The need for innovation

What is the difference between creativity and innovation?

How ready is your team to implement innovations?

How can you support innovation in your workplace?

There is more and more talk about innovation these days. Organisations are encouraged to become more creative, to innovate in the way that they work and the goods and services that they produce. But what does it mean? What are creativity and innovation?

In this session we will explore both these terms. We will do so by using two definitions that were given by Dr William (Bill) Coyne, who was the Senior Vice-President for research and development of the 3M corporation. He said that:

- Creativity is the thinking of novel and appropriate ideas.
- Innovation is the successful implementation of those ideas within an organisation.

What has this got to do with leading a team? No organisation can afford to waste the creativity of all its employees, and everyone is capable of being creative. Therefore, your role includes encouraging your team to ‘think of novel and appropriate ideas’ and implement those ideas successfully within your organisation.
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The thinking of novel and appropriate ideas

In the BS2 session Creative, team-based, problem solving you learnt how you could encourage your team to be creative. Everyone is capable of being creative. Teams should learn that they have this incredible ability. It’s only because so many think that creativity is something that artists and designers have that they fail to draw on their full capability.

The term ‘problem-solving’ shouldn’t stop you drawing on your team’s creativity whenever it will help. Problems can be to do with:

1. **Quality** - the goods and services you produce not being up to standard.
2. **Efficiency** - costs too high, too much waste or reworking or having to cope with customer complaints or faults.
3. **Output** - failing to hit targets for production, sales, etc.

But problems can also be:

4. **New products or services** - what can we do to meet customers needs more effectively or deal with competition?
5. **New processes** - how can we take advantage of new systems or new technology to work more efficiently or effectively?
6. **Motivation** - how can we change the way we work to make work more enjoyable and the team better motivated?

Creativity can be - needs to be - used to address all these problems.

**Case Study**

*Bill Coyne gave the sixth UK Innovation Lecture in 1996 when he told the story of masking tape.*

In the late 1940s, a researcher from 3M was visiting garages to see if he could help them resolve a problem they had when spraying cars. Two-tone cars had become popular and many people wanted their single colour cars sprayed a different colour on the top or bottom half. This meant that sprayers had to use tape to mask off (cover) the half not being painted. The tape marked the point where the colours changed.

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Having the idea for masking tape was a ‘Eureka!’ moment, the moment when the solution appeared. That was the creative moment, and it was a moment. It then took several years’ hard work to turn out masking tape. That’s innovation. It’s often been said that innovation is ‘5% inspiration and 95% perspiration’! In other words, it’s hard work turning the creative idea into effective products or services, processes or ways of working!

It’s important to recognise that innovative products and services or ways of working aren’t easy to introduce. Because they are innovative they often don’t easily fit in with what is currently in place. Things like job descriptions and organisational structures may not be in line with what is needed. Teams in different departments may need to work together, but are responsible to different managers. People may have to make decisions that are out of line with their grade or pay scale. If these barriers are allowed to get in the way, innovation can’t happen.

The successful implementation of creative ideas

According to legend, the ancient Greek mathematician Archimedes leapt out of his bath and ran through the streets of Syracuse, naked, shouting “Eureka” - meaning “I have found it”.

Supposedly he had suddenly realised that you could work out the volume of something odd-shaped (like a human body) by submerging it in a bath full of water and measuring the volume of water it displaced (that overflowed the bath).

Unfortunately, when they pulled the tape off, it damaged the paint underneath. This meant that they had to rub down the area with a fine abrasive paper (ie sandpaper) and paint it by hand. The researcher was looking at improving the abrasive paper to help them do the job better.

However, what he realised was that what was needed was a tape that didn’t damage the paint. He then started working on this problem instead and the result, after some time, was masking tape.

The ‘thinking of novel ideas’ means thinking new things that haven’t been thought of before. The ‘thinking of appropriate ideas’ means thinking of ideas that solve the problem. That’s what happened here. What was needed was a way of solving the real problem - masking the area without damaging the paint - not repairing the paint after it had been damaged.

Today masking tape is such a common-or-garden product that we take it for granted. That’s true about most things, once someone has thought of them! The hard part is to imagine the novel idea the first time.
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Case Study

Long Life Insurance has a problem. The company handles about 20,000 new customers a year. Each customer must fill in four different forms, each of which has to be processed separately. The company cannot keep up with the amount of work. The newly appointed operations manager, Ms. Patel, holds a meeting with members of the teams which process new customer details to discuss ways to process the forms more quickly.

During the meeting, several members of the customer service team suggest that the accounts team should take over processing two of the forms. When she is consulted, the leader of the accounts team suggests that members of the customer service team should work overtime until new people can be hired. No one is happy with these two ideas. The meeting continues and the team tries to brainstorm to come up with a better solution. Damien, a customer service team member, makes a suggestion.

Damien: “Instead of using four different forms, why don’t we create one new form? That way all the customer information will be in one place. It’ll cut down on paperwork for us and make filling out the forms quicker for customers.”

Ms. Patel: “I think Damien has come up with a good solution. What do the rest of you think? How could we design this form?”

The creativity - replace four forms with one - now has to be turned into an innovative solution - one form instead of four. This team - and your team - is much more likely to make a success of an innovation if there are certain things in place.

1. Teams must have the resources they need (especially time) and the motivation to make the innovation happen.

2. Teams must have the opportunity to learn from and get the help of other people across the organisation and people in other organisations.

3. Teams must be willing to seek out and use new technology to help make the innovation happen.

4. The organisation must be willing to let the team try out innovations.

As team leader you can work on the first three but without the support of your organisation, innovation is not going to be easy. Try the exercise on the next page to assess your team’s readiness for innovation.
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Exercise

How ready is your team to introduce innovative products or services, processes or ways of working? Rate each question on a scale from 1 ('not at all') to 5 ('very much')

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Look at the following questions and answer them as honestly as you can, by ticking the appropriate box.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The team can have access to the necessary resources, especially time, to make innovation a reality.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The team is strongly motivated to make innovation a reality.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>The team is willing and able to learn from and get the help of other people across the organisation.</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>The team is willing and able to learn from and get the help of other people outside the organisation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The team is willing to seek out and use new technology.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The organisation is willing to let the team try out innovations.</td>
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</table>

It is very difficult for you and your team to be innovative if your organisation doesn’t encourage you to be. However, if it does encourage innovation, then your role is critical in helping your team to take advantage of any new ideas. The case study below shows how barriers to innovation can prevent new ideas being put into operation.

Case Study

At Long Life Insurance, Ms Patel has given Damien responsibility for developing the new form. He has been told that while he does it the rest of the team will cover his job. Despite being helped and encouraged by his team leader, Damien finds that the other team members are grumbling about the time he is spending designing the new form. One of them complains to him that they are all having to work harder while he ‘sits around’ playing at being ‘Patel’s sunshine boy’.

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When Damien goes to talk to the people in accounts about the design of a single form he finds that they are less than helpful. They insist that they must have a separate form because the information they need is very specific and they don’t want to have to ‘sort through lots of other stuff’ to get the information they need.

Long Life has recently bought an Irish life insurance company and Damien asks Ms Patel if he can contact someone there to see what they do. She says that, although it’s a good idea, the company’s policy is to allow each business to remain quite independent and she doesn’t think it would be a good idea to get in touch.

Damien also suggests that customers could be encouraged to complete an online form as an alternative to using paper. But Ms Patel tells him that the company has a separate web-based operation and doesn’t want to confuse the two.

Fortunately for Damien, an opportunity to join another insurance company occurs and he hands in his resignation.

If people who are keen to support and encourage innovation aren’t encouraged then they will do what Damien did, and leave. And organisations that don’t support and encourage innovation won’t survive. So why don’t people and organisations support and encourage innovation? The reasons, which are looked at in detail in the BS2 session Understanding the change process are often due to:

- inertia (the tendency to want to stay as you are)
- risk and uncertainty (stopping with what you know in case the innovation doesn’t work)
- fear of failure (and being blamed for it)
- lack of equipment, and
- lack of skill or knowledge (both of which make it hard to do anything different).

Creating a team that welcomes innovation

If you want your team to welcome and support innovation, then you need to recognise the importance of innovation. If you don’t believe in its importance, then your team won’t either.

Innovation isn’t just a fancy name for doing things a bit differently. Innovation means radical changes to how work is done and in the goods and services being produced.
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Innovation means that people will work in very different ways. It means the tasks they perform will change, as will their relationships with other people and the equipment they use. Sometimes people feel that change on that sort of scale devalues their skills. Imagine how blacksmiths felt when cars started to replace horses. After years learning how to shoe a horse, they now had to learn to weld a broken back axle! (Most early garages were converted smithies.)

Looking back we can see that this change was inevitable but it didn’t seem like that at the time. More recently we have seen car manufacturing plants close in the UK, but others have been established as well. However, these new plants tend to be in places without a car making tradition, because the incoming companies wanted to introduce innovative work practices and were afraid that people who had worked in the industry for many years wouldn’t welcome these innovations.

There’s no reason why someone who has worked for years in an industry can’t embrace innovation. It’s just up to the organisation to support and encourage them. And how best do they do that? By having team leaders who support and encourage innovation, and who work with their teams to make it happen.

If your team is doubtful about innovation, then you must be prepared to support it:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When people say:</th>
<th>You should say:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We tried that once. It didn’t</td>
<td>Let’s find out what they did wrong then and make sure we don’t repeat their</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work</td>
<td>mistakes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s all right for them, they</td>
<td>Let’s show them that we’re better than them and can overcome problems they</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>don’t have our problems.</td>
<td>wouldn’t know how to deal with.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’ve always done it this way</td>
<td>With your skill and experience you should find it easy to learn how to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and it was good enough until</td>
<td>something new.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>now.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It ain’t broke, so why fix it?</td>
<td>Why not make it unbreakable?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everything’s always changing.</td>
<td>Should we stay in the station and let the train leave without us?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why can’t we have some</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stability for a while?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Complete the following exercises. Refer back to the session if necessary.

A Complete the statements by filling in the blanks.
   1. __________ is the thinking of __________ and appropriate ideas.
   2. __________ is the successful __________ of those ideas within an organisation.

B List six ‘problem’ areas which creativity can help to solve.
   1. __________
   2. __________
   3. __________
   4. __________
   5. __________
   6. __________

C Complete these statements by filling in the blanks.
   1. Teams must have the __________ they need (especially time) and the __________ to make the innovation happen.
   2. Teams must have the opportunity to __________ from and get the __________ of other people across the organisation and people in other organisations.
   3. Teams must be willing to seek out and use _____ __________ to help make the innovation happen.
   4. The organisation must be willing to let the team ____ ____ __________.
Making Connections

Answer the questions following this case.

Harrison’s department store has a problem. Many women come into the department and say that they have seen an outfit elsewhere in the store and would like to see if they can find some shoes to go with it. Unfortunately, women’s fashions are on the second floor and the shoe department is on the ground floor, near the exit. The women’s fashion department doesn’t like people wearing outfits down to Shoes, and the shoe department doesn’t let people take shoes out of the department.

To make matters worse, the people who make requests like this tend to be spending more on their outfits and are looking at the more expensive shoes. If they aren’t well looked after it’s possible the store might lose both potential sales.

The staff in Fashion have come up with what they think is a creative solution, to offer customers the chance to be served in both departments by the same person. A sales assistant from Fashion will bring them down to Shoes and serve them there. This provides high quality service and may well attract more customers when word gets about. However, it will also mean that staff in the shoe department lose their sales commission and yet will have to help out Fashion staff who don’t know their way around.

The sales team leader in Shoes has just told her team about the proposal, which has been enthusiastically agreed by the store’s management. The team all agree that the idea is good in principle, but has been poorly thought through.

How do you think this innovation could have been better implemented?
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Think and Apply

How well do you use the skills in this session? Does your organisation encourage you and your team to be creative and embrace innovation?

- If so, have you had experience of introducing innovation into the organisation? Was it effective?
- If not, why do you think this is?

1. Read the list of skills. Tick the boxes to show your strengths and weaknesses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>strengths &lt;-&gt; weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I’m good at this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>encouraging the thinking of novel and appropriate ideas</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>supporting the successful implementation of creative ideas</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assessing your team’s readiness to introduce innovation successfully</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Do you want to improve any of these skills?

3. How do you plan to improve the skills you listed in question 2? (You might want to discuss this with your line manager or your tutor/mentor/coach.)