



The Innovation wheel

by a head of global supply

How to liberate the creative potential of a group that had built its success and reputation on analytical rigour and reliable delivery to enable us to move from a strategy of rationalization to one of growth? This was the question I and my leadership team faced.

The Innovation wheel provided a rational framework that we could connect to as we played with a more intuitive approach. We could see the sequencing of the steps and the focus on delivery, but it also gave us a container in which we could comfortably experiment.

The key challenge was to let go of our pre-judgements. Everyone came in with a plan of what needed doing and just wanted to get on and do 'stuff'. That was what we were good at, but also what got in the way! The crafting of a real breakthrough question was crucial. The first versions were always an objective dressed up as a question. It was uncomfortable for us to create a question that we did not know the answer to – that was not what was expected of leaders!

It was really only on the third project that we got close to understanding how to use the whole wheel effectively:

- How to create the right environment to allow people to slow down at the start and open their minds
- How to craft and deliver a brief that was challenging and inspiring but also specific and focused
- How to select the right leader and sponsor to deliver the brief with skill, energy and purpose
- How to balance deep intuitive insight with the right level of analytical rigour and testing
- How to ensure that the process did not dominate but simply enabled the answer to emerge
- How to use the sponsor to give guidance, steering and resources to the team to ensure that the leadership intent was delivered
- How to use the council to really test the insights and proposals and have the courage to stop the project when necessary

The Innovation wheel provided a vehicle to shift the dominant deterministic approach to a more innovative one. Its use on a few large, highly visible projects had an impact that went well beyond those projects through the people it involved or touched. It has now started to become simply part of how we do our work.

