognized skills) but I wanted to formalize this in the workplace. As someone new to the formal innovation movement I realized it was essential to get senior managers on board as quickly as possible. Without their commitment and support I knew I would be a lone voice, banging my head against the wall. It is a slow process (convincing managers) but well worth the effort. We now have a forum where everyone can contribute ideas without the fear of ridicule or rejection.

-- Philip A Rushton, Age Concerns Insurance Products and Services

Remember that some people find creativity and innovation threatening

I have learned the hard way that many people find innovation and creativity very scary and threatening since it challenges their way of life as they know it. If you work or live in an otherwise turbulent environment, which of course many have the past six months, it can be very disturbing to have the few constants around you questioned and challenged. But just as with creativity in general, just because you get an idea doesn't mean that you have to act on it. Just because there are suggestions of new and different ways of doing things doesn't mean that they have to be acted upon. Reasoning about it helps to lower people's suspiciousness, and makes them more open to listening to suggestions.

-- Donnie SC Lygonis, Constant Innovation AB

Use multiple senses to be more creative

To make the most of brainstorming, make use of multiple senses. Use both visuals and audio to enhance the sessions. Also, during some exercises, limit one of the senses; for example, force participants to not use their voices.

-- Bill Raczyk, The Options Clearing Corporation

The importance of a clear definition of innovation

The most important lesson I learned in helping my company develop a strategy to imbed innovation into the culture is to ensure we have a clear definition of innovation. If we are going to encourage actions outside the general norms and expectations of the business, then we need to spell it out in a definition that gives permission to deviate from the order of things yet balances it with a creative unity that keeps the company's vision and mission in sight. The definition needs to be purposeful and credible and serve as a tool to guide, screen, track and measure innovative actions across the company.

I'm finding out this is not an easy task. We are new to this process in terms of putting together a strategy but everything I've read, listened to, people I've talked with and seminars attended all seem to point to the need to give some type of direction to employees at the start. What a better place in my opinion to capture it than in the definition of innovation.

-- Nan Quinlan, TACO, Inc.

Failure and innovation

Failure is a good/positive/vital component of innovation.

-- Deborah Carpenter, Westat

Be careful how you present your ideas

When you're presenting your innovation, be careful with even the seemingly minor details. Otherwise, your brilliant contribution runs the risk of being consigned to the dustbin of history by the derisive objections of vociferous nitpickers, and the world will be deprived of your creative inspiration.

-- Sigmund Halpert, *New York City HRA*

Explore the science of breakthrough problem solving

First, history repeats itself several times. Late in 2008, we saw a massive downsizing and retrenching in corporate America, with thousands of technical people leaving their companies. Based on past experience and studies, these are most likely the most creative long-term thinkers that probably caused a bit of disruption. They will most likely join small companies, become involved in startups or get involved in a completely different field. About five years from now, we will be asking where are all the experienced people we need around here to develop and execute programs?

Second, I continue to see the incredible inefficiency of most innovation efforts that only look at current products and customers and use very inefficient psychologically-based tools. The science that we know is involved in breakthrough problem solving is just beginning to take hold, but it's far behind Europe and Japan in its acceptance. We as a society simply can't afford this kind of inefficiency in our efforts.

-- Jack Hipple, *Innovation-TRIZ*

Develop an innovation toolkit

In 2008, it has become abundantly clear to me that effective and sustainable innovation is not an elusive or nebulous goal, but is in reality a practical, repeatable outcome derived from the everyday practice of problem-solving skills and disciplines. The challenge of innovating every day is often a self-imposed barrier – the misconception that a seemingly impossible task or crisis is the only time innovation skills can or should be applied. Innovation toolkits are abundant. Software, services, methodologies and other resources can help individuals innovate better, but if the selected tools are not used regularly, the skills needed to effectively use innovation tools atrophy and create frustration more often than results. The most important lessons I would impart to any innovation practitioner are these:

- Develop and grow an innovation toolkit that combines effective problem solving methodology and knowledge management.
- Use your toolkit to solve the simplest problems you can find.
- Repeat these steps every day.

-- Jim Belfiore, *Invention Machine Corporation*

The difference between creativity and innovation

The word "Innovation" is exciting but intimidating. People think they know what it means but people have different interpretations. Creativity and Innovation are also confused one with another. There is a gradual realization that Innovation is a process and is not "magic." Creativity is just the early part of the process. If I say "innovation" to people, intimidation can creep in and they think this is something very technical. If I talk with people about getting "new ideas in tough times," that resonates with them.

The process is simple:

1. Identify the opportunity
2. Find conceptual solutions
3. Pick the best solution based on risk and ROI
4. Make the preferred solution user friendly
5. Get to market with a working solution

As with any process, execution requires understanding of the process

2009 will be a year in which people are looking for a process through which they can get "new ideas in tough times" and get to market faster and cheaper than the competition.

-- *Peter Merrill, author of "Innovation Generation" and Quest Management Systems*