

Ignite YOUR Innovation

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This paper is intended to be a thought starter about innovation. We want to get you thinking about innovation and how it could and should impact you on a daily basis. That being said you will hear much more about innovation and making yourself more innovative at our presentation.

We have organized this paper by the good old “what, why, how, who, when, where” type questions. We did this because as we were talking about the innovative process we felt that innovation is challenged when one or more of these questions aren’t easily answered.

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What is Innovation?

A journey to delve deeper into the concept of innovation should immediately lead you to a discussion on invention vs. innovation and specifically, what the distinction is between the two. In simple terms, invention is the creation of brand new ideas or products. Innovation is the creative use, fine tuning, application and improvement of existing ideas or products.

Often people who 'invent' an idea can't capitalize on the idea – being able to capitalize on it is 'innovation'. Why spend exorbitant amounts of money on a new invention – brand new ideas and products require much research and investigation and therefore money and time to bring to market. You can spend 1/10 of that time and money on improving or tweaking something that already exists and possibly marketing it faster, cheaper and better.

“The ‘innovation gap’ represents the inability to take fundamental inventions (at the level of the university research lab or an entrepreneur's initial idea) into at least the preliminary stages of commercial development. Roughly speaking, there are two underlying causes for the innovation gap – one financial and the other operational. The financial reason concerns a relative lack of funding for the phase between invention and innovation. The operational reason relates to organizational, managerial, and technical factors that tend to impede the leap from invention to innovation. The two factors are certainly related to each other (one can call it a “chicken or egg” issue), but it is useful to address each one separately.” Source: <http://wistechology.com/articles/3954/>

Invention = new
Innovation = refine

Why Is Innovation Important?

Innovation is part of evolution! Without innovation, we become stagnant, or worse yet we start to decline. If your organization is not being innovative you can guarantee the competition is! Innovation is more than just products and technologies – it also includes process, business systems, and new management methods.

In your real property job you have to have creative and innovative ideas. But at the top of the list should be: a) how important innovation is to the future of your organization, b) the role of design in this, c) a recognition that innovation cannot be the sole responsibility of the research or design departments, and d) an awareness of the consequences of ignoring the first three points. It isn't the individual innovation that dictates the impact but the speed and scale of adoption that does.

“In a market driven economy, the real winner is the company that can make something valuable through innovation -- not the inventor who happens to come up with something that the market may or may not want.”

Source: http://www.techdirt.com/articles/20050322/1528251_F.shtml

How Do You Ignite Your Innovation?

One of the best ways is to become a *conscious observer*. Because innovation is about refining, improving or using existing products or ideas differently we decided to keep our own *innovation journals* (well, actually, everyone in the office is) as a way of becoming more observant. From the front of the book we track 'good' design and innovation and from the back of the book we document 'bad' design and innovation. I am sure you can already think of a few things you could put in your own innovation journal. Think of things that today alone you have thought 'wow, this is great', or 'argh, that could be better'.

How many times a day do you use something or try to do something and get frustrated by it? This is the pre-spark of innovation! The 'a-ha' moment comes when you realize what the improvement is or a way to improve the situation.

Think about the last time you received a complaint about a common service issue. Did you take advantage of the complaint and brainstorm an innovative solution that would reduce everyone's frustration and cost, or did you simply apply the same solution you have always been applying? Relate this to the last client move you completed. Many times, the complaints we hear about facility moves are that facilities did a great job making the computers and telephones work and communicating the move to the those directly affected by the move, but not to those indirectly affected by the move. What innovative solutions could be applied here? Ask yourself – is it crazy to expect a solution or is this over-solving and over-analyzing a problem?

The lesson – communicating innovation and change is critical to getting ahead

Who Can Be Innovative?

Anyone! The trick is finding the enablers....yes, it can be anyone, but you can't go it alone! It really is every member of the organization's responsibility to be innovative.

Samuel F. B. Morse didn't invent the telegraph. Alexander Graham Bell didn't invent the telephone. Thomas Edison invented neither the light bulb nor the movie camera. Guglielmo Marconi most assuredly didn't invent radio. They were all credited for their innovations and inventions but you can be certain that there were in fact teams of people that enabled them to do so. Source:
<http://www.technologyreview.com/business/13595/>

When Should You be Innovative?

The quick answer is *always* – at least always be alert for opportunities. Next time you find yourself thinking/saying: 'there must be a better way', 'this is crazy', 'I've done this too many times before', these should ignite your innovation. Try turning those statements to 'what would happen if?', 'why not try....?', 'have you considered?'. However, most people look to innovation when there is a threat rather than an opportunity.

Here is an example of one industry's threat and innovation opportunity: assume you/your organization sold a product. What if you were told you could no longer advertise on TV, then you could no longer advertise in magazines, then you were banned from sponsoring sporting events, then your product was banned from being visible in stores, and now you are about to be banned from advertising in all publications – how would you cope? Can you guess the product we are referring to? (come to our presentation and find out!)

Where Do People Get Innovative Ideas?

So where do you get your ideas? Ask anyone and they'll all have different answers. You'll hear answers like 'while driving in the car', 'in the shower', 'while cooking dinner', 'going for a run'... People are more innovative the more they are exposed to, have time to cogitate on and have conversations about a multitude of topics. Your brain takes in information over time and makes connections over time. It's when that final connection ('a-ha') is made, that we relate to where we get our best innovative ideas. The reality is you have been acquiring the knowledge from long before that. Make sure you open yourself up to a variety of stimuli, and take time to stop, think and challenge each other. You can't force yourself to be instantly innovative, or schedule it. But you can create opportunities and pay attention to the world around you.

We believe that the environments you are in contribute to that innovative thought process. Variety, experience, and workplace atmosphere and design all contribute.

So what does this mean to real property professionals? You participate in two ways – contributing your own ideas, and creating work environments that support innovation. However, it is unrealistic to expect the work environment to solve your organization's desire for an innovative workplace. A bad work environment will definitely hinder innovation, but the perfect environment for innovation will not 'an innovative organization' make.

It's the people that are the most important contributing factor; however, the environment must support it. Innovation is about combining ideas, objects and people.

Innovation occurs when you have the 'a-ha' moment. For example – a small organization who wanted to market at a very large tradeshow couldn't afford the costs. Their innovative solution was to ask their partners/alliances (other small businesses) if they'd like to join in the booth rental for a small fee. This innovative company was able to market their products to a much larger audience, and brought in enough partners that they actually made money on the booth. We're calling this 'Trade Show Booth Hotelling'.

Point in time + place in time = 'a-ha' moment

The Process of Innovation

As necessary as it is, innovation can be difficult and risky. Some of the hindrances to innovation are: level of risk, perception of difficulty, fear of the unknown, people taking cover and not sharing their ideas, stopping the process too early, not enough or no willingness to spend money, 'what-if' scenarios not being considered, being punished for making a mistake, statements like 'we don't do it that way' – all valid concerns, but they shouldn't stop you seeking innovation.

"Everybody uses the word, 'risk' [when they're talking about innovation]. But what it really means is an attitude towards acceptance of failure. And people don't want to use the word 'failure,' and so it's not just that companies need to be willing to have projects fail. People need to know that it's OK to fail. As long as it's not for someone not trying or somebody just blatantly mis-executing, failure is actually a good thing and not a bad thing." Source: *Managing Innovation: How to get the best out of your company's big ideas*, Wall Street Journal, Monday, 9/24/07

Innovation is not just about products, it is also about process. But after all we have discussed does 'innovative process' sounds like an oxymoron? Don't misunderstand us – we agree with forms and quality systems and harnessing technology – all we're saying is be careful that you don't choke

innovation. When we think of a *process*, we think linear, defined, consistent, and rigid. Here are some processes that can reduce opportunities for innovation: fixed forms with no space for notes or only yes or no answers, ISO 9000 certification (yes, even ISO), automated phone systems...these are 'process traps'.

Think about this - diversity in your process allows for a more varied output and end result

First Steps To Developing Your 'Innovation Blueprint'

Our presentation at World Workplace 2008 talked about becoming a futurist and the tips and tricks to becoming more aware and open to industries and concepts outside your normal circle. We feel that these concepts can also be used to develop your 'innovation blueprint'.

Start here –

1. Expand your awareness
 - o read different articles
 - o talk with different people
 - o interact with people from diverse backgrounds
2. Encourage collaboration and experimentation
3. Build and expand your 'innovation network'
4. Enhance your Innovative culture

Our Closing Thoughts...

Many people have been talking lately about innovation, being innovative and how innovation will set you apart from your competition. Clients we have been speaking with recently have been asking for assistance in creating environments that are 'innovative'. Our question back to them has been: what do you mean – do you want the space to be innovative or are you looking for your organization/team to be more innovative?

What was interesting to us was that the clients thought it would be the work environment that would drive the increase in innovative. You would think as facilities professionals we would agree with this statement. However, we think innovation is a culture and state of mind, not just the design of your space. Remember that space can only be an enabler to innovation.

Ultimately, you become innovative by recognizing obvious and not-so-obvious needs and trends that could impact your business, and then identifying and implementing steps to respond to those trends

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