

What it takes to be creative and innovative¹

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Innovation and creativity

Innovation and creativity are topics in vogue; everybody seems to be somehow interested in being creative and innovative. With so many examples such as Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberg, it seems like innovation is a gift and that becoming the next king of the new invention comes naturally and comfortably. The truth is that no matter how easy the innovation process appears to be or is presented in front of our eyes, there is a story behind every product, service, or leader that has transform life as we know it.

Innovation implies the adoption of a new idea, new procedure or behavior, or a mix of all elements described. Innovation can be put in place from different angles, such as technical innovations that include a new process and new products or services, or administrative changes referring to new procedures, policies, and organizational forms according to Jiménez. For any organization, innovation represents the opportunity not only to grow and survive but also to influence the direction of the industry significantly. Innovation is not only a weapon in competitive markets, but it can also turn out into social change or social entrepreneurship, says Davila et al.

Project managers find very fertile land to manage innovation projects; one way is helping the business growing; another way is supporting the community and social changes.

Creativity, on the other hand, "according to expert Michalko, is not an accident, not genetically determined. It is not a result of some easily learned magic trick or secret, but a consequence of your intention to be creative and your determination to learn and use creative thinking strategies." Following it will be presented ways to learn how to be more innovative and how to incorporate into project management practice.

The source of innovation comes from different paths

Hard-working in a specific direction. - Innovators select a problem to focus all their attention and energy to solve, pass much time thinking in several solutions or possibilities to resolve their issues, and when they have this instinct, then start the experimental phase. "The majority of innovations come from dedicated people in a field working hard to solve a well-defined problem, asserts Berkun." Innovate in our daily projects will also require a focus on common problems and how certain aspects can be improved.

The shift in the first direction – Often innovators could become stubborn enough to what they want to accomplish, and its resilience makes them work almost restlessness.

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However, when the first direction seems far away, and they "discover" something useful in the middle of their way, they start analyzing if this invention can be helpful for others. This way, while working in pursuing original idea can turn into something exciting and practical to use. Project managers by nature can sometimes be stubborn; however, it is essential to be flexible enough to understand that in the way of trying to solve a problem, the solution can emerge.

Curiosity – This motivator is like an internal motor; this innate need to know everything, to be curious about the world around us, how things are made, how things can be undone, and the challenge of trying to re-build some items with old pieces. Curiosity comes for the urge to know something new, passing the time, or just having fun. This way, many things have been discovered or invented, as creativity can be unlimited for a curious mind. Curiosity becomes an essential driver not only for innovation but also for understanding context, relations, and complexity involved in the project environment.

Wealth and money - Another source of innovation is located on the opposite spectrum. People that feel the need for recognition or power or both. This is often the case where what they are searching for is more related to status and money rather than creating and building something new. Some examples in history came for people more skilled in business or entrepreneurship rather than the genius that wanted to solve problems.

Necessity – Has ever happened to your mind the idea about having something that could make your life easier in some aspect, but that does not even exist? Well, this is a necessity calling you to create something new out of nothing or out of something that already exists and given other use. Sometimes innovator feels like if only they could have such thing could do other activities, simplify the process, improve time and energy or being lazier, well, there it is.

Combination – So many times, the origin of a new concept, idea, product, service, process, technology, and so is a combination of described previous factors. The innovation process can start at any point and suffer for swifts and switches that life imposes us. In the meantime, while trying to focus, life happens and forces you to see in the opposite direction, change motivation, look for other opportunities, or get back to starting point and bingo! What was looking for it is found less expectedly. Project managers can be agents of the change, either generating new ideas or implementing them using the best practice of project management that everybody knows.

Innovation brings many benefits to organizations such as deeper capabilities to define and achieve strategic objectives, business model introduction, becoming more proactive rather than reactive. Eliminate much firefighting, causing other firms to react to your innovations with a new product, service, and employees who are more engaged and who use a broader set of tools and techniques to accomplish strategic goals. Increase revenues and profits while retaining efficient cost management; sustained market differentiation and favorable media and press coverage; increased ability to leverage internal knowledge and external partnerships, says expert Phillips. Innovation becomes to many companies a way of sustainability or growth, either organization innovates or dies competing with others. However, change has to be in balance as part of an

organizational strategy; not everything is innovating; not everything is the search for profits.

What is required from leaders and project managers to innovate?

Leaders and project managers are essential because they give others orientation, guidance, and example; they set what is searched for and valued inside an organization or a specific project; however, there is no condition to innovate to be a leader or the other way around. Since leaders in organizations are responsible, among other things, for the wellbeing of the organization, setting a strategy and succeed, the following aspects are based thinking on them but are also applicable to anyone.

Hard work – As cruel as it sounds, nothing (or almost nothing) happens by accident or merely luck. Leaders, project managers, and innovators, and creative people come with their innovation, new ideas, new products, new hypothesis, new laws, etcetera, after many years of intense hard work. How many times is it being said that leaders read and they read too much; everyone that wants to succeed has to be well prepared. Know the world around them, knowing the market, knowing the competition, knowing what is expected from them, and overall hard work. Yes, working hard does not mean only be seated in an office several hours answering emails. Working hard in the innovation environment means to have enough resilience to overcome setbacks, be frustrated to follow dreams, and to get nothing. It is the willingness to raise after falling and continue with the same tenacity over what you truly believe. If project managers want to innovate in their daily activities, methods, procedures, and so on or help their organizations or business to innovate, it will represent hard work over their daily activities.

The idea that everybody thinks is right or could be true about how Newton discovered gravity or how amazon or google or Netflix works is fulfilled by the tip of the iceberg type of story. They are involved almost in a fairytale; the apple falls from the tree, and there it is: gravity. However, behind all great things that now humans take for granted or general knowledge; came from many years of study and hard work for somebody long before.

Risks – Risk is inherent to both leadership and innovation and, of course, project management. Not everybody is willing to lose all they know to embark on an adventure of creating something new or to following something that is not tested, validated, used, or generally accepted by society. Examples of new technology and inventions are in histories such as the invention of the telephone and television were at the beginning nobody wanted to invest. It takes risk and courage to believe in own or others' ideas and willing to navigate under the unknown. Of course, history is also full of failure stories because there are many useless inventions and trying and error attempts that nobody cares. In other words, being creative is risky; if you are not that type of person or leader, do not even try it. Or if you are a project manager adverse to risk

Sacrifice - Another relevant aspect to be considered. For example, in the case of Steve Jobs, when his life was ending, he realized that despite the fame, hard-work, followers, and his legacy. He sacrificed a lot of his personal experience for the benefit of what we all know as an apple history. Sacrifice is a concept hard to live, and to explain, many

inventors have lost their marriage, family, wealth, and even health in the pursuit of their dream. Is it worth it? I cannot tell; it depends on internal being, of inner values, of what moves you and even what you think your mission in this world is. This paper is not related to ethics or morality; everyone should evaluate what is willing to do either for the right or the wrong causes. However, the main idea here is despite hard work and risk; there is another aspect called a sacrifice to consider if you want to embark on innovation and creativity adventure. Who knows, maybe sacrifice will take you and humanity to the next big wave of transformation.

Observe and observe – Innovators, by definition, possess a curious mind; they spend countless hours observing their surroundings, nature, the human body, human behavior, they experiment with themselves, with their family and their friends, they become genuinely sees. In our contemporary world, this quality is becoming weird, with that much technology and ways to facilitate life with applications that tell us almost everything, the ability to watch and observe is nearly gone. However, seeing people has an advantage that is not for everybody; this enormous capacity well oriented can open full possibilities. Project managers learn with experience to observe human behavior around their teams and projects. It is also vital to extend the field of observation to find innovation possibilities in what we usually do.

Being trained to see from another perspective – “Michalko mentions that by changing your perspective, you expand your possibilities until you see something that you were unable to see before.” That is the magic of training your brain to see things from another perspective. Creative and innovative people do not follow the current path; they can see what others cannot. This situation also happens after hard work and training, yes training in several tools and mechanisms to put the attention in the missing spot, in the path that does not follow, in the alternatives everybody ignored, and so on. Being creative also requires many hours of unlearning what we already know and search for others' way to understand reality.

Innovation will require leadership that is a fact; however, not everything relies on the characteristics of the leader of the organization. "Innovation requires thought leaders, transformers, game-changers, ideators, disruptors, challengers, and observers. It also requires a platform where people can exchange ideas about trends occurring on a global level and what is happening in our arena, mentions Gerakiteys". A proper culture that supports innovation as a processor integrates as part of the business, as usual, will be needed to help the individual, visionary leadership, to go to the next level.

Suggested steps for Project Managers to innovate

Following Davila's rules of innovation suggested to be followed by any project manager, organizations, and projects together can benefit from implementing an innovation program.

1. **Exert strong leadership** on the innovation strategy and portfolio decisions. Like any other strategy in organizations, have to take into consideration and support from the head. Clear direction, support, motivation, and reward in this sense will

assure and encourage to permeate innovation culture inside the organization, business unit, project office, or specific project.

2. **Integrate innovation** into the company's first business mentality. Innovation mentality has to be promoted to daily activities, rewarding not only business as usual performance but also improvement in operational activities that include or represents an innovative way of thinking. This can easily incorporate into daily activities with the project team, day to day operations can be improved innovation small things.
3. **Align the amount and type of innovation** to the company's business. The nature and the amount of innovation needed for the organization, or project should be balanced between those. Balancing is an activity that relies on the Project Manager, how much time/resources is allocated to innovate vs. accomplishment on the project goals.
4. **Manage the natural tension** between creativity and value capture. Balancing again between these two is a responsibility for the project manager, creating enough value so the project can survive and grow as well with the right amount of creativity.
5. **Neutralize organizational antibodies.** Natural change enemies can appear now, and then when innovation comes to the scene, it is also a work of the project manager to minimize risks inviting project members to participate in all the initiatives.
6. **Recognize the basic unit of innovation is a social network**, including internal and external people and knowledge of the organization or the project. Bringing the right people from outside and mixed with internal resources will help to the success of the organization in the innovation initiatives. If it is not possible to do this mix, at least being open to what others in the exterior are doing, will give ideas on how to incorporate innovation in our projects.
7. **Create the right metrics and rewards for innovation.** Proper parameters and awards are also needed as innovation takes place; people will help to support if the right metrics are set up.

At the end

Innovation and creativity are processes that can be learned or developed with patience and a willingness to learn. Both are needed for the world to progress. Both are necessary for businesses, projects, and organizations to compete and remain competitive, being in the state of the art if they want to be part of a market.

Innovation represents a big part of human life and also for the organization. However, it is equally relevant to balance among other business objectives; otherwise, a business can suffer either because of too much innovation with no profitability or too much income or revenue without sustainability. This is also true for a project; too much innovation could affect the correct performance of it.

Innovation and creativity can be performed on several levels inside the organization, which can be a policy and mandatory or can be the goal of a single person that could represent a significant change. It depends on the individuals, on the leadership, and the organization.

Innovation is not for everybody; no matter how fascinated stories are and how much one can become the next hero, it always represents a risk and not a visible amount of work and dedicated hours that not all are willing to pay. Other important aspects to consider are equally significant such as risk and sacrifice if someone wants to succeed.

It is vital to understand that the roots of innovation are everywhere; there are many venues to become innovative, as many as motives and reasons humans find in their inner being to move into this marvelous world. Inspiration has come to writers, artists, musicians, scientists, business people, technological people, and project managers from several sources, and several reasons. People do unbelievable things for love, for recognition, for power, for pain, for pride, you never know if your next problem will put you in the path of a great discovery. Being attentive, observe, being open mind, and willing to see things from others' perspectives seem to be crucial for innovation.

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