A Strategy For Innovation Activists

5 Simple Steps to Start and Finish an Innovation Movement in Your Business

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might be interested. In fact, I'd be delighted.

GoInnovate!
Think Strategically. Innovate Swiftly.

"Innovation by definition
will not be accepted at first.
It takes repeated attempts,
endless demonstrations, and
monotonous rehearsals
before innovation can be accepted
and internalized by an organization.
This requires *courageous patience.*"

— Warren Bennis

OVERVIEW

Business activists who recognize organizations as living systems, "incubators" for change, think in terms of "growing" something rather than "changing" something.

Their challenge is to make possible the right environment (context) that nurtures new, different and better ideas and then implements the best of those ideas to create new value and wealth.

The strategy for innovation activists presented below will eliminate or minimize the impact of any obstacle to innovation and greater productivity, e.g. *we do not have enough time, people are full of fear and anxiety, and there is no good measurement system for innovation.*

Key points in the strategy are:

− A *systemic* approach to innovation calls forth a more complete picture of reality.

− The context - *people, structures, processes and technology* - at every level of the organization either enables or hinders innovation.

− Innovation activists are vigorous advocates for the cause of bringing about significant change in the context. Sometimes they hold an executive leadership position, often they do not.

− Innovation activists utilize a five step process to change the context:

   1. Write a gripping, coherent and realistic business case for change

   2. Build a coalition of like-minded people

   3. Enroll leadership in the cause

   4. Win small, win early, win often

   5. Integrate the cause into the whole organization – make it a way of life.

SYSTEMS THINKING

Systems thinking is strategic thinking is holistic thinking.

A *systemic* approach to innovation calls forth a more complete picture of reality and provides more accurate answers to questions such as, "*What's going on?*" "*What is causing this? "What are our best solutions?*"

By answering these and other key questions, activists develop a "total solution" that respects the many forces in an organization that influence success. Consequently activists are better able to leverage limited resources by directing them into the small, well-focused actions that produce the most significant, enduring improvements.

Systems thinking is a simple common-sense strategy for *how*, not *what*, you think that:
  – Deepens your awareness of yourself and your environment
  – Focuses your attention on what is most important
  – Guides you in making healthy choices, and
  – Assures your actions are in alignment with your commitments.

The result? You and your team consistently realize more of what matters most.

Yet, most leaders are conditioned to focus on *things* and to see the world in static images. They have been trained to break things apart, to look at the pieces. Or in other words, they most often practice *analytical thinking* which emphasizes the parts as primary and the whole as secondary. This type of thinking leads to linear explanations of systemic phenomenon and very often bad decisions.

Remember, organizations are products of the way people think and interact. In large part, it is *how* we think that determines *what* we think. How do you go about focusing on what is important? How do you make decisions? How do you get past confusion and uncertainty? How do you know the best course of action?

Thinking → Actions → Results

A MODEL FOR SYSTEMIC THINKING

Leadership, creativity, strategy, measures, processes, resources, metrics, rewards, technology and collaboration are all elements essential to the success of any business. When these are integrated into a *systemic* approach that accounts for the interconnection and interdependence of these elements, growth is swifter and more economical.

The *GoInnovate! System is a systemic thinking framework for* innovation.

In the simplest terms, the *GoInnovate! System* is a way of seeing and talking about reality. It is a *perspective* that incorporates the casual relationships behind any result in organizations. And, because it offers a wide range of techniques and skills, it is a set of tools as well.

The *GoInnovate! System* has three primary interrelated and interdependent components:

- *Generators.* These include a core set of values – openness, intention, courage, integrity and calmness - and three personal competencies that drive innovation: creativity, collaboration and leadership.

- *Cycle.* Deliberate change is more successful when teams understand and apply the same "process" for innovation.

- *Context.* These are internal forces in the organization that have a significant impact on the speed, viability and cost-effectiveness of any change imitative.

Within the organizational CONTEXT individuals apply the GENERATORS in teams to guide ideas through the CYCLE. *GoInnovate! System Model*
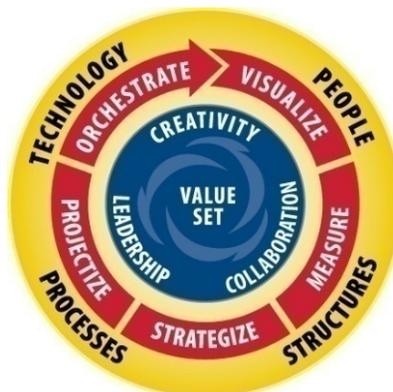
Please note that most innovations (by sheer number) are not product or service innovations but rather context (yellow circle) innovations. The recruitment of new employees, improving the management of ideas and knowledge, marketing strategies, virtual networks, new business processes are just a few examples of context innovations.

The *GoInnovate! System* is applicable to all of these context innovations. In fact, it can be applied to any *type* (strategic, product, service, process, technological, cultural) or *scope* of innovation (incremental, break-through, transformational).

It is critical that activists share the same mental model for change. Why? Because it is *how* we think that in large part determines *what* we think. Sharing a similar *how* to go about looking at and changing the world enables activists to *think together*. Improving a team's capability to think together saves time, money, and results are better.

Early in their careerrs, many activists learned the linear *Input – Process – Outcomes* model (or a variation of it) for change. Let's map this model to the *GoInnovate! System.*

Input ➡ Process ➡ Outcomes
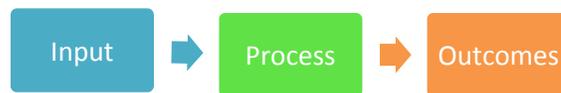
<u>Outcomes = Ideals</u>. Purpose and ideal future state are defined in the first phase of the Cycle (red circle) - Vi*sualizing the Ideals.* Using inductive, rather than deductive, logic, the Cycle does not start with the problem but rather first "calls forth" an optimum future and then seeks a bridge from the future back to the present.

<u>Inputs = Strategies, Projects and Generators</u>. The tangible (people, capital…) and intangible (motivation, skill…) resources impacting the innovation effort are defined in phases three and four of the Cycle (red circle) and include the Generators (blue circle).

<u>Processes = Context (yellow circle), and Orchestrate (5th phase of Cycle).</u> Sometimes referred to as *throughputs*, this is where inputs are transformed into outcomes.

The *GoInnovate! System Model* incorporates Input-Process-Outcomes model, adds a feedback loop and defines more clearly the essential elements (in addition to processes) that transform inputs into outputs.

THE CONTEXT

For the past 200 years business leaders have been thinking, and consequently acting, with a machine-like mind-set. A "good" machine can be controlled and it does what mechanics (managers) want it to do. Managers have been "driving" change by fixing parts (most often perceived to be people) or exchanging the old parts for new ones.

It is perfectly appropriate to fix a refrigerator it if it doesn't work. But people are not machines and we get ourselves in trouble when we try to "fix" people. Motivating people to be highly innovative is a lot more complicated than fixing a refrigerator.

Successful business activists act more like gardeners than mechanics. Gardeners focus on and nurture the environment in which the plants grow. They ask questions such as: Are the soil conditions appropriate for the plants? How much space will they need to grow? Will they require mounds or stakes? Are there weeds that need to be pulled? Are they getting enough water? Are the raccoons getting in and helping themselves?

Activists who recognize their organizations as living systems, "incubators" for change, think in terms of "growing" something rather than "changing" something. Their challenge becomes how to provide the right environment (context) to generate new, different and better ideas and innovations.
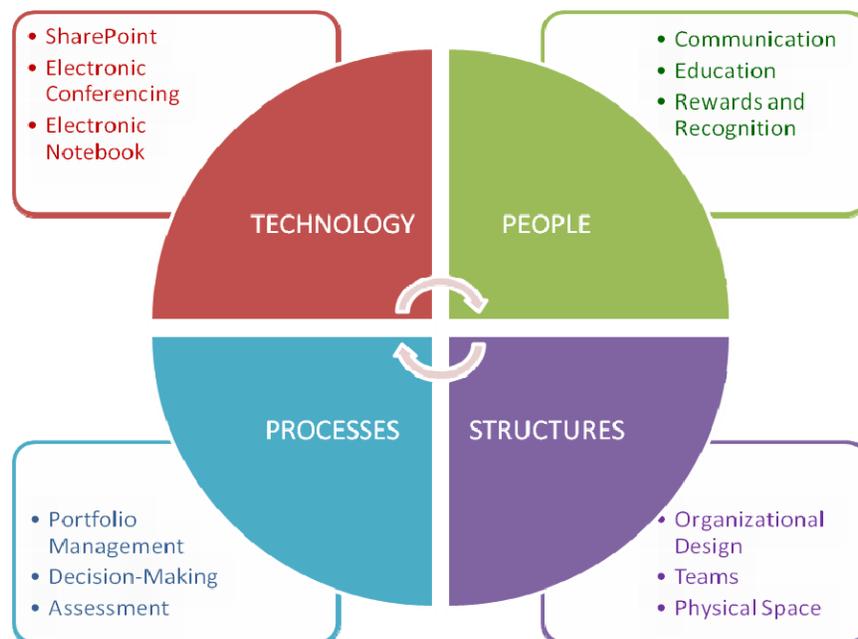
However, all too many business people concentrate their energy on the specific change they are trying to bring about e.g. a new product, without sufficient regard being paid to nurturing the right environment for change to flourish. By managing the context, activists remove the barriers to performance and minimize risk.

Four Elements of Context

The working environment at every level of the organization either enables or hinders innovation. It can be organized into four categories or elements - People, Structures, Processes and Technology.

These context elements are represented in the diagram below. Because each element and its many aspects (sub-elements) are interrelated and interdependent teams that want to change one part of the context must address all the elements. If any element is not properly addressed, people are left frustrated, resources are wasted and the change initiative does not reach its full potential. In some cases, it is even abandoned.

The Four Elements of Context and Some of Their Aspects

- SharePoint
- Electronic Conferencing
- Electronic Notebook

TECHNOLOGY

PEOPLE

- Communication
- Education
- Rewards and Recognition

PROCESSES

STRUCTURES

- Portfolio Management
- Decision-Making
- Assessment

- Organizational Design
- Teams
- Physical Space

Changing institutional patterns of behavior such as *we do not have enough time, performance of virtual teams, fear and anxiety and integration of across functions* requires collaboration, teamwork, and fundamental alterations in attitude and organizational behavior.

What we need to do is learn to work in the system, by which I mean that everybody, every team, every platform, every division, every component is there not for individual competitive profit or recognition, but for contribution to the system as a whole on a win-win basis.

W. Edwards Deming

THE INNOVATION ACTIVIST MIND-SET

Innovation activists are vigorous advocates of a cause. In most cases, they are people who do not hold an executive leadership position. Revolutions do not start in the castle. When it comes to changing the context, we have observed that if the change movement is driven from below the senior management it is more effective. In the Innovation Interviews I conducted there were a number of Tech Leaders who hold very strong opinions on certain aspects of the context e.g. *we do not have enough time*. They would be the ideal group to lead the charge to change this "obstacle" or others (real or imagined).

5-Step Process To Start And Finish An Innovation Movement

Activists can utilize the following five step process to change the context:

1. Write a Business Case for Change

2. Build a Coalition

3. Enroll Leadership

4. Win Small, Win Early, Win Often

5. Integrate into the Whole.

Please note that the active involvement of senior leadership does not take place until step 3 in the process.

1. Write a Business Case for Changing the Context

The first thing Innovation activists want to do is develop a forceful message that the change is essential for growth and maybe even survival. Their message must cause people to say, "Yes, our organization is broken and there is no alternative but to fix it."

Good business cases meet three tests. They are *gripping, coherent* and *realistic.*

– **Gripping.**
The business case for change must be dramatic and persuasive to capture people's imagination and ignite a sense of possibility.

It expresses why people should care by appealing to their values and dreams. It paints a vivid picture of *what could be*.

It attunes people to the cause by speaking to their *hearts* and aligns them by speaking to their *minds*. People need to see the change as inevitable and that it will make a positive difference in the organization and their jobs.

The business case for change answers the following questions:
- o What is changing in our world?
- o What opportunities do these changes make possible?
- o What context innovations are needed to exploit these changes?
- o How will these innovations generate value (wealth, return)?
- o How will they help to create more of a competitive advantage?
- o What is the cost of inaction?

– **Coherent.**
The case is concise, comprehensible, and consistent. It can be understood by all employees. All the pieces fit together and are mutually reinforcing.

– **Realistic.**
The business case is based on unimpeachable data. It is supported by evidence, historical examples and trends. It is economically sound and undeniably in the best interests of the organization and its members.

The business case should be short and to the point or it will never get read. It is best told in a "story" or "picture" form and should contain simple phrases and powerful analogies that people can pick up the ideas and pass them around. The depth of analysis and the quality of thinking must shine forth from every page.

A gripping, coherent and realistic business case is created by completing the first two phases of the GoInnovate! Cycle: *Visualizing the Ideals* (purpose and future state/vision) and *Measuring the Gaps* (between where you are and where you want to be). Keep in mind that the Cycle will go through much iteration. In starting out, activists need to know that their ideals and measures will change as others become involved in the cause.

A compelling business case for change must also include a passionate *call to action*. People reading the business case are provided different opportunities to contribute.

These are identified by completing the third phase in the Cycle - S*trategizing the Approaches.* One strategy is to build a coalition.

2. Build a Coalition
Activists can't change the context all by themselves. One of their first goals is to enroll people who already believe in the cause. If activists build support from the middle of the organization, upper management is more likely to pay attention.

Once a core group of activists is assembled the next step is to recruit others. These people are identified by asking the following questions:

– Who is already committed to the cause?

– Are there any cross-company initiatives to tap into?

- Who in the organization might have a stake in the success of our cause?

- What news groups and e-mail lists should we tap into?

The business case and call to action can be put on the intranet or Internet along with online forums for people to express their perspectives and help elaborate the business case. Outside experts can be brought in to give the *cause* credibility.

Activists are not quick to present management with a go/no-go decision. Before moving forward they strengthen the business case, purpose, vision, measures and strategies. They are identifying more opportunities for early action and potential obstacles that may arise.

One of the best strategies is to create opportunities for coalition members to work together on a project related to the cause. Coalitions get stronger when they focus on a common task.

If the coalition does its job, the "change virus" will spread and it will be in a position to approach leadership for support and resources.

3. Win Small, Win Early, Win Often

People can argue with declarations, but they can't argue with success. That is why from the beginning activists orchestrate a series of demonstration projects that won't sink themselves or their cause if they should fail. And some of them will fail.

All of the organizing efforts are worth nothing if activists can't demonstrate that their ideas actually work. From their grand strategy they must then engineer a series of escalating experiments (projects) designed to test the change concept and justify additional increments of investment.

The crucial questions are: What would constitute an early win? What can we do right now with limited coalition resources to build our credibility? What can we do to win over the skeptics? What kind of success would others find compelling?

As activists answer these questions and implement their plans, they are practicing phases four & five of the GoInnovate! Cycle: *Projectizing the Details* and *Orchestrating the Results.*

4. Enroll Leadership

Sooner or later, the cause has to become a mandate. That's why activists will eventually have to win the support of a leader or group of leaders who control the power and purse strings. Winning their support is the whole goal of writing a business case and building a coalition.

Activists need leadership to see what they see, learn what they have learned, and feel the sense of urgency and inevitability they feel. This begins by understanding these leaders: What are the pressures they face? What issues are at the top their agenda? What objectives have they set themselves and the organization?

Leaders are invited to coalition meetings and receive e-mails regarding the cause. Every event is an opportunity to advance the agenda or give a short elevator pitch.

In certain situations, activists may require a *translator*. A translator is someone who focuses on the future and understands management. He

or she *translates* the cause so upper management can fully understand it. They also need to be ready to bend their ideas to fit the leaders' goals.

5. Integrate into the Whole

Experiments that stay experiments are failures. Activists have to make the context change *a way of life.* Although they might want to *isolate* their projects in the early stages, they will eventually have to roll the changes out to the rest of the organization. Extended isolation will kill any cause that requires a significant amount of agreement, talent or capital.

Activists need to convince a broad cross-section of key executives that their cause is essential to the organization's future. Only then do they have a chance at winning the battle over limited resources. Whoever has the resources needs to be an ally.

Throughout the five steps outlined above, activists practice the values of innovation – openness, intention, courage, integrity and calmness - and use the personal skills of creativity, collaboration and personal leadership. They continually work the phases Cycle over and over again. And of course, they pay attention to the context in which they are trying to make the change. In other words, they are applying the *GoInnovate! System* at every step along the way.

Ask yourself:

– Do I believe in these principles and practices?

– Do I understand how to apply them in my area?

– Am I applying them? Where, what, when, and how?

– Does my team apply them? Where, what, when, and how?

YOUR NEXT STEP

Go out there and start a movement for innovation. You can do it.

Points To Remember:

- Begin with a clear purpose and future state and then plan your way back to the present.

- Get others to join. Don't try this alone. You're here to start a movement so get like minds together.

- Think holistically because everything is connected. Build your case for innovation with the *GoInnovate! System* in mind.

- Context is KEY! Leverage the four elements of context - technology, structures, people, and processes – there are resources to support your cause within each element.

People and businesses want to change for the better, and innovation is the way to create new wealth and value. However, it can be challenging and even scary for many to change. That's why it is important for you to have *courageous patience*.

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Enjoy the movement,

Andrew