

ideas

original perspectives on life and
business from leading thinkers

Volume no 2

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“A mind, once stretched by a new idea, never regains its original dimensions”

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

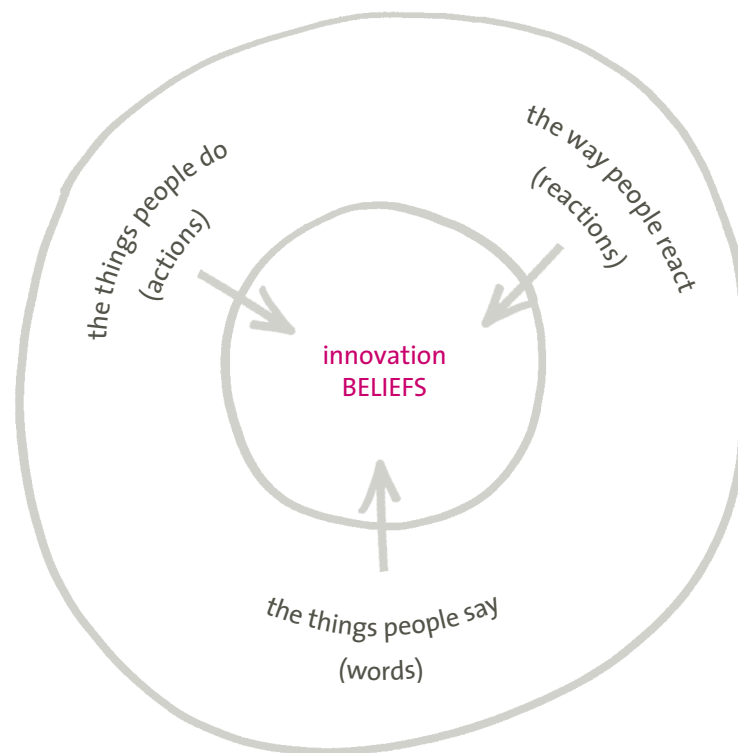
“Innovative organisations are good at accessing human ingenuity. When you establish the right environment, ideas flow freely.”

Build a creativity culture! Without the belief that innovation and creativity are important and that ideas have value, your people will hold back or only offer ‘safe’ ideas.

innovation begins with belief

SHELLEY DUNSTONE

THE STRUCTURE OF A CREATIVE CULTURE



'Innovation' is increasingly finding its way into organisational values statements. Innovation produces competitive advantage. It enables businesses to differentiate themselves from their competitors, increase market share, enter new markets and introduce new or improved products or services. In this competitive world, most things can be copied. But one thing that cannot be copied is a culture of innovation – your ability to innovate continuously. A commitment to innovation opens your eyes to a greater range of possibilities and opportunities.

Simply stating that a business values innovation is not enough. To increase an organisation's innovation capability requires culture change. The key to building a creative culture is to build positive beliefs about innovation. Every day the wheels of business turn. Like the hub of a wheel, belief is central to, and supports, the innovation process.

WHAT BELIEFS ARE HELPFUL?

To build a culture of innovation, both leaders and employees need to believe that:

- a constant flow of new ideas is essential to business success
- it is part of their job to think creatively
- the possibilities are unlimited
- their ideas are worthy of attention
- someone will take them seriously when they offer a suggestion
- their ideas will be valued
- it is worth making the effort.

It cannot automatically be assumed that people hold these beliefs. The beliefs that people bring to work are many and varied.

Innovation produces competitive advantage.
It enables businesses to differentiate themselves
from their competitors...

WHAT BELIEFS ARE UNHELPFUL?

People could actually be thinking:

- 'We're doing fine as we are.'
- 'I'm too busy to deal with this rubbish.'
- 'If it hasn't been done before now, there must be a good reason why not.'
- 'It's better to fly under the radar.'
- 'It's safer to look wise and say nothing.'
- 'We've got more important things to do.'
- 'I shouldn't make a suggestion if I haven't thought it through.'
- 'If I put up an idea I'm just making extra work for myself.'
- 'Let's just find a quick solution and move onto the next thing.'
- 'My idea isn't very impressive.'
- 'It's not my area – I'll leave this to the experts.'
- 'I will feel embarrassed if I make a mistake.'

These unspoken thoughts reflect beliefs acquired over a lifetime. These may or may not be objectively true, but they influence people's behaviour. And because most beliefs are deeply embedded in the subconscious, they cannot be changed overnight. The human mind finds it very hard to distinguish between belief and reality. People need help to become aware of and to modify their beliefs.

Our beliefs are a product of our experiences while growing up, from family, from education, from peers and from ethnic culture. When we enter the workforce we add a further set of beliefs, based on our interpretation of the appropriate way to behave, and the feedback we receive on our behaviour.

People are all different. Some are assertive and believe that their ideas demand attention; others are compliant, defer to authority or look to others for direction. As we grow up, we learn that some people are good at art, music or humour, others at sport, and others at schoolwork. Once we have an image of ourselves as 'analytical, not creative', it tends to stick. It's easy to think that these skills

are mutually exclusive. People working in 'serious' businesses pride themselves on being sensible and avoiding risk; their reputation is built on being wise. They attach importance to being 'right', and to come out with an idea that might be seen as a bit silly would feel very uncomfortable to them.

Work can sometimes seem like an extension of the schoolyard, and in any organisation collective beliefs develop about the way things 'should' be done. Someone who seems a little eccentric and 'not like us' is treated differently, and putting up a 'funny idea' can tag us as being a bit odd. To be negatively judged by peers is one of the greatest human fears. Early humans had to stick together in groups for protection and if you fell out of favour with your tribe, you would be abandoned to the woolly mammoths. The mammoths may be gone, but we still don't want to risk being kicked out of the group. This leads to everyone operating within 'safe' parameters.

People often think they have to hit upon 'the big idea', and so they will hold back if their idea is not Earth-shattering. Yet, offbeat observations, naïve questions and tiny ideas are the seeds from which big ideas grow. It is unrealistic to expect individuals to come up with workable, fully-fledged ideas all by themselves.

Because beliefs are invisible, we have to look for clues. Beliefs show up in what people say, the way they act and the way they react.

WORDS

How often do you engage in true brainstorming, where judgment is suspended? Do people think aloud, daring to voice new possibilities? Are people asking interesting questions?

Do people make only very serious and well-considered suggestions? Creative thinking requires enthusiasm and a naïve approach to questioning the status quo. We miss out on lots of ideas because we feel we have to be serious and business-like.

Is there lots of silence? If people are not saying much, they are keeping their ideas to themselves. A culture of innovation requires people to be generous with ideas. The best ideas could be the ones they are holding back.

Lateral thinking techniques can work well, but only if they are entered into in the right spirit. Without belief in the value of these techniques, people just go through the motions rather than engaging fully in the process.

ACTIONS

What action do you take to expose your mind to new ideas and possibilities?

How readily and generously do people offer to collaborate? Do they exercise initiative? How enthusiastically do they agree to trial a new idea? How willing are they to break away from tradition and try something new? Are people engaging in the process with enthusiasm? What beliefs does their body language communicate?

REACTIONS

Do people laugh when someone suggests something a bit unusual, or do they greet the idea with curiosity? To get a really good idea you need many to select from; how patient are people with the process?

Some 'institutional reactions' have been formalised into systems. What do these systems reveal about the organisation's collective beliefs? Do the systems help or hinder innovation? Do people accept or challenge the systems? How do the leaders react when people take action on their own initiative?

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BELIEFS AT GOOGLE

Google is the ultimate innovation machine. In just a few years it has grown from an eccentric student project to a huge business with global domination. Google keeps coming up with all kinds of new services and goods to offer. It can do just about anything for you. You can explore the surface of the moon or buy Google bike shorts or baby suits. Before long you'll be able to 'Google your genes' with a new genetic database.

The key to Google's success has been the beliefs of its founders, Larry Page and Sergey Brin. They hold a strong belief in possibility. Their philosophy is, 'Have a healthy disregard for the impossible'. Google began with Page's crazy idea to download the entire World Wide Web onto his computer. This action seemed completely pointless at the time, but it reveals his belief in the value of experimentation.

They believe that work should be fascinating. They allow their employees to spend one day per week exploring ideas that interest them. They expect people to develop their own passions and pursue them. They believe that in order to have success, you must first have a lot of failures, so Google takes action with a lot of small experimental projects. They believe that work should be fun, and they provide a fun and energising working environment. When someone comes up with a new idea, people react with excitement and a brainstorming session. People post their ideas on the intranet and others come forward to collaborate.

(Source: *The Google Story* [revised edition, 2006]
David A. Vise, Bantam Dell Publishing Group)

Every business has its own unique set of beliefs, because it is made up of unique individuals. The challenge is to develop new, positive beliefs that drive innovation.

People's words, actions and reactions provide clues to their beliefs. With encouragement, positive beliefs can be developed. By recognising this, and carefully choosing your own words, actions and reactions, you can build belief and help people to give freely of their ingenuity.☺

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Steven Di Pietro

STEVEN identifies the stage of service development and purpose for whole organisations, right down to individuals within the organisation. On a personal level, he helps people identify their personal purpose and ways to give meaning to their lives.

Steven believes it's all about how we interact with the outside world – or in other words, service. The value we create is maximised where service and purpose meet.

Steven spent more than 15 years in finance before establishing a customer service measurement company that monitors service in some of Australia's best-known organisations through activities such as mystery shopping.

He now travels Australia showing companies and individuals how to provide better service at less cost. His first book, *Service with Purpose – How to give better service at less cost*, will be available soon.

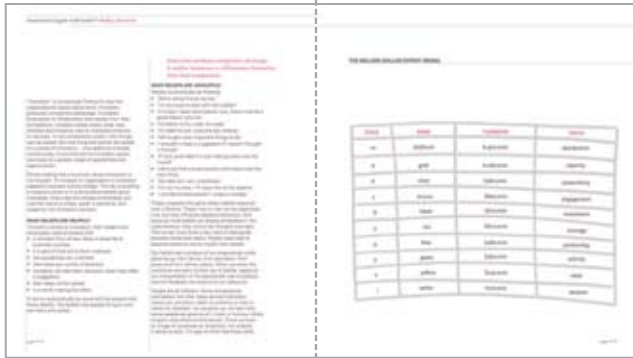


Shelley Durstone

SHELLEY takes people beyond good ideas to great ones! She establishes an environment in which people feel comfortable to share their thoughts and uses thought-provoking questions to generate high-quality conversation.

With a unique blend of experience in law, marketing, training, recruitment and consulting, Shelley brings a wide-ranging mix of rigorous thinking and creativity to every client's challenge. She has highly developed communication and investigative skills, and quickly comes to grips with industry issues.

Clients who like to work with Shelley are those who want to constantly improve, get the best from their people and expand the range of possibilities available to them.



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Or in other words - each of our **Thought Leaders** provides the “stuff” that makes a point and paints the picture. This methodology is unique to the Thought Leaders™ process and central to the Expert Development Programs that we run.

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