

Before innovation



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We barely manage the basic innovation process, but competitive pressure is already pushing us towards the next level. However, are we aiming at the right target?

Moving beyond innovation

A couple of days ago, there was a posting on the [Club of Amsterdam blog](#) by Simon Jones, Director, Human-Computer Studies Laboratory, University of Amsterdam, titled "[Beyond Innovation](#)".

In this article, Jones claims that, in order to remain competitive, the established economies in Europe have to extend their capabilities "beyond innovation". According to Jones, the traditional formal innovation process is now reasonably well understood and mastered and therefore, no longer delivers sufficient competitive differentiation.

As a result, European organisations have to extend the reach of their innovation capability beyond the traditional innovation paradigm.

The new innovation paradigm

In essence, in this new paradigm solutions will be developed that are the result of the complex interaction of different, often conflicting approaches that address problems based upon different perspectives and heuristics.

This view further builds upon a number of well-known and accepted theories, such as the added value of working with multi-disciplinary project teams, the potential innovation benefits in outsourcing contexts (1) and the more "formal" proof of the benefits of difference, described by Scott E. Page.

In general, there are a number of interesting insights in Jones' article and his viewpoint is aligned with our own thinking.

However, is this the correct target?

Innovation by design

Indeed, the way Jones describes this "beyond innovation" target is as of this is something new, a new way of addressing problems, a non-natural behaviour. That is not what we think.

We think that what Jones describes is very natural, human behaviour already deployed since we started to exist. Only, it is a way of addressing problems that only emerges and only can exist in specific contexts. And, as we already described in "[Innovation by design](#)", this context does not exist and cannot be created



[The Difference](#)
How the Power of Diversity
Creates Better Groups, Firms,
Schools, and Societies
Scott E. Page

within the organisational structure of most companies.

Therefore, we should be a bit more radical in our thinking and focus on the things that come "before" innovation. We must not think too much about how and why we will get more or better innovation. Instead, we must simply assume that innovation will come once we get the context correct.

This context is a very tangible environment that is reasonably well understood. So, in theory, addressing the shortcomings should not be too much of a problem. Unfortunately, we all know that the conflicting agenda's of stakeholders are strong inhibitors for success.

That's the real problem we must tackle and this will not happen unless we are willing to accept some significant changes in the social structure of our society and the way we balance risk and reward.

Will we ever get there?

Very difficult to tell. The only thing we can tell is that, whenever getting there, competitive advantage will be much less important.

(1) Productive Friction, How Difficult Business Partnerships Can Accelerate Innovation, by John Hagel III and John Seely Brown, Harvard Business Review, February 2005

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