



The Innovation Myth

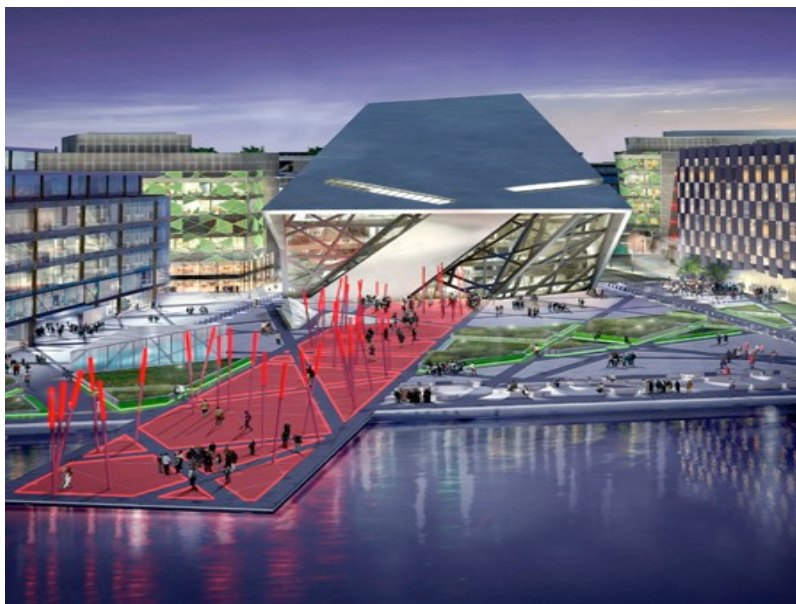
Scatter fairy dust or common sense?

by Paul O'Dea and Emer O'Donnell.

When the Grand Canal Theatre opened in March 2010 in Dublin's docklands, people paid over 100 euros a ticket to see Swan Lake, but despite the recession, the famous Dublin begrudgery wasn't in evidence after the show. None of the usual complaints – uncomfortable seats, bad view of the stage, poor acoustics – were raised. Everyone agreed it was a theatre experience like no other in Dublin.

Whizz-kid Daniel Liebeskind, architect of the Jewish Museum in Berlin and the forthcoming World Trade Center site in New York, designed the Grand Canal Theatre. His name is a byword for innovation. He belongs to that handful of world-renowned creatives, like Steve Jobs, Jeff Bezos, and Stephen Spielberg, who seem to scatter fairy dust over every project.

Innovation, to many, is a magical process. A lot of companies collude, however unconsciously in reserving innovation for an "annual séance" where a handful of self-styled "creative types" nervously gather to conjure up the next big thing.



But what if innovation were stripped of mystery? What if the innovator weren't a mad genius or magician, but a disciplined, observant entrepreneur working through simple steps, making

INSIGHT IN BRIEF

Innovation isn't alchemy but the result of disciplined practices and observances. While some individuals are naturally gifted, anyone can learn the processes to become more creative.

Innovation happens when you act on three fronts: break the status quo, get under the customers' skin, and focus on what it takes to win.

incremental changes that collectively add up to great innovation?

The good news is that even if you're not born with innovation, you can cultivate it. Our experience in working with hundreds of entrepreneurs tells us that the right processes can unlock the innovator in every team. All of the innovations that drive growth result from:

- a passion to break the status quo;
- a forensic ability to get under the customers' skin and;
- figuring out what it takes to win

What if the innovator wasn't a mad genius or magician, but a disciplined observant entrepreneur working through simple steps, making incremental changes that collectively add up to great innovation?

Innovation theatre or common sense

Let's take the Grand Canal Theatre. What's innovative about it? What processes were involved?

The team behind the Grand Canal Theatre broke the status quo by challenging the shared beliefs of what going to the theatre means. What were these beliefs? Traditional theatres, including the world-class theatres of Broadway and the West End, deliver excellently on the performance side, but less on customer experience. The auditoriums are small and poky, with poor acoustics, inadequate bathrooms, and uncomfortable seats with restricted viewing. The belief in Ireland was that theatre was elitist, highbrow, and arty, less about entertainment than cultural duty.

The Grand Canal team sought to get under the skin of potential customers. What could make people who'd ruled themselves out of this market start going to the theatre? What would improve their experience? The team found that an amazing customer experience would involve comfortable seats with unrestricted viewing, excellent acoustics, and an open, inviting foyer to set the tone for a glamorous evening with the emphasis on entertainment.

When it came to building something that would address those needs and win customers, the team turned to the best in the world - Studio Daniel Libeskind has unrivalled competence in building museums and large public spaces. Result: a new performing arts space in Dublin and a whole new cachet of customers who never knew they enjoyed the theatre.

Innovation, whether in a new industry like software, or an old one like the theatre, involves acting on three fronts: breaking

INSIGHT IN ACTION

What are the shared beliefs or accepted ways of doing business in your industry? Are these still in the best interest of customers? Are there emerging trends that make these beliefs less sound? Which of your competitors are acting on these trends? What can you learn from the way other industries developed?

What have you learnt from directly observing customers? Which customers are frustrated with the limitations of existing products and would pay more for better, more rounded products? Which customers are being offered services/products that are too broad and functionally rich for their needs? What markets do you not serve? How significant is the unmet need?

What things do you do better than any other competitor? How can you beat the competition? What is your company uniquely good at? Better than anybody else?

the status quo, getting under the customers' skin, and focusing on what it takes to win.

Break the status quo

What are the shared beliefs or accepted ways of doing business in your industry? How could you challenge these? Are they still in the best interests of customers? If you keep on doing things the same way as everybody else, don't be surprised if the results are disappointing.

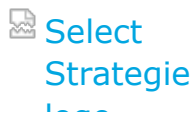
Get under the customers' skin

What can you learn from directly observing your customers? What needs do your customers have that they haven't recognised themselves?

Focus on what it takes to win

What are the things you need to do better than any other competitor? What is your company uniquely good at? Better than anyone else?

Innovation happens when you work on all three fronts together. If one of the world's oldest industries can innovate radically, why can't you? As Drucker said, 'innovation is the specific instrument of entrepreneurship'.



Select Strategies is a boutique consulting practice, which helps companies make growth happen. In our series, *Growth Insights*, we draw on experience from client engagements to look at issues which accelerate or inhibit company growth.

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