

The Innovator's Toolkit Review

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Just reading the complete title of The Innovator's Toolkit is bound to send the book flipper to the Internet to search out some definitions. While "innovation" is defined in a 44 word(s) compound sentence; "innovator," or "organic growth," are not to be found in the index without extended attachments [i.e., "innovators/adapters" - "Organic growth strategies"]. The web searcher will find that there are 605,000 results for "organic growth," and 7,490,000 for "innovator." After reading definitions of "innovator" off the web, such as ..."Innovators are successful, sophisticated, take-charge people with high self-esteem"* ... the flipper quickly settles into a chair to learn the 50+ techniques." * <http://www.sric-bi.com/VALS/innovators.shtml> [connected February 15,2009]

Alas for the publisher, The Innovator's Toolkit is being released just as Innovation, is getting some bad press. The March 2009 edition of Fast Company magazine begins an article with: "We know how innovation works. ... Innovation has always been about people in rich nations getting the latest stuff and the rest of the world getting our castoffs as our markets scale and prices come down." The feature's main point is that "Innovation now trickles up from emerging to advanced economies." The good news for John Wiley & Sons. Inc. is The Innovator's Toolkit is not about the philosophy of Innovation, but about the methods and techniques for bringing about sustainable growth in a company.

The Innovator's Toolkit organizes the fifty-five techniques into four sections: Define the Opportunity; Discover the Ideas; Develop the Solution; and Demonstrate the Innovation. The authors "duded" their process into a model call D4 (Define-Discover-Develop-Demonstrate). The first section lists tools for incorporating people, both employees and customers, into the defining and focusing of projects [e.g., Value Quotient, Nine Windows]. The second set of techniques, gives the manager methods to sort through the mélange of ideas generated by the first eleven methods to bring the firm closer to the customers expectations [Resource Optimization, SCAMPER ...]. After having selected an innovation plan, Part III provides tactics for formulating and optimizing the project design [Morphological Matrix, Discrete Even Simulation ...]. The final process is implementation and making sure that "your new business model actually works in the real world [SIPOC Map, Cause & Effect Diagram ...]."

The book is loaded with graphical exhibits of processes, worksheets, diagrams, and matrixes illustrating the key elements of each technique, and may appear at first to be overwhelming and intending for a Lean or Six Sigma black belt. However, each tool is well presented and organized. Every section covers the background and steps involved with a method, and provides resources for additional information.

A manager may encounter brainstorming and customer survey reports frequently in their conduct of business. The book enables a broader expansion of skills and meets its purpose of providing a ready desktop reference. This can be used to follow and understand the basic concepts of techniques which experts may recommend and include in their reports. One of the authors, David Silverstein, furnishes a description of the target user:

"... the book is intended for two audiences: for those at the top, it's important for them to know these tools are available. The first chapters are most important to them. Executives have long understood WHY it's important to innovate, but they didn't know there was a "how" that was available to their people. The main audience—the audience that is expected to make use of the entire book—are those that are tasked with leading specific innovation efforts. Specific problems to be solved, specific markets in need of new products, etc. That can be anyone from individual contributors through business unit leaders."

In addition to providing a catalog of techniques for designing and monitoring business growth ideas, The Innovator's Toolkit's, basic book format takes advantage of the Internet. This enables the writers to include more information about each tool, rather than having to produce the massive bulk usually necessary for this type of workbook in including an addendum with blank samples of the forms and worksheets. The reader is referred to a website where they can easily download the exhibits when needed.

"Growing a company isn't easy," the authors point out. Achieving and maintaining predictable and sustainable organic growth is even more difficult in a large company. This book provides the manager with 50 tools and techniques to both carry out a single innovation project and help your business become an "innovation-elite organization." For this purpose, while The Innovator's Toolkit may not be required reading, it does provide a handy reference for the manager who must deal with these issues in the every day life of a company.

The Innovator's Toolkit - 50+ Techniques for Predictable and Sustainable Organic Growth;
David Silverstein, Philip Samuel, and Neil DeCarlo;
John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, NJ;
2009; pp 352.

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