



A Culture of Innovation the Key to Success

 by Tania de Jong AM

Countering Disruption

In this era of disruption, a culture of innovation is one of the main reasons for the success of many fast growing companies.

Sometimes it feels like the queue of emails, piles of papers and 'to do' lists and not to mention a private life are overwhelming. Who has time for creativity or innovation? It'll just mean more work and more pressure.

Yet creativity is probably just what business needs - a chance for that unique, creative voice to shine, to re-energise, re-invent and re-imagine or create the future.

Accelerating Pace

On almost every important index business is accelerating. The stakes - the financial, social, environmental, and political consequences - are rising in a similar exponential way. Business

must innovate faster in order keep up with the pace of growth. Spending on innovation is an imperative.

The only constant in this world is change. That's what one of world's outstanding leaders and Executive Chairman of the X PRIZE Foundation, Dr Peter Diamandis and world-leading experts and futurists reminded delegates of at "Creative Innovation 2015 Asia Pacific, From Disruption to Sustainable Growth" ("Ci2015").

Dr Diamandis was just one of many global presenters challenging attendees to think about the future, and what an exponential explosion of technological innovation means for the economy, society and for each and every individual.

A Glimpse of the Future

If Ci2015 experts have it right, in even ten years time we'll not only be riding in driver-less cars,

but also looking at a world where machines are not just things but living entities with artificial intelligence starting to rival flesh and blood people. Dr Diamandis pointed out that in a few short years another five billion people would have been connected to the Internet, teeming with new ideas, insights and ways of doing things.

One outcome of this forecast disruption is decreased job security, as an estimated 47% of current middle class jobs will become redundant due to robots and other new technologies.

Within the next decade, as many as 40 percent of today's S&P companies may be gone - disrupted by rapidly advancing technologies and the entrepreneurs adapting quickly to this new environment.

If companies allow themselves to be dominated by bureaucracy and administration rather than creativity



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and innovation, it is inevitable they will suffocate and cease to create and implement strategies for growth.

Looking Back at the Past

Just think back a decade. Who then had heard of Facebook or could have anticipated that cute cat videos could captivate the entire world through You Tube? Who then would have believed that their mobile phone would become the way that most of us would take our happy snaps and transform our culture, and the way the world sees us, through the phenomenon of the selfie? Indeed, in 2005 digital cameras themselves had just supplanted the film technology that had endured for over 150 years. In three years, will smart phones themselves be oh, so yesterday?

Where is Kodak, the company that in the 1880s popularised photography for the masses? It was destroyed by the very digital technology it invented yet failed to see its potential to make its film-based business obsolete. After all, Kodak made its money selling 36 exposure films to customers who might get only one good photo!

Disruption, Disruption, Disruption

Speaker after speaker at Ci2015 drove home the message that large-scale disruption caused by the Internet, technology, robotics and globalisation is the greatest threat to organisations and government in the next five years. But as CEO of ANZ Global Wealth, Joyce Phillips, pointed out, change and innovation also bring great opportunity.

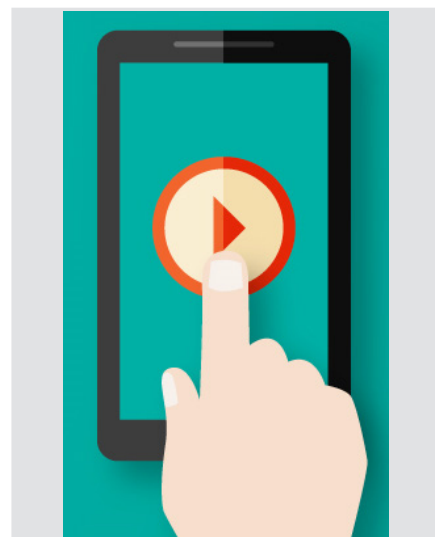
Even the more successful riders of change sometimes miss opportunities too. Nolan Bushnell, founder of Atari, told the conference how in the 1970s he was given the chance by one of his former employees, a bloke he described as intense and prickly, to have a one-third stake of a new start-up company for just \$50,000. The company's name was Apple. The employee's name was Steve Jobs.

Mass disruption is undoubtedly the greatest commercial and cultural threat all organisations will face in the foreseeable future. But since the start of the Industrial Revolution we've lived with it, we've coped with it, we've adapted

to it. Disruption has helped make us what we are.

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They use creative thinking to attack problems of all sizes and innovate new ideas, while many other companies are still afraid of harnessing creativity. Since we live in a business world that is changing so rapidly, it's hard to keep up with the competition.



Creativity as the Answer for Business

Thinking creatively and fostering a culture of innovation is a competitive advantage. Here are ten tips to develop a culture of innovation at your company:

Fuel passion: With a passionate and committed team, a realistic timeline and an aligned purpose, you can accomplish anything.

Know your market: Knowledge is power in business. Stay abreast of what the competition is doing, what the media is saying, and how consumer habits are changing. Learn from other sectors.

Read diverse books and media and continue to learn about the broader challenges and opportunities caused by massive technological disruption across all sectors.

Think outside the box:

Innovation is all about exploiting an observed gap in the market so look at how you can fulfill that gap. Focus on your customers' needs. How can you meet and exceed their expectations? To be the first to market you have to dare to be different!

Stay focused: Be really clear about what you want and how you will get there. Obstacles are the things you see when you have lost sight of your goal. Challenge negative thoughts.

Never give up: As Steve Jobs famously said: "Stay hungry, stay foolish" which means never be satisfied, and always push yourself. Research shows you need at least 50 ideas to get 10 potential projects, of which only two will be successful, so don't be disheartened if your initial ideas aren't a success.

Maximize diversity: Create opportunities for "positive human collisions" to occur. Connect people to others they'd be unlikely to meet. Bring together teams of men and women that are multi-faith, multi-generational and multi-cultural. Opportunities will spark!

Celebrate and reward ideas:

If you want your team to be creative, you need to establish an environment that rewards them for doing so. Creative ideas need to make sense and must be implementable and of value. Ideas without an implementation plan are of little value.

Be courageous and embrace failure:

In most companies, people are so afraid of making mistakes that they don't pursue their dreams. Australia has a very risk-averse culture. Failure is better seen as the First Attempt In Learning. Every great entrepreneur has failed many times on the way to success.

Ask questions and be curious:

Innovators actively explore the environment, challenge status quo and investigate new possibilities. Business should ask questions such as: What if? Why not? What

will be needed to make this work? Who will do it? How much time and budget is required?

Flexible / adaptable: Innovators can handle uncertainty, initiate new projects and are able to adjust the "game plan" as needed. Be prepared to pivot to meet changing circumstances and consumer needs.

Conclusion

It is critical to do some serious crystal ball gazing to work out what communities, organisations and individuals need to manage galloping disruption and opportunities. By thinking more creatively and developing a culture of innovation organisations and communities can make a manageable transition from a state of continuous disruption to a state of sustainable growth.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tania de Jong AM is a leading Australian soprano, inspirational speaker, social entrepreneur, spiritual journey woman and creative innovation catalyst. She founded Creative Universe, Creativity Australia, Music Theatre Australia, Pot-Pourri and The Song Room and works with diverse communities through the 'With One Voice' choir social inclusion programs. She is Founder and Executive Producer of Creative Innovation Global. Tania's TED Talk has sparked international interest. Tania has just released her solo CD Heaven on Earth.