



The act of innovation is both essential to success and largely misunderstood. Dr David Cutler, founder and CEO, The Puzzler Company, a Yamaha Master Educator, a Distinguished Professor at of South Carolina, a member of the Liberty Fellowship and Aspen Global Leadership Network, and author of *The Game of Innovation*, offers an insightful glimpse into who is responsible for driving change and how to best achieve it.

**MYTH
BUSTER**

The truth about innovation

MYTH 1: Innovators are born, not made

Many people mistakenly believe innovators are born, not made. It is as if the heavens above opened up to decree, “Thou shalt be a brilliant innovator!” (And the rest of you? You are destined to a life of average, predictable normalcy . . .).

Every human being possesses the potential to dream big and collaborate creatively. True, some are more naturally inclined to question existing models and imagine alternatives. They have a knack for spotting opportunities where others find only obstacles.

But this aptitude is accessible to anyone. Strategies can be taught. Approaches can be learned. Like reading fluency or playing an instrument, excellence requires technique and practice. Over time, skilled inventors amass an ever-expanding toolbox of tricks to help them generate the remarkable.

Innovation is not just about genetic wiring. Everybody—including you and your team—has the capacity to cultivate this invaluable skill.

MYTH 2: Those who fail to innovate are closed-minded

Frustrated by the sloth-like pace of change that afflicts so many organisations, forward-looking colleagues often assume that lack of progress

stems from close-minded resistance. Those who fail to innovate must be inflexible opponents, little more than stubborn obstructionists responsible for their own mediocrity (and probably, ultimate demise). Because all it takes, this line of reasoning presupposes, is a willingness to try. Just jump in, and poof, the magic happens!

Certainly, there are instances of prickly stakeholders who stonewall any degree of change, no matter how small or necessary. These self-appointed defenders of the status quo are on a quest to thwart evolution at all costs.

But most employees are persuadable. Front row observers to an unpredictable world, they are well aware of the need for growth. They care about organisational success, and are committed to keeping it relevant and sustainable, at least theoretically. Under the right conditions, the vast majority of workers can be willingly transformed into an active army of change agents. The culprit here is not obstinance. Rather, it is a lack of skills, permission, authority, guidance, leadership. To turbo-charge an innovation train, it is necessary to optimise the culture and conditions.

MYTH 3: We are not in the innovation business

Some organisations value breakthrough progress above all else. The whole point is to achieve

game-changing disruption, radical reimagination, extreme differentiation, and then, do it all over again.

But many communities have a different calling. Their identity involves preserving history, maintaining excellence, embracing best practices. Focused on quality control and continuity, the future looks a lot like the past.

That is unfortunate. We live in a world that looks unfavourably upon those who fail to adapt. Factors like new competition, ground-breaking technology, shifting values, and ever-evolving trends ensure that no business, no industry, can be sustained without constant modification. Those who fail to meet the challenge head on are punished decisively with diminished relevance, or even extinction. Nobody is exempt.

Even healthy organisations benefit from creative, entrepreneurial cultures. Non-profits exist to address societal challenges while serving the common good. For profits, strive to break through the clutter while offering fresh value to clients. Many job titles describe a creative problem-to-be-solved: teacher, marketer, fund raiser. In all these cases, extraordinary problem-solving is key to increasing impact and success.

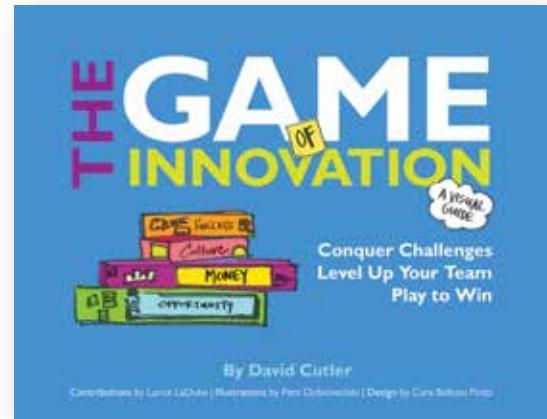
It is difficult to imagine any successful organisation today that is not squarely in the innovation business. Those falling short need to get there soon or face the consequences.

Myth 4: We don't have enough money to innovate

Deep pockets of behemoths like Google and Apple allow them the luxury to fund constant experimentation. But us? We simply don't have the capital. A pervasive belief argues that innovation is expensive, out of reach to those with limited resources.

The opposite may be true. There is often an inverse correlation between money and creativity.

It is difficult to imagine any successful organisation today that is not squarely in the innovation business. Those falling short need to get there soon or face the consequences.



Wealthy practices come to believe that throwing money at any problem is the indisputable remedy. "We need more customers; let's spend more on advertising!" Yet obvious approaches—no matter how well-funded—are unlikely to adequately prevail over today's complex problems, let alone catalyse remarkable results.

Cash-strapped teams, on the other hand, have no choice but to explore low-cost, high-imagination guerilla tactics. As a result, they are more likely to invent radical, buzz-worthy solutions. In fact, if success proves elusive with your current level of funding, consider how the dilemma might be solved with, say, 50 or 75 per cent less.

A lack of resources can be a blessing. Forcing uncommon exploration, it offers a potent key to breakthrough invention.

MYTH 5: Great leaders design innovative solutions

Organisations often hire leaders with the express purpose of driving change. So it is understandable why many come to believe these professionals are responsible for generating big ideas.

But this belief is flawed on multiple levels. For starters, it is unlikely that the boss—or any individual for that matter—will single-handedly invent all the best remedies. Furthermore, it turns out people don't like being told what to do.



© Shutterstock.com

Particularly when proposals are different from what they have always done before. Regardless of merit, top-down mandates are notoriously met with deep scepticism and resistance.

Here is some advice for leaders, and it may sound counter-intuitive: Don't be the idea person. That's not the gig.

Instead, focus energy on setting the narrative. Design and facilitate carefully orchestrated processes—I call them ‘innovation GAMEs’—likely to unearth cutting-edge proposals.

Determine which questions will be asked, in what order, for how long.

Come time to problem-solve, however, give power to the people, the creative geniuses across your community. Empower stakeholders to collaborate closely, dream big, and deliver the extraordinary.

The best GAMEs are built in such a way that no solution is predetermined, yet promising outcomes are almost guaranteed. Better yet,

the experience is likely to cultivate healthy institutional buy-in and pride.

Great leaders are not mad scientists. Rather, they emerge victorious when transforming valued community members into engaged, proactive, innovation champions.

Speaker, author, consultant, and facilitator David Cutler is known for leading immersive “innovation GAMEs.” These powerful, team-based experiences have empowered business, arts, and education communities from around the globe to solve creative challenges while becoming better collaborators. In addition to being founder and CEO of The Puzzler Company, he is also an award-winning, multi-genre musician and Yamaha Master Educator. Cutler is a Distinguished Professor at the University of South Carolina, where he teaches innovation and entrepreneurship, and a member of the Liberty Fellowship and Aspen Global Leadership Network. ■