



Do we even try? | The Xpragmatic View



The Xpragmatic View #111
 January 25, 2009
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 url: <http://www.xpragma.com/view111.php>

Every organisation is continuously confronted with the dilemma of conflicting interests. Some initiative might help us progress in a given direction, yet it complicates things for other plans that we have. As in life, it is a matter of finding a balance. However, sometimes, we have to accept that certain things simply cannot go together.

In the October issue of the [Harvard Business Review](#), there was an article by Teresa M. Amabile¹ and Mukti Khaire² titled "[Creativity and the Role of the Leader](#)". The article summarizes the various ideas and comments that were collected during a two-day colloquium at the Harvard Business School on the subject of "Creativity, Entrepreneurship, and Organizations of the Future."

The article certainly highlights some very good insights and draws a very complete picture of what a workable management approach might be. However, very little of this is really new.

In general, it is a rephrasing of themes that are already reasonably well known, be it perhaps not very well practised:

- acknowledging that everyone can be an idea contributor;
- making sure that new ideas can find their way through the bureaucracy of the organisation;
- accepting the unavoidability of failures;
- etc.

All of these are very valid points. However, the key insight came at the end of the colloquium when a participant correctly summarised that this all boiled down to the requirement that management must become a "facilitator" of innovation and then asked the 5-point question whether any of today's leaders were really interested in becoming facilitators?

We all know the answer. They aren't. They aren't because it does not fit their personality. Apart from a few exceptions, today's leaders have not reached their top position because they were facilitators. Quite the opposite. Facilitators very rarely make it to the CEO position.

It is all very natural. Everyone understands this. It is the logical consequence of the structure of today's organisations where a higher position not necessarily is a guarantee for a better or a specific competence, yet ALWAYS is a guarantee for a higher level of importance, control and command.

Hierarchy attracts the right type of personalities and in general, these are no facilitator personalities.

Therefore, as long as we cannot remove this burden of hierarchy, our quest for innovation will be a futile battle. The same goes for colloquiums that aim at finding the Holy Grail that will allow squeezing and twisting our behaviour to make it fit in the box that we call the innovative enterprise.

Thinking outside the box.

Do we even try?

¹ Teresa M. Amabile is the Edsel Bryant Ford Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School in Boston.

² Mukti Khaire is an assistant professor at Harvard Business School.

About the author



Marc Buyens is analyst, management consultant and owner of Xpragma. Marc started Xpragma in 1999 after a 20+ years career in the IT sector. Today, he provides advice, training and mentoring services focusing on the intersection of technological evolution, organisational change and business strategy: a messy world of unfulfilled promises.



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