

# Balancing innovation and continuous improvement

Innovation is a term still gaining momentum across all sectors. It is a wonderful and exciting way to invent new ways to add value for your customers and transform the way your organisation not only works, but thinks.

However, the lack of a framework around some innovation schemes means that organisations can fail to derive the benefits they expect and need. A good framework won't dampen the innovative spirit of your staff, but it will provide you with the conditions you need for success.

Your framework, as a minimum, needs to ensure all innovation projects have a clear driver, and address some opportunity for improvement with the expected benefits outlined. Those benefits could be reduced spend, increased efficiencies, improved customer service, new service offering(s), or increased competitive edge... the list is almost endless. If you can't define a measurable benefit for your innovation project, then you have to question why you should invest resource in the first place?

There are many different approaches and frameworks for innovation out there, you just need to find the right one for your organisation, one that harnesses the power of your greatest asset - your people!

[\\*Google allowed their employees 20% of their week to pursue ideas that interest them - this is how Google Mail came about!](#)

"I define innovation as executing new ideas to create value"

- Tim Kastelle

"Creativity is thinking up new things. Innovation is doing new things"

- Theodore Levitt

"Innovation is change that creates a new dimension of performance"

- Peter Drucker

"Innovation is the creation of something that improves the way we live our lives"

- Barack Obama

"Innovation is applied creativity, the implementation of something fresh and new"

- Ad Esse Consulting

Your framework should also include structured continuous improvement, the idea of making small incremental improvements to how you do your work each and every single day. Innovation and continuous improvement are not mutually exclusive concepts, but actually complement each other.

## Continuous improvement and innovation should run side by side...

Sometimes wrongly seen as contradictory approaches, all too often continuous improvement activity grinds to a halt in business areas that are undertaking innovation projects. This is a mistake. Unless your continuous improvement activity involves a significant financial or resource investment (which it shouldn't) you should continue to make small improvements whilst you reap the wider benefits of innovation.

## Innovation needs continuous improvement to flourish...

No one gets innovation right first time. In fact, we should expect to fail frequently when innovating. As Thomas Edison once said: "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work."

When you find an innovation that works, it still won't be perfect first time. It will require tweaking, or rather continuous improvement, by the people working on the new system, in order for it to become the best it can be.

## Innovation without continuous improvement can lead to staff alienation...

Innovation can often feel like a top-down approach, with change 'happening to' staff. If you ensure that continuous improvement is part of your innovation approach it can allow staff to feel more engaged in change, with a way of addressing any issues resulting from innovation.

## Say hello

Ad Esse have been working in your sector for over 15 years helping organisations to harness the power of creative thinking to design and create better services for you and your customers. If you're interested in developing an improvement framework to fit with your corporate culture, or in transferring continuous improvement and innovation skills into your workforce then [email us](mailto:info@ad-esse.com).