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Burn The Box: Rethinking The Approach To Innovation

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Innovation should not be an event or project. It should be the organizational culture with priority, utilized to gain and retain a competitive advantage. If true innovation occurs outside the box, then you do not need the box. Time to burn it.

Unleash Your Thinkers: No More Boxes By David Cooper

Don't Use This Cliché

"Think outside of the box!" This overused cliché "covertly" urges people to partake in different or unconventional thinking. It asks a person or organization to abandon legacy approaches to address a particular, often temporary, situation in a non-traditional way. It asks humans to disregard cultural norms and historical training in favor of progress and then return to the same approaches they were just asked to abandon. This is very interesting (but counter intuitive).

Let's take a moment to understand the complex human. Beyond cognitive considerations, people (and organizations) are creatures of habit. Yes, they are highly adaptive to unforeseen circumstances, effectively maneuvering through challenges, which threaten their existence. However, our ultimate goal is to return to a place of comfort, consistency and safety. We are adaptive but most of the time, we don't enjoy change.

The Past Walls Destroy the Future Views

How can an organization encourage "Thinking outside the box?" Here's the secret – it can't. Most organizations are successful because of well-defined and structured processes that contribute to its efficiency. Unfortunately, this "benefit" is both a gift and a curse, as movement beyond the "organized boundaries"

Leaders must remove all restrictive boundaries, inspiring intellectual expansion ....

becomes almost impossible for the well-trained employee. Most organizations discourage "real free thinking." Instead, they advocate thinly veiled attempts to get temporary innovation from people who have been encouraged

to remain comfortably sterile. For example, a global Fortune 100 company, well known for producing the world's most talented martial artists (Six Sigma), struggled to implement a new business process. For several years, its black belts worked diligently to make a 2015 concern fit into a 1990 box. They were unable to move beyond a standard (historical) approach to address contemporary concerns.

After several unsuccessful attempts to complete the project (and the arrogance to not seek help), the company cancelled the project. There is nothing more disheartening than investing valuable resources, which yield a negative ROI.

Burning the Box: Complete the Innovation Transformation

Real innovation is not a project; it's a culture. People are encouraged to consistently think and act differently – for the sake of the organization. Employees are not moving from a place of complacency to a place of creativity. They continuously dwell in the innovation space. They are not asked to "think outside the box" because there is no box to constrain them.

Leaders need to evaluate their culture and systems carefully. If the lack of innovation is hindering organizational progress (you are in a box), consider compelling (cultural change) all stakeholders to permanently move from a responsive posture to a permanently disruptive position (burn the box). Leaders must remove all restrictive boundaries, inspiring intellectual expansion and behavioral development among all contributors.

Innovation Is…

Innovation is more than a buzzword; it is an actionable, profitable culture that constantly works to improve itself. It is not constrained by historical perspectives because it is motivated by potential opportunities. It does not temporarily eliminate obstructions because there are no obstacles to remove. Burn the box today!

Is it Comfort or Fear That Keeps Us in the Box?

By Rohan Rodney

Leaders often cite the need for their teams to innovate and push the corners of the envelope when it comes to product and service development. Through corporate memos, department off-sites, wall placards and quarterly reviews, leaders often thump their tables decreeing the need to push past competition at lightning speed. So why is it that we do not see more great products and services coming from every company whose leadership states that innovators will be rewarded handsomely?

Is it the fear culture where everyone feels fearful of sticking out his or her neck for fear of being ridiculed? Are there repercussions for those who do not play it safe in the corporate environment? When times get tough, why do people fear for their reputation and hunker down in their cubicles unwilling to "think or act outside of the box"?

Pervasive throughout many corporate environments is the underlying "fear culture". The economic climate has not rebounded to the point where everyone feels willing to attempt potential value creation which may or may not be the next big thing. This, of course, heavily weighs in on why employees feel the need to stay in a "safe zone". Leadership will always state they wish their teams would be more innovative and they find it a struggle to spur risk-taking. Often the truth that most leaders need to realize is they need to be the lead innovator and figure out the ideal way to destroy the box, which contains that fear culture.

An innovative leader encourages every individual to constantly be looking to institute creative ideas and values experimentation where failures are seen as learning opportunities. An exciting and brave new world awaits companies that truly buy into the fail-fast-and-then-iterate-quickly approach. The brave new company culture needs to learn from their mistakes and then celebrate. Learned failures become prizes in that they allow the next product or service approach to be refined. Future services, products and features can be debugged with increased efficiencies. Projects of any size will blossom.
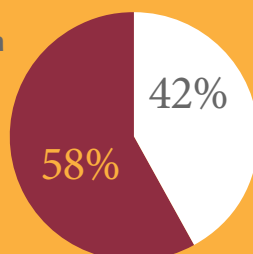
In its truest form, digital marketing embodies

Quick Facts

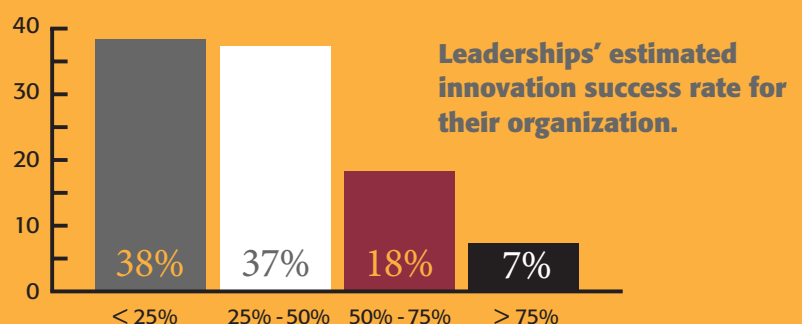**Does your organization have an explicit innovation strategy?**

- ■ yes
- □ no

58% / 42%

Source: Capgemini Consulting, Innovation Leadership Study - 2012

Leaderships' estimated innovation success rate for their organization.

< 25%	25% - 50%	50% - 75%	> 75%
38%	37%	18%	7%

Boxed In? Defining the Purpose for Effectiveness

By G.A. Bivens

Wolfgang Riebe is credited with the quote "Everyone is gifted - but some people never open their package." Can the same be said of an organization? In what sense might this be possible?

To explore this, let's look to the world of packaging. The package, or the "box", has a purpose. Two primary definitions are:

■ A container for permanent use as storage, such as a jewelry box

■ A receptacle for temporary use in the transport of contents, such as a corrugated box.

For Permanent Use?

A demonstrable example of the container for permanent use is a jewelry box. The box houses something valuable to the possessor and may itself possess some value. However, the primary purpose of the box is the storage or transport of something of value. There is a thriving hobby of collecting jewelry boxes. The container, or box, itself becomes the thing of value. How often is this the case in the business world? The way of work is often referred to as the box. The way should be a means to deliver value. The value generated can be a process, product or service, among other things. Yet in many organizations the box (way) becomes more coveted than the actual product or service designed to generate value.

When the box is the object of desire, the actual source of value, the product or service, becomes less important. This scenario is played out in the many organizations which launch new initiatives, which become constrained by the organizational inertia. The aspiration must be scaled back in order to conform to the dimensions of the box.

Imagine a new customer initiative, which creates new ways to connect with the customer, bringing with it the potential to significantly grow the bottom line. In order for the initiative to take root, there will need to be some changes to the CRM as well as the customer support process. The organization is poised to capitalize on this opportunity for growth. This is where the challenges begin. The team responsible for the multi-year, multi-dollar project to deploy the current tailored CRM system begin to chafe at the idea of tinkering with the world class CRM implementation. The new initiative will have to conform to the workflow the organization has in place. "It was constructed with the future in mind so it will handle any requirements of the new program". But will it? The customer support team will need to incorporate some new processes in order to accommodate the additional services. Again, there is hesitation. "The processes we have in place have served the organization well up until now...this is no different". But isn't it different?

The current trends in customer engagement further emphasize the idea of giving the customer a premier experience. There are higher expectations from the customer on the how they see their interactions with a company.

The move toward multi-channel engagement and the effortless experience are driving even higher expectations from the customer on the quality of the interaction. Will the old "box" adequately adorn the new offer?

A risk to many organizations is they become so enamored with the box they forget the box is only a delivery mechanism. The business becomes a hostage to its "packaging". The box becomes an inhibiting storage vessel for the benefits the company should be delivering to the customer. The permanence of process imposed by the defenders of the status quo can jeopardize the future of a business in transition.

A Receptacle for Temporary Use?

The objective of an organization should be to deliver value to their customer with a resulting benefit to itself. The operative word in the forgoing statement is deliver. Focus should be on the delivery of the value, not singularly on the mechanism.

When a long anticipated online purchase arrives at your door, do you revel in the intricacy of the packaging? How the corners are folded? How the flaps are taped? This is not the typical response, is it? The interest is on what is in the package. The time spent on the package is purely for the purpose of getting to that thing of value the box has delivered. And what becomes of the box after the item in the box has been retrieved? Is the placed in a place of prominence like the item that it delivered? Not likely. The receptacle is discarded. This could be by means of incineration or, on some occasion, recycling.

An organization's processes should be regarded in the same way. They should be regarded as a receptacle for temporary use in the transport of value. The way itself should not be preserved like an antique. The things, which do not work, should be discarded as quickly as possible, incinerated even. There is no value in maintaining something which is no longer relevant to the business just because it worked at some time in the past.

There are some occurrences where the box can be recycled instead of incinerated. There is occasionally justification to repurpose (or recycle) certain aspects of a process. There may be aspects of the existing process that can be easily adapted to a new situation. However, this should not happen without an objective evaluation of the requirements and

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"Is it Comfort or Fear..." *from page 3*

this innovative approach. It burns the box of the traditional annual twelve-month marketing plan based on the previous year's market research. A culture centered on customer innovation utilizes digital channels to experiment, measure, tweak and improve. These improvements do not always come in leaps and bounds, just as changing corporate culture does not always occur in leaps and bounds. What happens most often is minor movements are done that steadily move towards a major ROI event. This is done by closely monitoring feedback from your customer facing campaigns. It is essential to let consumer feedback guide you to the path of increased sales and customer service. This often leads to a greater understanding of how your customers think.

Can leadership take this same approach with developing the ideal innovation culture? Perhaps it can but maybe not quite along the same path. Small refinements in digital marketing demonstrate how to learn to best serve your customers and to continuously develop a real, sustainable relationship. In order to build a successful culture of innovation, a leader must continuously move the culture in the optimal direction, making slight adjustments as it goes along. There is no one declarative statement to "Innovate or die!". There must be continual affirmation to the team that it is okay to fail and learn. Continuously tearing down any semblance of the dreaded box must be one of the highest priorities.

For a team to truly believe it is allowed to be innovative, there must be trust established with leadership, which can take some time. From a leadership perspective, it must be understood that burning the box will most likely not happen overnight. Preventing that box from sprouting back up is a long-term endeavor, necessary for long-term success. Burn the box, stomp on it and sprinkle "box-away" growth killer on top of the soil so roots cannot take hold. Let the decomposition of that box provide the fertilization of innovation.

Next Q
Strategy: Don't Leave the Boardroom Without It

The ultra-competitive business environment requires a cohesive, comprehensive playbook to focus resources and business initiatives. Sending management into battle without a sound, prudent strategy is tantamount to organizational torture. Don't do it.

What's In Your Box? By L. Wagner

We find comfort in the familiar. We tend to follow processes which were previously established. We follow the lead from our current and past leaders. On the personal side, we follow tradition - we pull from our frames of reference.

Innovation does not mean we disregard that perspective. Innovation comes from expounding on why the system worked in the past and then making it better. Innovation comes when we fully understand the word WHY? Why was this created? Why does it work? Why do we need to change it? Who has it affected? Who has benefited? Does it need to be changed? The list can go on and on. Our innovative nature will often kick in when questions like these are answered. The questions may then arise on how "what was" can now be applied to "what can be".

Albert Einstein once said "The important thing is never stop questioning". The most powerful tool for creativity and innovation is to question. The questioning process takes place subconsciously but you must consciously ask yourself several questions. If you question everything — big things, small things, relevant and irrelevant things — you can become more creative because your frame of reference increases. In some cases, your frame of reference may even change. Think about how productive brainstorming sessions sometimes are, as ideas are bounced and tossed around. Remember the rule, "No idea is a bad one, everything has its place." In Algebra, we are/were plagued by the letter "X". "X" can mean anything to reach a solution. However, to get to a solution, questions must be answered to determine what "X" means. This same process can be applied in innovative thinking.

> **Sample Problem: $x + 9 = 18 - 2x$**
> **Solution: $x = 3$(innovation)**

It is necessary at times to go further than "Thinking Outside the Box". We must go further by elevating to the next level or higher; this is called "Burning the Box", which can be innovation at its best. Let's look at a few examples of innovation at its best, in everyday items that have been used for years:

- Telephones became cellular phones and are now called smart phones.
- Boom boxes evolved in to the Walkman; today we have iPods.
- Car keys changed to remote keys and now are keyless.

The same items evolved through the process of innovation. All ideas were on the table and not seen as impossible. Through innovation, the questions were answered and we adjusted to the identified.

"Defining the Purpose..." *from page 4*

the current set of circumstances.

Organizations must resist the tendency to fail to open the package. A substantial amount of value can be generated if there is a deliberate effort to constantly re-think how things are done. It is in this space where evolutionary innovations can be born. The fluidity this practice produces is the birthplace of disruptive innovation.

Miyamoto Musashi said in The Way of Self Reliance , " Do not carry antiques handed down from generation to generation". The carrying of and clinging to those antiquities can blind an organization to new approaches and trends that will generate the assets that can fuel its future growth.

Recognizing the nature of the box and the influence it exerts over your organization can be the first step in the future that you envision.

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