

Week 1

So, what, exactly, is 'innovation'? There are many definitions and many interpretations about what the essence of 'innovation' actually is. Some describe it as doing something new with an invention or product that had never been done before, like using certain radio frequencies to break up calcium deposits in patients who have kidney stones. Others say that it's the creation of something all together new like Alexander Graham Bell created the telephone. Still others say it's the combination of two common or known things to make a new thing – like combining radio frequency bands with the telephone to make the wireless cellphone -- the precursor to today's ubiquitous smartphones. There's also a school of thought that says innovation is whatever takes the business and its customers to the next level – “Executing an idea which addresses a specific challenge and achieves value for both the company and customer” (Skillicorn, 2016).

Realistically, in today's business environment most leaders are going to 'innovate' by spotting ways to improve their businesses rather than creating new, never-before-seen products or services. While this is often very exciting to do, these are expensive and risky investments since it's difficult to determine the market value or the public's appetite for your new invention, simply because there's no known market for it ... yet. On the other, more practical hand, evaluating the areas where there are inefficiencies and improving these is also innovation – and, arguably a much more profitable way to go in the long run.

In your program studies you are well acquainted with the foundational elements of business and business operations. There are fundamental aspects that must function efficiently in order to effectively support the success and profitability of the business. Internal processes like human resources, finance, accounting and other organizational operations. There are also the fundamental elements such as the fabric of the organization's culture that are also essential to the effectiveness of the business. Think about what elements and tools are in those task areas, there are data stores, reports, communication methods, people, and a host of other elements, right? So, a savvy leader evaluates the critical aspects of an organization's leverage of any of these tools and considers the impact each element (data, reports, communication) has on the organization.

One of the easiest ways to identify inefficiency is to look at the tasks in one's own role. As an example, if you're the CMO (chief marketing officer) and you can't get an accurate listing of current clients versus potential clients you want to target, then that's a significant inefficiency. So what would you do about that? Some possibilities are having one of your staff members keep a manual spreadsheet that is updated daily based on

the calls logged from your sales team. Ugh! That sounds like a disaster waiting to happen, doesn't it?

Maybe you could have one of your tech savvy staff members create a simple database to capture that information from the sales people as they enter calls into their logs. Hmm... that could be (marginally) better. Or, perhaps you could work with the CIO in the IT area for a possible solution to your problem, and this option is always worth your time to evaluate (Shultz, 2017). Or, what about a software solution like Salesforce to do that for your department? And, take it a step farther, what if the data you need to capture could be fed efficiently to the *other* areas in the organization that rely on it, too? For an immediate problem like this, one doesn't look to create a new tool to address the situation, one looks for something already invented that could be used to facilitate the efficiency one needs.

And that is the critical thing -in business, innovation is really about improving the operational efficiency of its foundations - that is where value is brought because it allows the organization to take advantage of opportunities in the marketplace when they arise, and to improve its own set of core business drivers.

That is innovation -your organization needs a method to improve its efficiency in order to bring value to the business and its customers. And, a known technology solution can bring this to the organization; it isn't imperative to create something that's never been seen before – it's only imperative that the solution brings value to the organization and its customers. Period.

References

Shultz, N. (October 31, 2017). [CFO & CIO partnership: How to unite for competitive advantage](#)

[\(Links to an external site.\)](#)

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Skillicorn, N. (2016). [What is innovation? 15 experts share their innovation definition](#)

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