

by Ron Fisher, CEO QRP Canada and owner of Fisher Resolution

Creative Chaos and Innovation Culture



Innovation is a term that has been thrown about in management circles for years—always with admiration and the suggestion that to be innovative is to be creative and think outside the box.

Many management gurus have written books about this topic, with Tom Peters' *The Circle of Innovation* being one of the most popular in its day. I remember as a young manager in the corporate world being told about this book and ordered to read it to become a better manager. Of course, the problem was that in a highly regulated corporate world, thinking outside the box was typically seen as being insubordinate rather than innovative.

I also remember one senior manager counselling me to do things and seek forgiveness later, and I took that advice and went with it. The prevailing sentiment was that if it made sense and improved the bottom line, chances were it was not going to get you in trouble. However, this was a risk many managers would not take, preferring instead to conform to the tried and true. At times this came with a cost to the organization, and/or the people in it.

There is an old saying, "don't rock the

boat," which makes good sense because rocking a boat may cause it to capsize. In stable times people get complacent and avoid taking risks. People tend to be protectionist. Within the chain of command, some have made their names on past achievements and do not want those deeds to be seen as antiquated or past their prime because the same may be said of them. So, some intentionally or unconsciously squash innovation and outside-the-box thinking.

It has been said that innovators see the big picture, not just what their core business is today."

If you ask a creative person what they need to be successful and to nourish their creativity, they will tell you about cultivating an environment for creativity. They usually like to be left alone to try things and be creative without any barriers. I have heard it suggested

that innovation comes out of "creative chaos." This typically does not occur in highly structured environments or when things are comfortable, but rather in challenging times.

I was the head of a 4H beef and dairy club, and while I am fond of cows within the farming context, there is no room for sacred cows in innovation. It is not for the faint of heart or for people who need the comfort of routine.

If you want innovation and change, you cannot keep doing the proverbial same thing and expect different results. And you must ask, what is the harm in trying new things? In most cases these are not life and death situations, so if you try something and it fails, is it a failure, or did you try it and learn something as a result?

While researching this article, I found a plethora of organizations offering "programs" for companies to create cultures that foster innovation. Many have similar themes, such as creating workshops for creativity, programs, contests, etc. One such program has a ten-prong approach to creating an environment of creativity and innovation. It

may be just me, but I think creating a highly structured environment that tries to promote everyone working together to innovate seems counterintuitive to free-flowing thought and creativity.

Companies and managers always love to put “programs” in place, as they give the impression of doing something, and they typically have some way of measuring results. Sadly, they often end up restricting free thought and free flow, which is the essence of innovation.

Innovators tend to pay attention to things that have already changed, and how to capitalize on those changes and anticipated changes by upending traditional business models, which understandably may not be popular with the status quo.

It has been said that innovators see the big picture, not just what their core business is today. But what are the skills within that core business, and how could they be redirected?

An article by Carmen Ang published on visualcapitalist.com identified the top 50

innovative companies in 2021. The list was compiled following an extensive process of polling 1,600 global innovation professionals. The top ten companies were identified as:

- | | |
|--------------|------------|
| 1. Apple | 6. Samsung |
| 2. Alphabet | 7. IBM |
| 3. Amazon | 8. Huawei |
| 4. Microsoft | 9. Sony |
| 5. Tesla | 10. Pfizer |

Tesla, while ranked at number five, was not the only automotive company recognized, with Toyota ranked at 21, Hyundai at 39, and Mitsubishi at 45. In much of my research, writers noted that innovators and innovative companies often did not stick to what the company was known for, but took the skills within, looked further afield, and often morphed into something totally different. Within the automotive industry, there are numerous companies that did not originate within the industry. Here are just a few:

Volvo was originally a company making ball bearings. The SKF ball bearing company

made the first Volvo car, the Volvo OV4, on April 14, 1927. In essence, it was manufactured to be a guinea pig for SKF’s ball bearings.

Sticking with the Swedish theme, Saab was originally an aeroplane manufacturer in 1937, providing aircraft for the Swedish Airforce. The company’s full name was Svenska Aeroplan Aktiebolaget, giving the world the acronym Saab.



Volvo OV4

Moving over to England, the Land Rover company originally formed as the *continued on page 27*

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Lancashire Steam Motor Company in 1896, making steam lawnmowers. In 1907 they renamed themselves Leyland Motors, later to become British Leyland, with the Land Rover brand lasting for generations and the Queen's vehicle of choice, apparently, to traverse the kingdoms.



Image: Car Brand Names

In 1895, Skoda Auto was founded as Laurin & Klement, and made bicycles, motorcycles, and later cars, in the Kingdom of Bohemia. Since first producing cars in 1905, the company rose to become the largest auto manufacturer in all of Austria-

Hungary. In 2000, the company became a subsidiary of Volkswagen.

The car company Opel originated as a sewing machine manufacturer on January 21, 1862. It went on to make bicycles in 1886 and its first car in 1899. In 1902, at the Hamburg Motor Show, they debuted their first car. Since those early years, Opel has made cars under the Vauxhall, Buick, and Holden brands.

Peugeot first opened its doors in 1810 as a family run coffee mill company. It started making bicycles in 1830, and segued into making salt, pepper, and coffee grinders in 1842. Armand Peugeot's interest in automobile manufacturing led to them producing cars in 1882. Peugeot went on to win five European Car of the Year awards and five World Rally Championships, among other accolades.

While these companies may have changed business models, they all involved the manufacturing of products, so in many

respects they stayed with what was their apparent strength.

“The gift is that opportunity knocks.”

So here we are in what seems like year ten of Covid, and the only thing certain is uncertainty. Staffing issues continue to be a problem, supply chains are disrupted, and protesters and blockades all guarantee there is no new normal other than abnormal. The gift is that opportunity knocks. Throw out all the rules and decide whether to be a yeasayer or a naysayer. Open things up, try new things, and have fun with it. If it makes you nervous, think like you are going to Vegas and predetermine what you are willing to gamble and set some parameters. In these days of electric vehicles and flying cars, there is no better time to reinvent yourself. ■

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