



How to be an innovator in your organisation

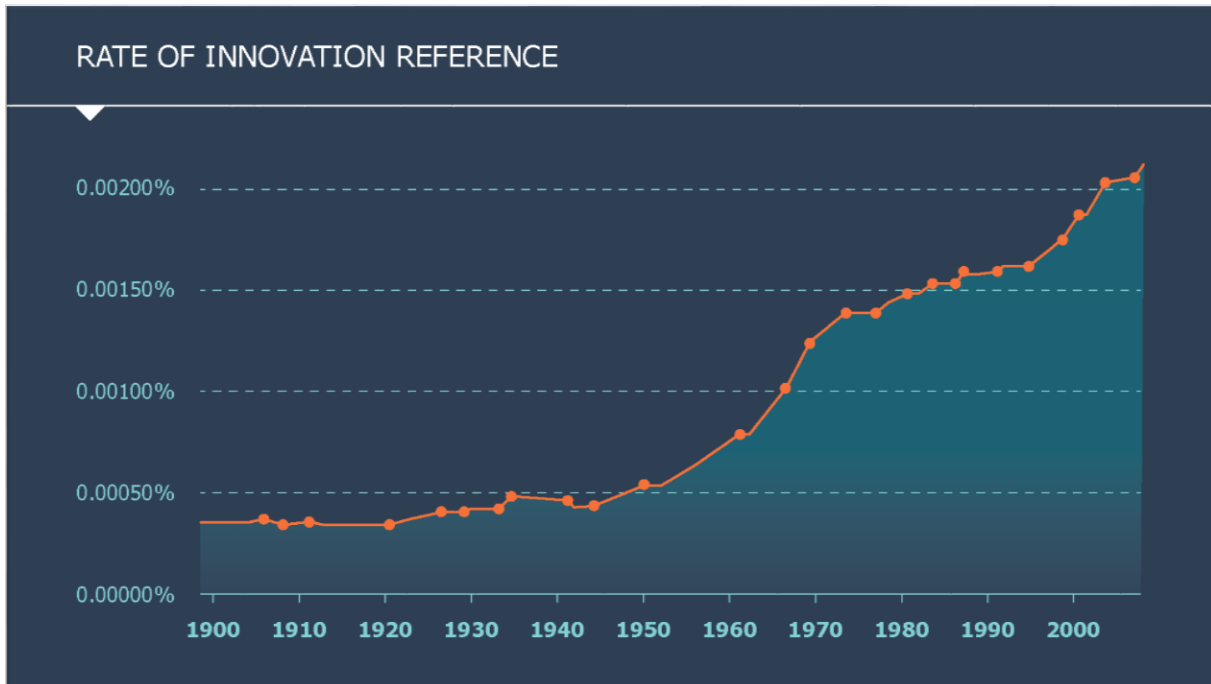
INTERGY CONSULTING WHITEPAPER

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What does innovation mean?

Innovation is a word often used, but rarely understood. We asked Google Ngram about historical use of the word "innovation."¹ When we look at the number of times the word 'innovation' was mentioned in text, you can see from the graph below that usage of the word has more than tripled from 1930 to 2000. People aren't yet tired of talking about innovation, so it's probably time you got on board.



Australia ranks 19th on the Global Innovation Scale², behind global giants like the US and UK, and slick, Nordic countries like Sweden and Finland. How can we compete with these innovation leaders?

The best place to start is with a definition:

Innovate *(verb)*

Make changes in something established, especially by introducing new methods, ideas, or products. e.g. 'the company's failure to diversify and innovate competitively'

To be innovative, simply look at what is in place and seek to improve it or replace it.

¹ https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=innovation&year_start=1900&year_end=2016&corpus=15&smoothing=3&share=&direct_url=t1%3B%2Cinnovation%3B%2Cc0

² <https://www.globalinnovationindex.org/analysis-indicator>

What can innovation look like?

There is no one answer. Innovation can take different shapes, depending on your role in the company and your company’s goals. For a locally operated café, innovation could mean investing in digital scales so that coffee beans would be weighed perfectly each time, while innovation in a large multinational bank could mean developing tailored software that would allow colleagues in different offices access to document editors so that everyone involved in a project has the latest version of a plan.

This pyramid includes a number of actions and end results that are indicative of innovation, ranked with the easier items down the bottom and the hardest at the top. It's not an exhaustive list, but will give you an idea of the many varied ways you can seek to innovate:



Innovative workplaces may benefit from increased competitiveness and staff retention, greater interest from customers as a result of an innovative reputation, and more effective use of resources. Simply put, innovation better positions your business for the future.

We have deep experience with helping our customers bring innovation to their business with custom-built technology solutions, so we’re sharing what we've learnt to show you how attainable innovation is for businesses, individuals and teams.

We've outlined how you or your business can switch to an innovation mindset with six key themes – technology, routine, pain points, challenging ideas, agility and inspiration.

THEME ONE: DON'T BE SCARED OF TECHNOLOGY

Technology can be the means or the end in innovation – that is, you can use it to assist your innovative efforts, or technology can be the result of innovation. Wherever technology fits into the process, don't be afraid of it. If you think that technology can assist you in your innovation process (e.g. project management software will help your team keep on top of your plans for prototyping a new product) engage an expert to help you to figure out the ins and outs of the technology.

We recently worked on an app to help a client track and manage construction project information from their phone³. This app directly influenced an increase in productivity because key decision makers could easily access the information they needed when they weren't at a desk. This app is a practical solution for an industry which involves a lot of time on-site, and an example of how innovation can streamline work with a simple tweak.

THEME TWO: BREAK ROUTINE

Set aside time to innovate and force yourself to break the routine.

It is easy to get bogged down in daily tasks and lose sight of our innovation goals, but to find innovation you must make yourself break this routine. Encourage your team to undertake training or hold an offsite meeting so that you can sit down together and collaborate; any time spent working on the business instead of in it is time well spent.

When you do get a chance to break routine, remember that no idea is a bad one. Some of the greatest ideas start as a discussion, so bounce ideas off your colleagues and build on them. You may consider inviting colleagues from outside your direct team, or an expert in a particular field to contribute. Bringing diversity of opinion into the mix ensures that you avoid groupthink, which results in stagnation, not innovation.

THEME THREE: FOCUS ON PAIN POINTS

If you want to be known as the person creating innovative solutions, address pain points. Are customers bottlenecking at the checkout and overloading your website? Look for a solution to this and you'll be the go-to innovation person.

Looking to provide answers to these difficult parts of your business will also help you to get support from colleagues and external stakeholders because there is meaning behind it. It's much easier to work on a solution when you believe in it.

The same goes internally – if you can find a way to streamline internal processes, you'll be the most popular person in the office. A large part of innovation is collaboration – if you're asking your people to collaborate, why wouldn't you want your software doing the same?

³ <http://php5.intergy.com.au/intergy/our-work/cordell-mobile/>

The inefficiencies resulting from different programs across different teams is astounding, and counterproductive. If the accounting team are using MYOB or Xero, operations are utilising JIRA, and customer service are using emails and spreadsheets, consider how you can improve this.

Technology that is tailored to your needs can help people complete their jobs more efficiently so that their time is better spent elsewhere. Listen to your colleagues' needs and identify where you can start innovating internally.

THEME FOUR: CHALLENGE IDEAS

Innovation doesn't only happen when you've got complete agreement around your table. To shake up your innovation efforts, you often need diversity of views. This sometimes means that you need someone who is willing to agitate or play devil's advocate to get the group thinking about different options.

Hedge fund, Bridgewater, has hit the headlines recently with its radical approach to preventing groupthink⁴. Bridgewater's founder, Ray Dalio believes that "no one has the right to hold a critical opinion without speaking up about it" and encourages strong feedback loops within his company in the interest of "radical transparency."

Dalio goes so far as to encourage staff to rate his performance and famously received an exceptionally critical email from a staff member which said, among other things "it was obvious to all of us that you did not prepare at all because there is no way you could have and been that disorganized at the outset if you had prepared." This kind of email exchange is not unusual at Bridgewater, and Dalio responded by CCing the entire company, inviting them for feedback and explaining the learnings from the exchange.

THEME FIVE: BE AGILE

Have a plan in place, but don't let it become a crutch. The best innovators are ready to change direction when their plans aren't working, to be constantly evaluating the outcomes of their plans and to adjust where necessary. The best-laid plans can be torn to shreds when your product or idea meets the real world – users may not interact with your app how you intended, people may not use your space as you understood that they would.

A prime example of this agility is Slack, the collaboration tool. Slack was originally intended as an internal tool for a company called Tiny Speck while they worked on an online game. The game is now defunct, but Slack has more than three million active users daily⁵.

Part of this process often involves destruction. Being able to recognise that your idea is no longer necessary to the project is a tough step, but something that you have to be prepared to come to terms

⁴ <http://www.businessinsider.com/ray-dalio-management-strategy-bridgewater-2016-1?IR=T>

⁵ <http://expandedramblings.com/index.php/slack-statistics/>

with. It gets easier though, so don't worry- the more you ideate, the easier letting go of ideas will come to you, you'll have plenty more options to work on.

THEME SIX: SEEK OUT **INSPIRATION** EVERYWHERE

It's inherently human of us to want to be the source of all wisdom. However, if you're open to inspiration, you may find yourself eating some humble pie and taking a back seat when the time comes- regardless of whether this inspiration comes from your six-year-old, your junior at work, or your late night chat with a neighbour over a bottle of wine.

This theme ties in with theme two about routine; surrounding yourself with the same office space every day is comforting in its predictability, but it's unlikely to inspire you to think differently. Challenge yourself with a change to the daily grind and see what happens – this isn't to say that sporadic trips to the beach are in order when you're on work's time, but hard work doesn't always mean being at your desktop.

Practical tips for innovative thinking

- a) **Change what you think you know about innovation** – innovation doesn't necessarily involve creating the next Uber, bitcoin or drone. Start small to build up your innovation skills. The first innovative project you undertake might be implementing Skype meetings to save on interstate trips, or starting a working group to figure out how to fix your website. No matter the size of the innovative task, the learnings you take away will be invaluable for future innovation attempts.
- b) **Initiate innovation blockouts** – set a recurring meeting in your diary (either by yourself or as a team) and do some blue sky thinking.
- c) **Don't be scared of failure** – if you keep waiting for the perfect idea or the perfect environment to incubate your idea, it will never flourish. Start now and be prepared for several iterations of your idea, multiple failures, and lots of pep talks.
- d) **Be on the lookout** – if you're not looking for opportunities, they're not going to come looking for you. Innovation is hard work, so keep your eyes peeled to identify needs and solutions.
- e) **Avoid "this is the way we've always done it"** – these eight words are a knife in the heart of innovators. If you can't come up for a reason as to why you should keep doing something the same way, consider ways that it can be done differently.

KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK TO START INNOVATING

- 1 - *How can technology help me to innovate?*
- 2 - *Am I falling victim to groupthink?*
- 3 - *Who will champion innovation efforts with me?*
- 4 - *How can I allocate time for innovation?*
- 5 - *What project do I most enjoy dedicating my thoughts to?*
- 6 - *Will my innovation focus be internal or external?*
- 7 - *Am I prepared to fail and start again?*
- 8 - *What is getting in the way of change?*
- 9 - *What technology solutions do I need?*

Challenges you'll need to tackle

- **Getting your leaders on board:** Whether it's management or the Executive Committee, you need to have your leaders on board for the innovation journey. Having buy-in from those above you will ensure that you're supported in your innovation efforts – it may even be factored into future business plans.
- **Setting aside time:** Blocking out 3pm on a Thursday won't get your creative juices flowing on cue, but it will force you to step back from day-to-day tasks and think. Setting this time aside is important because it gives you and your team time to think. You might use this time to go for a walk, talk with a friend who is doing something amazing in their field, or grab a room and some butcher's paper to brainstorm; regardless of the format your innovation blockout takes, make a point of taking this time regularly.
- **Keeping yourself accountable:** This needs no explanation. Setting goals and involving others can assist you in this.

- **Finding passionate advocates:** Your team needs to want to make or change something, without that inner drive, your plans could fall short.
- **Staying up to date with changes:** The only way to stay ahead of the curve is to never stop learning. Find companies that are successful in the space you're interested in and sign up for their newsletters, attend events to hear from people who are innovating, have coffee with inspiring people, sign up to courses – the list goes on.

Innovation can seem like a daunting concept, but with the right tools it is an achievable and desirable business goal. If you're a mover or a shaker, get in touch with Intergy to discuss how our technology solutions can help you with your innovation plans.



CONTACT US

If you have any questions about how we can add value to your business software solutions call us on **1300 739 117**



Head office

Level 3, Suite 3,
9-13 Young Street
Sydney NSW 2000

P 1300 739 117

E info@intergy.com.au

F 02 8090 7649

intergy.com.au

SYDNEY / MELBOURNE
BRISBANE / COIMBATORE

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