Week 2

In last week's lecture, we talked about innovation and the various definitions that are given to the concept. Last week's discussion centered around innovation as the continuous improvement of an organization for the benefit of its employees and its customers. To continue discussion from last week's lecture, let's look at another aspect of being innovative.

Last week we examined the core aspects of an organization, things like HR, finance, and the other foundational business elements, and how to create efficiencies in those areas by considering the problems that one observes in processes. Consider now another aspect of being innovative – that being thinking outside the box, for lack of a better description. Keep in mind, too, that there's lots of ambiguity inherent in nearly all innovation, and innovation is almost always related to intangible and often unknown benefits to those who might use them in the future.

You're probably asking, 'What does that mean to me?' So, this is the question that you have to continually ask yourself along with asking the same question of others around you – 'What if we could ….[blank]?' And fill in the blank. The essential aspect of this question is *not* to get stuck in assigning realistic, or even possible, ideas in that blank – innovation should push the boundaries of what we know is 'true' today.

Why? By assigning things that we already know about, such as products, processes, and solutions, we are immediately limiting our vision to other possibilities – we are necessarily eliminating other possibilities from consideration. "Thinking outside the box" is such a trite and overused phrase – however, it does give one the general sense that there are no bounds to what one could conceive. Moreover, this is the essential concept to keep in mind – no bounds.

Why is this important? In your role as, say, a CFO, a CMO, or even the CEO, it's not up to you to figure out *how* something gets done or is implemented or executed – your job is to come up with the ideas for increasing efficacy and efficiency in the organization. So, if you limit yourself to what you know about technology, or about products or processes, or any of those other *known* aspects – you will get bogged down in details that are essentially irrelevant to answering the question you have – and that will be limiting the possibilities for realizing your goals.

What you have to keep in mind here, is that the "how" of executing the ideas that you might come up with are usually not on your plate – chances are, the actual *execution* for those ideas will be coming from other areas in your organization, such as somewhere in IT. Like any good innovator, you don't need to know *how* the execution will get done –

you just need to come up with the ideas – those are the 'what if's' -- and let others see what is possible. In other words, you suggest ideas for what needs to happen to move the organization forward. By partnering with your peers across the organization, you can posit your ideas, and very often you will get realistic ways to realize your goals (Shultz, 2017).

One thing to remember – your ideas will need real partnership from your peers in the organization, so nurturing those relationships early on is a wise approach. You aren't the CIO, so you will need that person's help to realize your goals. You'll also need to be able to convince the CEO that your idea for innovation is worth the cost, the risk, and the effort of getting it done. Part of that convincing will often require including intangible elements in your justification for your CEO.

Intangibles are part of every organization, such as employee morale, employee satisfaction, customer goodwill, reputation, organizational efficiency gains through various processes, will need to have a *value*. Often there are no ROI numbers associated with any of these intangibles. So, you have to be able to justify, if not necessarily quantify, the value that these intangibles bring to the organization.

You will need to learn how to describe those in a narrative format in a convincing way so that others, like the CEO, accept your logic in spite of the lack of hard numbers. You have to learn to think in abstract ways and intangible concepts and be able to explain and justify your logic for including these as support for your ideas. You also have to be willing to step outside the usual constraints of hard numbers and measurable bottom-line results – in other words, avoid the limitations of the 'Department of No' and think outside the box.

Reference

Shultz, N. (October 31, 2017). [CFO & CIO partnership: How to unite for competitive advantage](https://www.blackline.com/blog/process-change-management/cfo-cio-partnership/). *Blackline Magazine.* https://www.blackline.com/blog/process-change-management/cfo-cio-partnership/