



## Tucker on Innovation

Reporting on best practices, the latest research and upcoming events in the field of innovation, Tucker on Innovation is a free quarterly newsletter for organizational practitioners, thought leaders, and friends of the Global Innovation Movement. Past issues are archived on our website: <http://www.innovationresource.com>. Reprint permission granted upon request to the Editor at [jwilliams@innovationresource.com](mailto:jwilliams@innovationresource.com). Copyright 2008, all rights reserved.

Judy Williams, Editor      Second Quarter, 2008

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## Sustaining Innovation in Tough Times

The innovation manager on the phone sounded distraught. "There's so much distraction in our firm right now," he explained. "With the credit crisis and the economy in such shape, I'm having trouble keeping the focus on innovation." What to do?

There's no question innovation initiatives are under pressure right now more than at any time during this decade. And innovation managers are definitely earning their stripes. Keeping these programs on the front burner can't be easy. Getting face time with the CEO becomes a creative challenge in itself. But it can be done.

### Communication is Critical

Communication is critical. Making the case, and remaking the case, for continued investment of talent and resources and learning is essential.

To be effective, the innovation team needs the persuasion skills of an evangelist, the skills of a diplomat (to navigate the inevitable issues of turf and budgets and rewards), the patience of Job, and the tenacity of a dog trying to bury a bone in a marble floor. And that's just for the good times, when innovation is easy.

Actually, innovation is never easy. Never has been and never will be, even in the most innovation-adept organizations. Peter Drucker used to say that nothing gets done in organizations except by monomaniacs on a mission. Push back, foot dragging and outright pressure to wind down the innovation program will come, sooner or later, regardless of the larger economic environment. Getting distracted is nothing new.

### Moving Beyond Boom & Bust

Innovation has always run in cycles. As Rosabeth Moss Kanter observed in a recent Harvard Business Review article, waves of enthusiasm inevitably give way to waves of neglect.

During periods of neglect, budgets for innovation would get slashed. Creative people would get reassigned or shown the door. The firm's innovation engine would be allowed to rust. Until one day somebody high up in the organization (the chief) slaps his or her head and exclaims, "Oh my gosh! We've got nothing in the pipeline. This is a crisis!" And a new cycle of innovation would commence.

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**"There is no situation that is not transformable. There is no person who is hopeless. There is no set of circumstances that cannot be turned around by human beings and their natural capacity for love of the deepest sort."**

– Desmond Tutu

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**"Human beings are problem solvers. The better you get at it, the more problems you are going to be asked to solve."**

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– Buckminster Fuller

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## Tucker to Appear at These Special Upcoming Public Events . . .

IIR USA 2008  
Innovation Immersion  
Conference  
Phoenix, Arizona  
October 20-22, 2008

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Pure Insight Ltd.  
Innovation Leader  
Summit 2008  
London, UK  
November 3-4, 2008

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## Products

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This time it was supposed to be different.

The Global Innovation Movement that blossomed in the early years of this decade urged an end to the boom-bust cycles. This loosely aligned group of thought leaders and corporate practitioners advocate a fundamentally different approach to inventing a firm's future.

The Movement's big idea was that innovation should be embedded as deeply in your firm's DNA as quality or safety or environmental compliance. You wouldn't practice quality in boom or bust cycles or in an ad hoc, piecemeal fashion would you?

As Simon Spencer, BorgWarner's first innovation champion, once commented, "We had a process for everything else around here except for innovation."

The good news is that, distractions aside, things do seem to be different this time.

The troubled economy in the US, which has now spread to Europe, India and many other parts of the non-oil producing world, has not set off a bust cycle as it might have in the past. So second quarter, 2008, I'm cautiously optimistic.

No question innovation initiatives are under strain. Budgets are being cut in more than a few firms. Some companies are throwing in the towel, and reverting to hunkering down as a strategy. Yet we hear constantly from organizations exploring the innovation terrain. Consultants in the field are seeing only a small pullback in demand for our services.

Time will tell for certain. But I believe the Innovation Movement has brought about a paradigm shift in how innovation gets accomplished. There's no going back to the old ways of producing new products, services and business models. The world is moving too fast. Innovate or evaporate.

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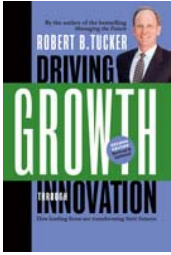
## Innovation Program on the Ropes? Don't Blame the Economy

If you're concerned about the staying power of your company's initiative, you can troubleshoot by looking for flaws in the design and implementation of your program. Consider these common "derailers" below and think about how you might shore up those that apply to your firm.

1. You thought you could suddenly get new growth opportunities happening without engaging the larger organization and without taking the time to design an overarching process. Big mistake, and all too common. Let's just get some new projects in the pipeline and innovation will take care of itself. It won't.

2. It was never a serious initiative in the first place. You thought that having

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that big rah rah meeting where you announced the initiative would be enough. And then it would just take off from there. Dream on. And then plan your work and work your plan. It's not too late.

3. You never really had senior management's support in the first place. It may not be too late to gain it but you're lost without it.

4. You never really had full support of the chief. Reread #3.

5. You assumed that improving your New Product Development Process was the same as revamping innovation. Innovation is much much more than new products. If your firm still defines innovation as new products only, you have an educational challenge ahead.

6. You asked everyone in the company for their ideas all at once and got overwhelmed with the ideas you received. It may seem like a really cool thing to do, but you will almost invariably be overwhelmed, and will not be able to utilize the ideas. Even worse, you will have given people an excuse to be cynical about the company's innovation intent. You may end up further back than when you started.

7. You didn't take the time to design the new process before hitting the "roll out" button. You gave in to the temptation just to do something, get started. The place to begin is to study up on innovation best practices, do some benchmarking, draw up a blueprint, form a team -- and then roll it out. In that order. It takes time. Count on it. But rolling it out while you are still making design and governance decisions is a huge mistake.

8. You changed leaders (and leadership) midstream, and the new chief doesn't support the initiative. A leadership change during the first three years is almost certain death to an innovation initiative. The new guy (or gal) wants to make their mark and they invariably assume that the way the last guy did it was wrong and must be disbanded.

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