

## DESIGN LEADERSHIP

*The creative process as applied to building innovation in organizations*

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## **SUMMARY**

Developing a strong understanding of the creative process constitutes the foundation for the development of sound creative ideas: the basis for innovation. The creative process starts with a predefined road map and a cognitive understanding of the individual's way of processing information. A personal understanding of how each one of us processes information fosters the development of creative solutions that result in new products or processes. This document highlights the importance of process in building innovation.

**Key Words:** Design, innovation, leadership, project management, creative thinking.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Innovation, according to the latest IBM CEO Survey (IBM Global Business Services, 2006), is the most important factor in driving success at organizations in the years to come. Organizations where innovation is a key strategic factor thrive on the work of creative individuals and need this work to drive innovation. According to Florida (2003), companies must recognize the importance of hiring and developing creative talent in order to succeed.

A study of the creative process as it relates to individuals and organizations provides a greater understanding of how creativity can be augmented in organizations and applied to driving innovation. This process starts with the capacity to understand one's own creative apply it with skill to situations in which creativity does not flow naturally. The seven stages of the development of an idea (Aspelund, 2006) constitute a clear road map by which organizations can take their existing processes and apply it to increase the chances of developing successful creative ideas.

## **METHODOLOGY**

An understanding how individuals develop creative ideas starts an analysis of the seven intelligences of Gardner (2006) in combination with Lazear's (2001) methods of learning. A series of creative tools is then evaluated to build upon one's understanding of creativity and how it can be applied to different types of situations.

Furthermore, an analysis of the design process as applied to organizations presents a road map for innovation through the application of creative processes. Finally, the application of the design process to foster creativity in organizations is analyzed through a series of case studies, including Cirque De Soleil, IDEO, Semco and Virgin Group.

## **DESIGN PROCESS AS APPLIED TO ORGANIZATIONS**

### **Creativity**

The recent interest in innovation as part of the strategic plan of corporations raises the question of processes and strategies that need to be followed to achieve innovation (IBM Global Business Services, 2006). The role of creativity in organizations is a key element in the development of innovation as a strategic tool. Companies such as Proctor and Gamble and General Electric have worked to develop strategies that involve the design process in the operation of the company (Bruce et al, 2005).

Richard Florida (2002) in his book *The Creative Class* describes creativity as the primordial raw material of our age. Creative brain power, according to Florida, is as important to this age as land was in the feudal era or gold in the 1800s and 1900s.

The study of creativity as the basis for innovation includes an analysis of the individual's capacity to create that propels an understanding of the areas in which an individual is more creative and those in which creativity flows with more difficulty.

According to Carter, Bishop, and Kravits (1998/2005), creativity is associated with certain intelligences, and not necessarily with analytical intelligence. While intelligence is defined as the capacity for association of ideas or concepts, creativity is defined as the capacity to evaluate problems from different perspectives.

Creativity is also the capacity of examining and discerning diverse ideas and materials to achieve combinations that are new and useful. The creative work involves daring to develop new concepts and accept that errors might occur in the process.

Technological, economical, artistic and cultural creativity coexist in an environment of mutual relationships (Florida, 2003). These different types of creativity strengthen each other in a process that requires great amounts of discipline and hard work.

### **Creativity and Innovation**

In the latest IBM CEO Innovation Study (2006), 765 CEOs from 21 industries expressed the need to foster innovation by integrating the structure of the company with information technologies, and by developing a structure for innovation that is driven from the top.

Considering the relationship of creativity and innovation, it is important to understand how organizations can apply the creative process to instill innovation in their workforce.

### **The Creative Process**

The work of Gardner (2006) and Lazear (2001) plays a key role in understanding how individuals process information. Gardner (2006) presents the theory that human beings have seven intelligences, some more developed than others. These seven intelligences are: verbal-linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, corporal-kinesthetic, intrapersonal, interpersonal and naturalistic. Through tests developed by Gardner (2006), an individual can understand which intelligences he or she has more developed than others, and thus which intelligences are directly related to their creative capacity. Lazear (2001), on the other hand, presents an understanding of four different learning methods: that of the thinker, the organizer, the giver and the adventurer. Similar to the seven intelligences, we all have certain learning methods more developed than others. In this analysis, the thinker and the giver are associated with the left brain while the giver and adventurer are associated with the right brain (Lazear, 2001). A combined understanding of the seven intelligences of Gardner (2006) and the methods of learning of Lazear (2001) can help an individual develop a cognitive capacity for defining his or her creative process and apply it with skill to situations in which creativity does not flow naturally.

Moreover, Carter, Bishop, and Kravits (1998/2005) present the importance of understanding the difference between creative thinking and critical thinking. Through their analysis, the authors sustain that critical thinking plays a key role in the development of creative thinking, allowing the consideration of a wide range of options in the development of an idea through a continuous process of questioning.

## **Design Process**

In design management, the design process plays a definite role in the success of a project. According to Aspelund (2006), applying the design process carefully and methodically to the development of an idea will produce a more assured result that relates equally well to architectural design or apparel design.

The design process is divided into two main sections: analysis and synthesis, where analysis is the equivalent to the definition of the problem and synthesis is the equivalent to the design (Peña and Parshall, 2001). Analysis is the identification of the variables and constraints of the project, ending in the punctual definition of a problem, which becomes the baton that permits the start of the synthesis. The analysis of a project consists of a full analysis of a problem taking into account the impact of form, function, economy and time in relation to the objectives, needs and limitations. Synthesis is the final part of the process where the design aspect is developed in response to the needs and limitations outlined in the analysis of the project.

While the analysis phase includes a thorough understanding of the problem, the synthesis or design phase is best defined by the seven stages of creation of an idea (Aspelund, 2006), which constitute a basic roadmap for success that when fully applied to the development of an idea ensures the development of a wide range of options.

The seven stages of design as described by Aspelund (2006) include a series of steps that start with the continuous exercise of the creative impulses in an individual. The actual development of an idea starts with an analysis of the needs and constraints of the project followed by brainstorming. The next steps include an evaluation of the ideas developed in relation to the objectives of the project. The final stages include definition of details in consideration of production issues.

The understanding of the goals in each one of these steps is needed to provide a clear visualization of the creative process, allowing individuals to concentrate in the development of ideas.

### **Design Process as applied to organizations**

*Mini-case studies.*

#### **Semco**

Semco is a Brazilian organization that provides a wide array of products and services for the naval, pharmaceutical and food industries, among many others. With 3,000 employees and U\$212 million in annual revenue (Grupo Semco, 2007), Semco is an organization recognized for achieving success through the development of innovative solutions. Ricardo Semler, CEO of Semco, has turned the company into an organization that embraces creativity and creative individuals, through an undefined structure and an environment that promotes creativity (Semler, 2000).

Semler claims that part of the success of the organization lies on its lack of official structure: Semco has no organizational chart or business plan and no company strategy. Semco's employees have the option of setting up their own hours, designing their workplace, and choosing their own IT, among many other things.

## **IDEO**

Described as the most influential company in the world in terms of product development (Koppel, 1999), IDEO is a staple for innovation.

Tom Kelly, CEO of IDEO describes ten aspects of innovation that are considered critical for product development (Kelly & Littman, 2005). In the book *The Ten Faces of Innovation*, Kelly describes these ten faces and divides them into three main categories: learning personas, organizing personas and building personas (Kelly & Littman, 2005).

Through these ten personas, projects are analyzed from a variety of perspectives. The learning personas provide an anthropologic perspective, taking into account the historical perspective and the examination of similar products in other industries. The organizing personas take charge of developing a cohesive group while helping the team overcome obstacles. The building personas make sure that the client's needs are met taking charge of the physical environment and turning it into a powerful tool that influences behavior and attitude, and ensuring continued creation innovation through story telling.

## **Virgin Group**

Virgin Group was established in 1984 with Virgin Atlantic, an air line with a single flight from London to New York. Virgin was created with the ideal of providing an exceptional service at a very inexpensive price. After becoming one of the biggest airline companies of the US, Virgin group started diversifying the business, eventually expanding to over 30 brands that include a wide array of products and services from colas to cell phones to bridal boutiques.

Virgin group is an innovative company recognized for promoting bold ideas and successfully developing new businesses (Mortimer, 2002). Innovation at Virgin is part of a set of values that the organization treasures. There is no one in charge of innovation; everyone is encouraged to take on bold ideas, from the CEO to entry level employees at every department (Mortimer, 2002).

Product innovation is a fundamental aspect of Virgin group. The organization is recognized for creating new offers for its customers, based on observation and listening. Innovation at the company level is a key ingredient in the development of new ideas, making business simple for customers while building success through the development of new products. Executives at Virgin believe that ideas will be successful if initiators truly believe that they will make a difference in people's lives or in the market (Mortimer, 2002).

## **Cirque du Soleil**

Cirque du Soleil is a company with an edge that entered an existing market creating a new product and transforming the way viewers perceive circus. The organization, currently lead by Guy Laliberté, started in 1984 by a group of street performers (Kim & Mauborgne, 2004), in a time when the circus industry was in a long-term decline due to lack of public interest in the events and rising concerns by animal right activist groups in regards to the treatment of animals.

Cirque du Soleil walked into an industry dominated by traditional circus such as Ringling, who attracted some of the best performers in the industry. The founding group decided to create a new spectacle, differentiating themselves from the competition via the nature of the product. Cirque du Soleil came to the market with a completely new product that took away the notion of competing. They created a new market based on innovation, targeting an audience that liked theatrical events with an edge (Kim & Mauborgne, 2004).

Empowering people within the organization to pursue their dreams is a key factor in encouraging innovation at Cirque du Soleil. The company is recognized for taking good care of its staff offering a plethora of extracurricular activities including acting lessons (Plerich, 2007).

## **CONCLUSION**

The value of creativity and the creative process is evident in the success of companies like Semco, IDEO, Virgin Group and Cirque de Soleil. Given the value placed in innovation as a key strategic resource, it is critical that companies embrace the notion of applying the design process within their organizations in order to succeed. The training that designers acquire can be emulated at companies by allowing individuals to follow their inspiration and develop their creative environments, thus fostering an environment of creativity.

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