

Creative Innovation 2012 - “Wicked Problems, Great Opportunities” – *White Paper*

21st Century leaders will need both courage and ‘right brain’ thinking to foster sustainable innovation.

I was privileged to attend Creative Innovation 2012, an inspiring and thought provoking conference focusing on the need for courage and leadership in volatile times. In particular, I took away a strong sense of the problems and opportunities likely to present as a result of the ever more rapid technological advancement we will experience in the coming decades.

The Challenge

Many gifted thinkers extrapolated on where current trends might take us. Dr Megan Clark listed six major megatrends. These included familiar themes such as the challenge of feeding a growing world population, the destruction of bio-diversity, the shift in the world’s centre of gravity to Asia and the ageing of the population. Two further trends focussed on possible outcomes of the digital revolution; a world where every physical object could have its virtual equivalent and a tendency to value sensory experiences over products.

Baroness Greenfield delved further into the impact of Information Technology and where we might be a hundred years from now. Would the ability to interact in a 3D virtual world cause a blurring in our minds of reality and fantasy? Would nanotechnology implants that enhance our mental and physical abilities lead to a blurring of the boundaries between man and machine, or as predicted by Ray Kurzweil, one CI11’s key speakers, a combining of carbon and silicon systems to blend the best features of humanity and robots? With genetically enhanced bodies and nutrition, would our idea of nature and what it means to be human inevitably evolve?

Even if one is cynical about the dynamic impact of IT, nanotechnology and genetics, along with the impact of population growth and climate change, it should be obvious to political and business leaders alike that *the 21st Century will be one of unprecedented change and only those countries and corporations that are truly creative and foster innovation will prosper.*

The Solution

The speakers at CI12 described how both public and private sector organisations are adapting to change, how they are fostering creativity, and of the importance of investing in research and development to provide many of the ideas and products that will enable innovation.

I will focus on two imperatives;

- **Removing barriers to innovation** - how we can encourage innovation in our companies, government and institutions;
- **Matching ‘right brain’ and ‘left brain’ development** - how can we best prepare society for the impact of unprecedented change?

Removing barriers to innovation

Methodologies to unlock the creative abilities inherent in any workforce have been known for some time. In summary, leaders need to replace cultures based on fear that don't support failure to cultures based on shared achievement where innovation is rewarded even when the outcome is not successful.

So if many CEOs or Department Secretaries already know this, why do we rarely see it in practice? Why do we instead see, thinly veiled by the near universal cant about 'valuing our people,' cultures where the path to promotion is to not make a mistake? Where negative feedback is the most potent management tool? Where existing dogmas dominate and are rarely challenged?

The answer is usually a lack of courage.

As Geoff Mulgan, head of NESTA the UK's innovation think tank, reminded us, bureaucracies should be celebrated; he was delighted that they ensured his plane didn't fall out of the sky, just as I am when my Medicare reimbursement goes straight to my bank account. Good governance too should be celebrated, as any country dogged by corruption can testify. So before embarking on a journey of cultural change a smart CEO first ensures their organisation has tight governance arrangements and strong lines of accountability to form bedrock that, because it enables risk management, makes change easier to successfully implement.

This needs to be accompanied by a change of language focusing on positive feedback and celebration. Many CEOs do this too. It's the next stage that's challenging and calls for courage; *rewarding original ideas whether they ultimately succeed or fail*. As Professor Rumelt said, CEOs who establish frameworks for innovation and take personal responsibility for any negative impact on the bottom line will be the ones rewarded with creative cultures. Geoff Mulgan spoke of the 'democratisation on innovation', the need to get everyone involved.

Government also needs to get out of the way of entrepreneurs. They don't need any further encouragement, their own drive will take care of that, and innovation is in their DNA. Ruslan Kogan explained how he was exploiting changing consumer patterns driven by the internet; Siviu Itescu is commercialising leading edge medical research and Jason Drew, an eco-entrepreneur, is growing profitable businesses that deliver sustainable outcomes.

Matching right and left brain development

A person who is "left-brained" is said to be more logical, analytical and objective, while a person who is "right-brained" is said to be more intuitive, thoughtful and subjective.

Most people would agree a society needs a good mixture of both. Since the start of the Industrial Revolution and continuing into the Information Revolution, rapid "left-brain" innovation has given us factories, electricity, automobiles, nuclear power, the web and nanotechnology. "Right brain" innovation, which would give us humans the wherewithal to use new technology for the benefit of our planet and its people, has failed to keep pace. This could have disastrous consequences.

Many speakers at CI12 shared this concern. Scott Anthony thought innovation need not only have growth as its goal but also integration and that maximising shareholder value as the paramount corporate goal is proving to be a fatal paradigm. Geoff Mulgan thought innovation will become less about things and more about feelings and the way we live.

Adam Kahane said we need to blend 'Power' (individual ambition) with 'Love' (what's good for the whole). Michael Rennie said high performance organisations blend 'Fear' (big hairy audacious goals) with 'Love' (care, respect and trust in a safe team environment).

Nurturing right-brain thinking has profound implications for how we deliver professional and personal development both at schools and universities and in the workplace. Art, literature, music, drama and comedy are likely to be rescued from residing purely in "Humanities", where they leave students more culturally developed but unsure as to how they might ever find gainful employment, to be put to use across the entire syllabus.

Outcomes will not only be measured by technical skills and memory, but also by increases in creativity, empathy and awareness. CI12 differentiated itself from other conferences by augmenting the contribution of over 40 world class thinkers by using musicians, poets, graphic artists and actors to help transport delegates into right-brained headspace.

A revolution in how companies relate to their staff and customers is already underway. This will surely spread to how they relate to the wider communities that they impact and their shareholders.

Words like love and spirituality are starting to infiltrate management texts. Smart leaders wanting to drive sustainable innovation will pay attention.

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January 2013