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WHAT ELSE IS NEW? MANAGING INNOVATION IN DIFFERENT CULTURES

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Abstract

This paper contends that innovation can and does happen in any culture. After all, no culture is better than another. What actually happens is that innovation must be managed differently in each culture, in ways that are consistent with that culture. The misconceptions about innovation management are briefly described. Subsequently, examples are given depicting how innovation is typically managed in Contest, Social Pyramid, Network, Well-Oiled Machine, Solar System and Family cultures. Innovation management in Japan is described separately, since it has unique characteristics that do not match the other six culture styles.

Keywords: Innovation; Culture; Mental Images; Innovation Management.

Introduction

Life is an eternal struggle between, on one side, learning, change, discovery and innovation; and on the other side, confirmation, continuity, identity and repetition. Individuals, teams, organizations and communities of all sizes toggle between these two sides, each seeking their own dynamic balance. The simple truth is that none can survive on one side alone of this spectrum.

Organizations are particularly exposed to the effects of entropy. If they fail to innovate, in an increasingly competitive globalized market, they risk their very survival. Organizations therefore seek innovation constantly; not only to remain competitive, but even to insure their continuous existence.

In seeking competitiveness through innovation, organizations pursue the best methods and also strive to develop the best workplace culture to foster innovation. However, they face the broad culture bias that affects most managers everywhere: the bias towards Anglo-Saxon management practices, which stem from the fact that two thirds of all the management books in the world are published in the US, UK and Canada. This means that most business schools and graduate management courses tend to teach practices that are based on Anglo-Saxon values. This includes, of course, notions about how an organization might foster and manage innovation.

Misconception about the universality of innovation management

There is a misconception that innovation can only flourish in cultures (national, organizational or team cultures) that have certain characteristics. These "innovation friendly" cultures, according to this misconception, would be basically characterized by low Power Distance (PDI), therefore egalitarian, because the fear of authority figures typical of high PDI cultures would stifle initiative and innovation.

This notion goes on to stipulate that innovation can also flourish only in cultures that are individualistic (high IDV) rather than collectivistic (low IDV), because collectivism would also stifle innovation and creativity, since it reinforces group thinking (and individual conformism to group opinions), thereby hindering the kind of critical thinking that fosters departures from the status quo and the search for breakthroughs.

This misconception goes on to postulate that innovation needs a cultural environment that is more geared towards performance rather than caring and quality of life. According to this notion, innovation flourishes among individuals who thrive on the pressure to perform, rather than among those who prefer to dedicate themselves to improving the quality of their lives.

Further, this mindset considers that in order to foster innovation a culture that scores low on Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI) is needed. High UAI means that ambiguity is avoided and certainty is preferred, and those values would hinder the exploration of new ideas.

To top it all, this notion assumes that a long-term orientation (LTO) is undesirable as aa culture characteristic and a short-term orientation is preferable (low LTO) to foster innovation, since this would lead to quick wins and more results sooner rather than later, while a high LTO would lead to programs that would yield results in decades, instead of weeks or months.

When one looks at the combined cultural characteristics linked to this notion, it is clear that it describes Contest cultures according to Huib Wursten's Mental Images of culture (Wursten, 2019). The bottom line is: people from Contest cultures who write about innovation tend to think that innovation can only thrive in their own environment. This, of course, is the most basic of all culture biases: assuming that your own culture is "the right one," and that all others are "wrong." (Lanzer, 2012).

The very definition of innovation as breakthrough, in contrast with constant improvement strategies like the Japanese Kaizen, denotes a culture bias towards Anglo-Saxon values. The point is that behind almost every definition we use internationally there is an implicit cultural bias, simply because there is a human being behind them… and most of us tend to forget our own culture biases when we write about supposedly universal concepts such as innovation.

This paper contends that innovation can and does happen in any culture. After all, no culture is better than another (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). What actually happens is that innovation must be managed differently in each culture, in ways that are consistent with that culture.

How innovation is typically managed in the United States (and similarly in other Contest cultures)

The management of innovation in Contest cultures is based on what has been described above as an "innovation-friendly" environment. The misconception is simply that this would be applicable universally. It certainly does describe how innovation tends to happen in an Anglo-Saxon environment.

The assumptions in Contest cultures are that: (a) life is a competition; (b) you need to perform as an individual in order to win; and (c) you should stand out and boast about your performance. Naturally, in this kind of cultural environment, innovation is typically fostered by offering awards, prizes and all kinds of incentives (financial and non-financial) to stimulate indivi8duals towards coming up with new ideas/products/services that represent a real breakthrough: something that hits existing restraints and breaks through them, in an aggressive way, creating a new, unprecedented and much better level.

The assumption in such cultures is also that people are motivated by challenges, confrontations, conflicts and competition. Therefore, a typical approach to foster innovation is to create a contest, in which many participants compete to win a prize that will go to whoever can present the best innovative idea/proposal, according to specific criteria (the latter are needed to ensure that the competition is fair, a basic tenent of Contest cultures).

The drive to be a winner, and the knowledge that winners "take it all," receiving ample recognition in financial and non-financial terms, lead to the pursue of innovations in

all fields of endeavors in Contest cultures. Within organizations, different teams often compete with each other on the same subject matter to achieve overlapping (or even exactly the same) goals. Managers are comfortable with assigning the same task to two different teams and announcing: may the best team win!

Apple Inc, for instance, has been known to fund million-dollar research and product development projects that often lead to nowhere; but management believes that finding a breakthrough in consumer electronics will yield such huge financial returns that they can afford to reach several dead ends in the pursuit of a jackpot win. It is also a known fact that Apple's corporate culture is more consistent with innovation and this has yielded more success than its main competitors over the past two decades (Jaruzelski, Loehr, & Holman, 2012). Apple has spent much less than Microsoft on research and development, both in absolute figures and as a percentage of its sales, in the past 20 years. Yet, its results have been much better, and why is that? Because its organizational culture has been more consistent with fostering innovation as described in the cited study. Apple gives more freedom and funding to research new ideas and accepts that some of them might yield no results. Microsoft invested more money, but their culture had been putting too much emphasis on controlling the process, with below optimal results.

Two Steve stories

The stories of two CEO's (Steve Jobs at Apple and Steve Balmer at Microsoft) illustrates how organizational cultures can differ between each other, while sharing the same national culture values and competing with similar products in similar markets. This is relevant when we consider that CEO's do indeed have significant impact on the cultures of the organizations they lead (Whitehurst, 2016).

Under Balmer, Microsoft continued to struggle with an internal conflict that had plagued the company already for years before he ascended to the CEO position: the emphasis on marketing (designing products that would appeal more to the end user) versus the emphasis on technical aspects that made the products more appealing to IT administrators in companies. Balmer's personal leadership style was one of stimulating people to keep on fighting and to "let the best team win," without picking a side. His style as a leader on stage has been widely broadcast on the internet through a video clip made during a Microsoft convention. It is known as the "Steve Balmer Monkey Dance," and in it Balmer basically cheers his audience in a very energetic way, with few words and a lot shouting and jumping around. The clip has been widely used to illustrate a somewhat stereotyped view of an American leadership style: all about energy and little else.

Jobs had a very different style. In spite of being described often by his peers and direct reports as an autocrat and bully (or "a jerk"), Jobs was able to center the whole Apple organization around a vision of designing products for the end-user: someone who wants something easy to use and that looks cool, without having to understand anything about the technical aspects inside the gadgets. The paradox is that Apple became successful by doing something Contest cultures (individualistic societies) do not typically excel at: focusing on the other person (the client) and the communication form, rather than focusing on yourself and the content of your message. Jobs had to bully people into doing that. Although apparently he showed little empathy with those who worked directly with him, he had much more empathy with the end users as customers, and that drove the company's success.

Plus, Jobs had a different style on stage making presentations to journalists: he was elegant and subdued, using suspense and subtle drama to have impact. In a way, one might say that he personified what his audience wished to be; while Balmer personified what his audience actually were.

Even though Jobs was bullying his teams to go against the culture, he was also reinforcing the Contest environment by stimulating competition among teams and he was very confrontational in his interactions. Perhaps the main difference between him and Balmer can be summarized as: Jobs did pick a side in the conflict between the marketing professionals and the IT nerds. He picked the marketing perspective in terms of designing with the end user in mind; and demanded his technical specialists to comply. As a result, the Apple organizational culture is certainly a Contest culture: but it puts more emphasis on providing freedom to take risks and innovate through trial and error, rather than trying to control the outcomes of the innovation process.

Another paradox emerged from this: by trying to control spending and outcome, Microsoft had less results; while Apple had better results by letting go of controls (comparatively) and allowing failures to happen.

A case example from Brazil, a Social Pyramid culture

A few years ago, I was on the Managing Board of a large bank in Brazil (roughly 20,000 staff and 700 retail branches). At a certain point in time we concluded that we needed decisive action towards fostering innovation within that organization. So how did we manage to do that in that Social Pyramid (Lanzer, 2018) organizational culture?

We started by considering four different possible approaches: (a) to create a unit like the typical R&D department found in the pharmaceutical industry; (b) to implement a suggestion-box style campaign, asking people to submit innovative ideas on an on-going basis; (c) to create a contest of innovative ideas in the typical style used in American companies since the 1950's; and (d) to create a "*usina de inovação*", a kind of ad hoc "innovation plant" with rather specific characteristics.

This choice provides a good example of how innovation can be managed within a Social Pyramid culture, based on such a culture's basic characteristics.

First of all, the whole idea originated from an external marketing consultant, José Carlos Teixeira Moreira, who had been hired to advise the organization on its strategic marketing approach. Creating the innovation plant was but a small part of a very broad approach to branding, product development, corporate communications, sales training and advertising. As is typical of a hierarchical culture, with centralized at the top decision-making processes, everything had to be sanctioned formally by the Managing Board; and informally, before that, by the CEO in person.

Innovation can be stimulated and managed in Social Pyramid cultures; but only when top management approves of it. And the style of program adopted in organizations will depend very much on the personal preferences and attitudes of their top managers.

In this case, the program consisted of creating a very small core unit, with just three full-time staff, that would provide support for the creation of an innovation hub (the so-called innovation plant), staffed by volunteers who would join it on a part-time basis to work on specific product development projects and ideas. The period of time dedicated by each individual varied according to their professional circumstances and availability. Three or four could dedicate twenty hours a week to the plant, but for a maximum of six months; they continued with their current jobs in other bank departments, completely unrelated to what they were doing at the innovation hub. Another seven or eight people would dedicate just four hours a week to a specific project. Still others participated formally on projects just for a two-hour meeting each week, though we knew that in practice they worked at home in the evenings or during weekends to carry out particular tasks as required.

The common element to the plant's staff was that they were all volunteers: they were fully engaged because they believed in the innovations that they had signed up for, and they treated the whole thing like a cause and not like tasks that they had a duty to perform. This

again is something quite consistent with Social Pyramid cultures: to engage in discretionary efforts when there is specific motivation to do that.

There were no monetary incentives attached to participation in the innovation plant; and in some cases, the participants had difficulties with their bosses at their regular jobs, who frowned at them not being exclusively dedicated to their units. To facilitate the process of getting these bosses to allow participation in the projects, a couple of Board Members were made official sponsors of the plant. Whenever there was an issue, they would gently step in and ensure to these bosses that the participation of their staff was highly appreciated. This was all about using the hierarchy to push innovation forward. Without top management support, nothing can happen.

The plant worked well for almost 10 years and generated several innovations that were unique to that organization in Brazil. The ideas had to be developed, presented and vetted by different departments typically involved in the creation of a new product or approach to relationships with clients, and that happened as needed. Eventually the organization was acquired by another institution and most of the Managing Board members were replaced, including the CEO; the new top team were more concerned with keeping the acquired organization under control, rather than with fostering innovation, so they opted to dissolve the plant. The external consultant had already left the project after the first three years, seeing that it no longer required his continuous assistance and had developed nicely into an independent way of functioning, reporting rather loosely to one of the two sponsoring Board members.

An attempt to recreate the innovation plant in a Network culture does not succeed

Some three years after the innovation hub was created in Brazil, I was moved to the Netherlands and after a few months adapting to a different corporate and cultural environment, attempted to implement a program along the same lines as the one that was still enjoying such success in Brazil. The thinking, at the time, was that surely a Network environment would be very supportive of an innovation hub, much more than the Brazilian Social Pyramid culture. The Dutch culture appeared to be more open to innovation, since it was more egalitarian and individualistic. There seemed to be more freedom of expressing opinions, even dissenting from the status quo, and individual initiatives were stimulated and did not require sanctioning by top management. I even remember the Dutch CEO saying that he preferred to have people asking for forgiveness, if they had taken initiative and something had gone wrong, rather than having them asking for permission before doing anything. However, the program did not fly… precisely because the cultural assumptions were different.

When the proposal was discussed with the Dutch Managing Board, they much preferred a "suggestion box" approach. This was their preference because it was perceived as being much more egalitarian and "democratic." The innovation plant approach implied restricting participation to a rather small team (or a few teams) of volunteers involved in the projects. It would not be possible in the Netherlands to accommodate everyone who wished to join the hub, if suddenly we had dozens, or even hundreds, of people stepping forward and applying. There would need to be some sort of selection process, and that meant that some would be included, while others would be excluded. This aspect clashed with the fact that the Dutch society is indeed a much more inclusive one.

The challenges for fostering innovation in the Dutch banking industry were (and still are) of a different nature. The inclusiveness of Network societies can sometimes become an obstacle to organizing innovation efforts. When you allow "a thousand flowers bloom," paraphrasing the Dutch popular expression, it may become difficult to manage the multitude of initiatives that are brought to attention. In addition to that, the Dutch culture tends to give

greater value to being more monochronic (doing one thing at a time) rather than polychronic (multitasking). This causes organizations to outright reject innovative ideas, when they are perceived as being too many at the same time and too much of a threat to the status quo, especially in a traditionally conservative industry like banking.

A different multinational banking organization based in the Netherlands provided additional examples recently. Initially they tried to foster innovation by creating regional centers of excellence dedicated to helping units in their geographic area (for instance, the Benelux region) to develop new products, services and client strategies. This approach is a compromise between the suggestion box (include everyone) and the innovation plant (select a small team to focus on innovation): it was in essence to use a small team as facilitators who would contact different business units and try to help them to innovate.

This approach had mixed results. Some units were more interested than others, which was to be expected. The main obstacle was what Wursten (Wursten, 2013) has described as "the 'toko' syndrome." In Dutch work culture many unit heads adopt an attitude of thinking about their unit as a little Indonesian shop (or 'toko') of which the manager/supervisor is the sole master. This person knows where everything about this little private "kingdom" and allows no external interference. The unit becomes an extension of their own personality; and any outsider expressing an opinion about how the unit should be run is perceived as invading the person's privacy. Therefore, any attempt to foster innovation is also regarded as undue interference and rejected forthwith.

The bank's management then decided to add a different approach, one that moved a bit towards the direction of creating an innovation plant, in the sense that it involved setting up a small team to innovate. They set up a central innovation Center of Excellence (CoE) of just over 10 people, with a mandate to collect or generate innovative ideas. This differed from the Brazilian Innovation Plant because as the CoE was created its 11 staff were permanently transferred there on a full-time basis.

In this case, it meant taking up an idea that had been submitted through a suggestion box program and selecting a smaller team (4 to 6 project volunteers from outside the CoE) who were invited to develop that idea and turn it into a finished product. At least one of the 11 CoE members would be part of this other project team. The project team worked full-time on the project and were transferred outside the bank to an ad-hoc start-up. The start-up was funded by the bank but enjoyed autonomy to work independently on developing the new product or service, even to create a separate brand and marketing strategy.

When the product was ready to launch, it was brought back into the organization to be included in the bank's product/service portfolio. However, at that moment they hit the same obstacles again: the "took" mentality, also referred to as the "not invented here" syndrome. The managers who should normally take the new product under their wings as part of the existing portfolio rejected it as antibodies rejecting an organ transplant. They scrutinized the product to find reasons why it could never work. Frustrated because of all this infighting, many project participants left the organization.

After three years of operating the CoE in this fashion, the overall balance is positive: three different start-ups were created and continued to operate independently from the main company because their absorption was rejected. Two others were successfully absorbed. Four other projects were abandoned because they were not absorbed and could not survive outside the bank. The main problem they had to live with was the attrition resulted in 10 out of the original 11 staff leaving the company out of frustration. Each of them was replaced, so the CoE continues to operate fully staffed; but the high turnover bears witness to the damage inflicted on the team by resistance to change from within the main organization.

In the Dutch market there are a couple of consulting companies (Dijksman, 2019) specializing on creating start-ups as spin-offs from larger companies (one of the bank's

former CoE members joined one of them). These innovation specialists offer help to large multinationals that are too big and have become rather too rigid to generate innovation. They will take a team away from the large organization and set them up as an independent start-up to develop the new idea into a full-fledged product. They then assist on facilitating the absorption of the start-up back into the mother-company, or in keeping it afloat as an independent entity.

In spite of the difficulties encountered, these cases all offer examples of how obstacles to innovation can be overcome in Network cultures. The strategies employed are typical of cultures that are egalitarian, individualistic and more "Feminine" rather than "Masculine" in the way Hofstede has described these terms (Hofstede, 2003).

Innovation can happen in Solar System cultures, if you know how to manage your boss

Solar System cultures such as France, Belgium, Italy and Spain generate innovation too, but the value logics of these culture directs innovation efforts to different areas, such as gastronomy, fashion and design, rather than artificial intelligence, software architecture or mobile applications.

The way innovation efforts are managed in Solar System cultures also tends to be different from what can be observed in other cultures. The tension between high Power Distance (PDI) and high Individualism (IDV) brings an interesting dynamic to the interaction between a boss who wants to foster innovation but is keen on being respected as the authority figure that has the final say in anything and enjoys being praise; and the team members who want to innovate and get credit for it, but must respect the boss' position or risk being sacked if they fail to demonstrate it.

As in Social Pyramid cultures, innovation depends very much on it being sanctioned by the respective authority figure prior to any initiative. In hierarchical cultures you do need to ask permission first, before doing anything. If the boss gives you a mandate to innovate, fantastic. If not, you will get in trouble if you do. Problems often arise because in Solar System cultures individuals often stray away from their boss' directives, to express their individualism… and are confronted into submission when the boss finds out. The trick then is to convince bosses that it was their idea in the first place. If you can manage your boss' ego in a Solar System culture you can go a long way; but the challenge is that bosses know how to play this game also, and this may mean that in certain situations they can become control freaks. The really smart bosses play this in a different way: they pretend to ignore that they are being manipulated, but make sure that the subordinates also know that they are all playing a power game. As long as the boss does not lose face, everybody can win. However, the players are all dancing on a tight rope… and they know that if push comes to shove, the people at the top will win and the ones at the bottom will suffer.

Yes, innovation can happen in these environments. However, there is often a lot of energy diverted to maintaining appearances and playing power games, and this can make the process less efficient.

Innovation in Germany requires planning and organizing a breakthrough

Well-Oiled Machine cultures like Germany, Austria and Switzerland are better suited to formal innovation processes and incremental improvements, rather than dramatic breakthroughs. The cultural need to avoid uncertainty and ambiguity demands discipline in following detailed procedures; therefore, what is more commonly found in organizations are the classical Research & Development departments with full-time experts dedicated to exploring possibilities by following detailed road maps quite strictly. All this leaves little room for undisciplined creativity or unbridled exploration. Yet, it provides a good environment for incremental improvements.

Examples are found in the automobile industry, where improvements in engineering have led German cars to the top global position in reliability and efficiency. In Formula 1 auto racing, often cited as the new frontier where automotive innovations are created and tested, and later incorporated into vehicles for the general public, the Mercedes F1 team has dominated the sport for the past seven years, even though the sport's regulators change the engineering rules every two years, requiring extensive re-design of cars and motors. One can debate whether the innovations introduced by Mercedes are breakthroughs or just incremental improvements, but the fact remains that in a highly competitive and heavily regulated sport their engineers have managed to come up with new ideas in terms of suspension design, power generation and aerodynamics every single year.

These WOM cultures do not lend themselves easily to ad hoc project teams or volunteers working for a cause; they rely on proven experts with full time dedication to following strict procedures. However, systematic research can also lead to breakthroughs (for instance, in the pharmaceutical industry, or in biotechnology) as long as there is a clear mandate and detailed planning in place.

Innovation happens in China, as long as it does not challenge the regime

China have broken records in filing patents for innovations in 2019, surpassing the USA who dominated that field for many years (WIPO, 2020). This has happened because the Chinese government decided a few years ago to stop ignoring intellectual property claims from the US and Europe and start beating them at their own game. That is: they stimulated people to register patents for all the innovations that they were working on, instead of leaving registration aside. They also gave people mandates to innovate.

The combination of high PDI and strong Collectivism (low IDV), plus strong performance orientation (high MAS), low Uncertainty Avoidance and very high flexibility & relativism (as characteristics of high Long-Term Orientation – LTO) translated into a lot of innovations in China. Thanks to that, innovation is growing tremendously in China and is likely to continue, as long as the initiatives do not challenge the political regime and do not cause leaders to lose face.

When leaders announce a mandate for innovation in Family cultures, this can have tremendous impact, just as long as the hierarchy per se is respected. Innovation must be perceived by all as fulfilling a mandate for the leader, rather than challenging that leader's position.

One of the outcomes of this push has been the development of 5G technology for mobile devices and the networks that enable them to operate. The Chinese became so far advanced in this technology that the US had to accuse them of using that technology for spying purposes, in order to stop them from dominating that technology's market. Whether the accusations from the pot calling the kettle black are true or not is besides the point that once there is a mandate to innovate, Family cultures can generate innovation as much as any other culture. Lest we not forget that this mandate does come with restrictions regarding not allowing leaders to lose face.

Innovation in Japan can get you in trouble when you step outside rituals

The rules of the culture game in Japan are complex, and this applies, as well, to the way innovation is managed.

Because Japan has one of the highest Uncertainty Avoidance levels in the world, this does put several restrictions on innovation initiatives. Japan has a very low risk appetite, even more than Germany, for instance, and this is a force for maintaining the status quo. At the same time, the restrictions enforced in every day Japanese life by the rigorous observation of rituals brings with it an appetite for adopting consumer innovations at great speeds. There is a

sort of counterculture in Japanese consumer habits, compensating for the notion that one should always conform to tradition and to the approach of doing business as usual.

If products are presented in a somewhat childish appearance (akin to the Japanese Manga style of big eyes, bright colors and big emotions) then it can be widely accepted as "non-threatening" to the real world of adults conducting serious business engaged in strict rituals.

It is difficult to make dramatic breakthroughs in Japan, because there is a lot of conformism in corporate life. Constant minimal improvements are stimulated abundantly, through the many reincarnations of Quality Management programs (now evolved into Six Sigma) since the 1950's. Incremental improvements were historically shunned in the American culture (not enough confrontation and challenge in those approaches) and so William Edwards Deming's ideas flew away and found fertile ground in the Japanese culture (Walton, 1992). Japan became an industrial powerhouse, notably in automobiles and electronic consumer goods, but also in heavy engineering equipment and trains. All this was achieved over decades of incremental improvements. When you compare the gadgets at an electronics trade show in Japan in 2019 with the kind of products on display 30 years before, the difference is dramatic. However, evolution in these products happened through years of incremental improvements, rather than in a single leap (or breakthrough) causing a revolution.

Sometimes Japanese companies get into financial difficulties in the long run, when the ritualistic and uncertainty avoiding aspects of their corporate cultures cause them to slow down innovation. Sony is an often-mentioned example, and Nissan has been cited often as well. Carlos Ghosn made international headlines at Nissan-Renault for different reasons in the past ten years. First, when he arrived as CEO and created a corporate culture revolution by demanding that the company accelerate their product-development cycle to better compete with the speed of change in American and European manufacturers. He was praised for his success leading Nissan and Renault simultaneously, then went from famous to infamous, incarcerated and accused of fraud and spending the company's money for personal gain. Once again: regardless of whether the accusations are true or not (the case is still in court) there is little doubt that Mr. Ghosn went too far in challenging cultural norms in Japan, especially the one about feigning modesty, and that eventually led to his downfall (Buruma, 2020).

Who has the final say about innovation?

Contest culture pundits are not thrilled by incremental improvements. They constantly criticize Apple, for instance, because it has not created "a breakthrough product" such as the iPhone in more than a decade. On the other hand, Apple has grown to become a behemoth, the largest publicly traded company in the world by market capitalization. And Microsoft, which is the second largest, has not created any breakthrough products since inventing Windows (which is actually an imitation of a pre-existing Apple software application) in the 1990's. And was the iPhone truly a breakthrough, or just a natural evolution of the iPod, which in turn was based on Sony's original Walkman products in the early 1980's?

Innovation is one of those terms that organizations are keen on talking about (Google it and you will get 1.69 billion references). People enjoy new things… but not if they threaten their values (Hofstede, 2003). This restriction fully applies to innovation. It can be fostered in any culture, as long as it is managed in ways that are consistent with those cultures. Therefore, it is only natural that in each culture there will be different ways of fostering and leading innovation, and there is no universal way of managing innovation efforts.

Conclusion

As organizations continue to pursue ways of stimulating innovation within their ranks, they must consider the realities of their existing workplace culture and the culture of the environment in which the company is operating in. The roadmap to innovation does not consist of a single path; rather, there are many different roads to innovation and the more successful are the ones that are consistent with the culture of the respective organization.

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