

10 KEY INNOVATION DRIVERS



Introduction

With every organisation now competing in a global marketplace, trying to seduce super savvy customers & consumers, the need to build innovation capability is now at the centre of the strategic radar. So, when CEOs and executive teams consider what the consequences are of their organisation not being agile enough, they already know the answer. Failure to 'move fast' and in different, disruptive ways means a swift, painful and public death!

21st Century competitive advantage will be delivered not just by 'what' your organisation does but also by 'how' you do it and that means using innovation to develop new business models and different approaches to how you build relationships, interact with customers and become their 'no-brainer' choice. The influences and buying patterns of these 'super savvy' customers are constantly evolving and they now expect, by default, great products and services as standard so it's no longer a point of difference. So, your differentiator needs to go beyond products. It should be 'how' your organisation behaves and 'how' your 'culture of innovation' differentiates you from the competition.

Whilst we can look back on the recent financial crisis and the shifting balance of growth, manufacturing, leadership and power across the globe we do so with the benefit of hindsight. What we don't know yet is what's on the horizon, what does the economy and consumer of tomorrow look and feel like and how we will need to operate and behave in order to thrive.

“We must develop a culture comfortable with operating in an uncertain future!”

John Chambers
CEO, Cisco

With the only certainty about the future being 'uncertainty' an organisation with innovation at its heart, one fundamentally built around bravery, agility, creativity, intelligence, future-orientation and talent is ready to capitalize on whatever comes next. The organisations that are unable to innovate are already missing out on valuable growth opportunities and more importantly, reducing their ability to compete or even survive.

Here's some of my latest thinking on key drivers that will help push the innovation agenda forward in your organisation. These insights are based on the traits of world class organisations and their relentless focus on growth through innovation. It's time to adopt a new mindset and approach to the future, we must pay it some respect and prepare for what it has in store for us and building game-changing innovation capability is the key.

FLUIDITY

With the pace of change gaining momentum day by day, the market you operate in may not exist in the very near future, so 'what's your burning platform? If you don't know this you can't operate with organisation-wide fluidity because you won't know what your next move needs to be. The customers you have today will change their behaviour tomorrow and if you're not in parallel you'll lose them. Build the ability to be agile, fluid and future oriented not fixed on what you have been, once were or still do.

CHAMPIONS

Innovation must be part of corporate strategy if it's to embed into an organisation's culture. To do this, it needs dedicated 'ambassadors' at ground zero. From the top of the organisation right down to the bottom you need passionate 'Innovation Champions' responsible and accountable for driving innovation capability into the very heart of your organisation. Innovation requires different thinking and perspective so make sure your champions represent a diverse cross section of people from every corner of your organisation.

GENERATIONS

So far Gen X has led Gen Y but the tables are rapidly turning. In some organisations Gen Y are already starting to lead Gen X and as we move into Gen Z the challenges associated with this will only accelerate. The organisational support required for such a shift is extensive but critical to driving future innovation and growth. So, don't expect the next generation of leaders to subscribe to the same old structures and rules. They will want to do things in a much flatter, less hierarchical, more collaborative way. It's something I call 'Collaborative Leadership' and it will be key.

LEGACY

I always ask my clients a fundamental question, "what do you really, really want to do? If you closed the door in several years time and someone asks, what did you achieve? What answer do you want to be able to give?" If you're not inspired by wanting to answer that question with anything really cool or game-changing then innovation for you is likely to be more of a position defending mechanism. People want to work for organisations that genuinely believe in something, that want to do something cool, that inspires them. If not, it's just 'work' and your innovation efforts will be proportionate at best.

PERSPECTIVE

As we evolve and change at an ever increasing pace what we knew yesterday isn't necessarily of value today and what we learn today may well be superseded tomorrow. Understanding the rapid evolution of knowledge and information accessibility, the innovation leaders of the future will be knowledge creators and thought leaders not followers. 21st Century competitive advantage means having a perspective, one that's different to your competitors and one that resonates with your customers existing and new.

OPPORTUNITY

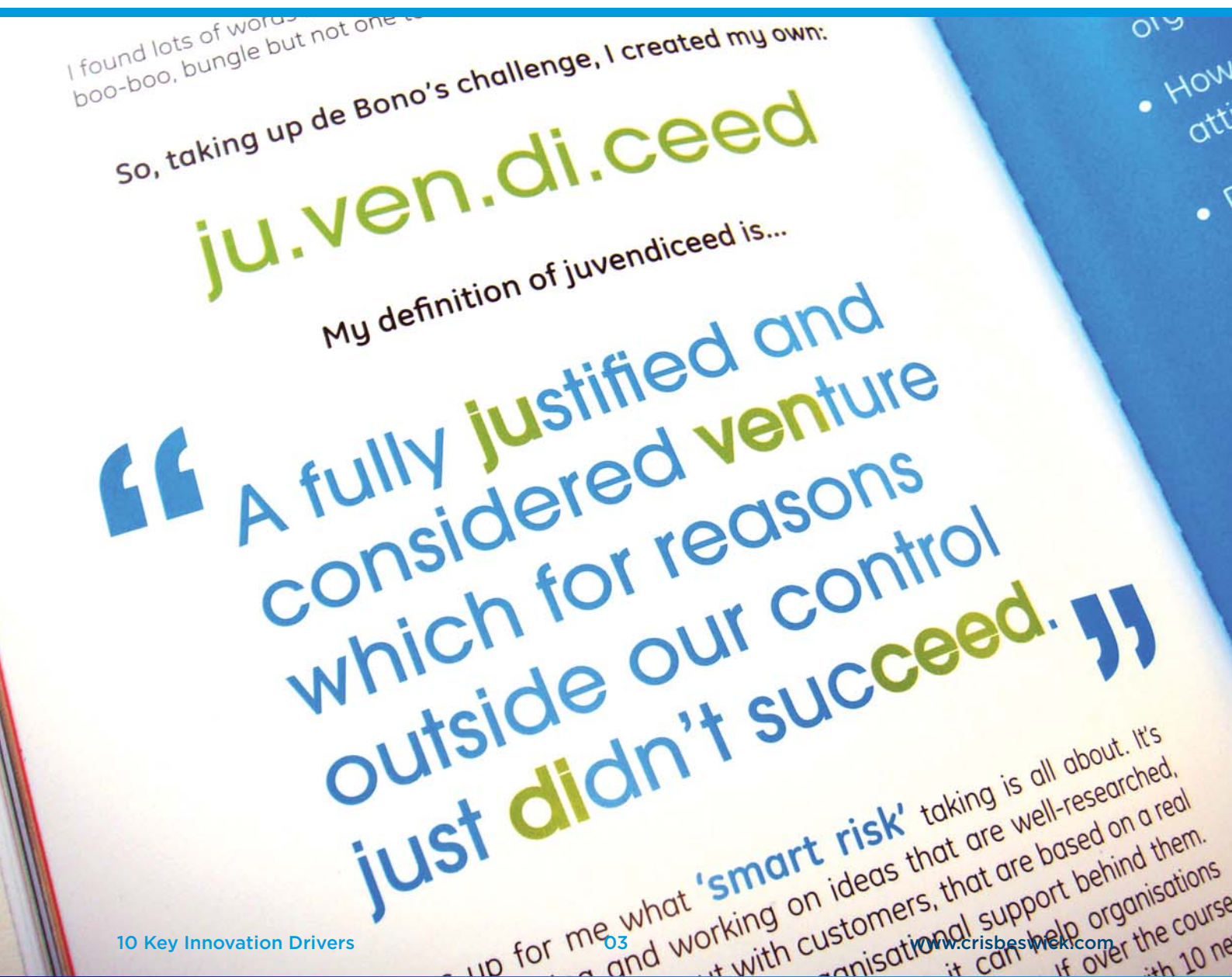
For most organisations the uncertainty about the future becomes a focus for negativity. When we're certain about something it's usually because we're familiar with it. However, in innovation terms that's bad as it means we don't question or look for fresh insight. Why would we, we know all about it right? But, uncertainty is good for innovation because it makes us inquisitive, ask questions and search for deeper insight and that creates opportunity. So, in a world of constant change and uncertainty, we say opportunity abounds.

LANGUAGE

The language used in and around innovation is absolutely critical. The word innovation has been bastardized so much over recent years that there is total confusion about just exactly what it means. So, create a common language around innovation throughout your organisation so that everyone can get on the same page. Communication is key, so if there isn't a buzzword to describe exactly what you mean by something, create one. Here's one from me; when we take a risk and it doesn't work out as expected, don't call it a mistake as that's negative. It's a 'Juvendiceed' and it's something you learn from.

BEHAVIOUR

Innovation is about behaviour and how much an organisation is prepared to change its behaviour directly relates to innovation success. The difference between incremental and radical innovation is about what happens inside the organisation and the culture that exists. Incremental innovation won't change your customers behaviour or yours but radical innovation will. So, if you're not prepared to change your behaviour and your culture the best innovation you can realistically hope for will be incremental at best.



COLLABORATION

Being smart about building your innovation capability is key. You can't hope to do everything on your own, so like any great crime fighting duo or championship team, find partners who share your beliefs and your passion for building something truly different. Knowledge is the greatest commodity so collaborate wisely and seek companies who can genuinely add value and perspective and seek talented people not for 'What' they think but for 'How' they think. The more you collaborate the more you'll be able to capitalize on opportunities that arise in the future.

FOCUS

One thing we can predict about the future is that customers are always likely to have problems and our focus as organisations is to solve them in the most added value way for them and the most profitable way for us. When you look toward the future and become masters of intelligence, anticipating those problems and/or trends becomes easier and it's what will separate the average organisation from the innovation leader. Be brave and focus on becoming the 'trend-setter' not the 'fashion-follower' as it will make you irresistible to customers, you'll become what I call their 'no-brainer choice'.

Conclusion...

If the 21st Century challenge is to build an organisation branded an 'innovation leader' it will be done by relentlessly pursuing the quest to be exceptional. So, start by asking not 'how do we change what we've got?' but 'what do we need to do to shape the future?'.

Good Luck!

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