



OPENING DOORS

The future is unfolding NOW and HERE and the only way to get to the future first is to out-innovate the competition and create new markets of opportunity. **Dr Nick Udall** explores eight doorways for profound, inspired innovation.

In a world where market differentiation and product lifecycles are increasingly measured in months and not decades, entrepreneurship – rather than stewardship, will capture tomorrow's riches. Surviving, let alone thriving, depends not upon buffing up assets, relying on existing market competence, hammering down costs, re-structuring or re-engineering, but upon re-vitalising what you stand for, questioning your orthodoxy, and learning to unlock the necessary passions and imaginations (in both your internal and external customers) to leap into the future.

The space between

The most potent source of future value lies not in brainstorming, analysis or prediction, but in the 'space between'; different teams, departments and organisations, products and services, brands and customers, intellectual capital and creative capital, today and tomorrow, you and me? How can you harness the creative potential of the space between? Start with the ultimate innovation question:

where does the future start in your business?

At the top of the tree, the Executive Board are legally responsible for the future of the business. While they are a hierarchy of power, they are unlikely to be the hierarchy of imagination (after all CEO's tend to be ex-accountants!) this, lying throughout the organisation. Marketing departments often attempt to 'own the future', usually at the frustration of every other person with a pulse in the organisation, but marketing as we have known it, is dead, a victim of its own customer-centred orthodoxy. R&D seeks out and occasionally creates new technology, identifies future trends and invests in forecasting - but you can't predict the future. And strategy? Unfortunately, you do not have the luxury of time to plan and then implement.

Hold the questions

So, where does the future start in your business? This is more of a tricky question than it may seem. If you can answer this question, you are probably in trouble. Likewise, if you can't answer this question or this question does not mean anything to you, you are also in trouble. Sound like a lose/lose scenario – but hold on! We have all been conditioned to answer questions.

Indeed as soon as organisations are asked a question, they desperately try and answer it. And when you answer, you stop learning and stop being curious. Instead, suspend your disbelief and try and hold the question, feel it, question it, be it.

By holding the question, more questions will arise. If you explore the space between, behind and before these new questions a host of guiding principles and actions will emerge.

Having held this question myself for the last ten years, 8 doorways have emerged which enable businesses to get to the future faster, if not first. ways with skill and at will.

To open the doorways 'hold' the various questions i.e. hold the questions up in front of your mind and play with the creative spaces between the words, and between the questions. These questions are not ponderings, but quests to action.

How can you and your company out-innovate the company and get to the future first?

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Doorway 1: Pioneering business purpose

What is your unique business purpose (beyond profit) that energises the hearts and minds of your people, your customers and your future market opportunities?

We live in a real time world of perfect markets and total competition. There are very few products, services, technologies, pools of knowledge or business processes that are not readily available to everyone. Yet, it is increasingly difficult, and of course imperative, to differentiate yourself. You can only 'stand out', if you 'stand for' something.

Moreover, everyone else is re-focusing, re-inventing, re-designing, re-engineering and re-organising. The only thing to do is to stop competing, stop fighting for a larger slice of the pie. True competitiveness comes from not competing. Bake a new pie! Bake a pie with your name on it. Bake a pie from your unique ingredients.

Doorway 2: Visioning

How are you working with the creative tension between today and tomorrow?

A organisational vision is not a marketing slogan plastered on mugs and t-shirts, nor is it a mission statement framed gloriously at reception or in an entrance hall. A vision cannot be reduced to words. A vision is visual. It creates pictures in the mind which pull people into their future. A sensational vision can activate and harness the imagination, experimentation and agility of your whole organisa-

tion. Together, purpose and vision become catalysts for health and wealth creation – where wealth flows directly from innovation, not optimism.

Doorway 3: Leading

How are you leading people into the future?

Stop minimising, start maximising! You cannot shrink to greatness. The role of leadership in this new age is to create environments that can release people to think, say and do new things. Leading the future will focus on context more than content, releasing the capacity for creativity, innovation and self-organisation – and where trust, truth and timing will become central qualities. Creative leaders need to produce uncertainty, challenge people and love experimentation. Fail faster to succeed sooner!

Doorway 4: Creating

How are you turning your intellectual capital into creative capital?

All modern companies compete on knowledge. But knowledge is perishable. Whilst many companies have accumulated mountains of intellectual capital, profound innovation comes from exploring the unknown. Innovative businesses show us what was not. They shape our perception of what could be. Innovation is about creation, not adaptation.

Doorway 5: Branding

What is behind and in front of your brand presence?

Forget forecasting and focus groups. Whilst the current chant echoing around every company is that you must be

customer focused, customer centred, customer led - you cannot expect the customer to think the unthinkable. That's your job. Real innovation sometimes means firing customers. The key is to explore the brand space between you and the customer, between your current and future markets. Face up to the truth: the brand not the CEO runs the company. Your brand has the unique ability to put the world into creative relationship with you, rather than you constantly bending to the world.

Your brand breathes life into your purpose, and visa versa. Together they enable the business to leap into the future with integrity - for today's transparent markets will undress the unscrupulous at the speed of light.

Doorway 6: Designing

How are you harnessing the value between your tangible and intangible assets?

Everything has form. If it has form, it has meaning. Without form there is no way of generating new wealth. If your company is not interested in design it is meaningless. The future revolves around design: designing perceptions of opportunity, designing new ways of delighting customers, designing new ways of working, designing new products and services. But what about the space between products and services – or as I read somewhere recently: serducts and provices. We now live in the fusion of the global village, where the key to new value is working with multiplication rather than addition – creating unique

bundled offers which are difficult to unbundle.

Doorway 7: Organising

How are you organising your people around an inspiring purpose beyond profit?

The main task of the company is no longer to employ but to be great organisers. Organisers offer creative spaces and creative opportunities, rather than jobs. In the organising paradigm nothing is given. It is a temporary, potent and unstable fusion of ideas, people and other resources. Risk, dynamism and the constant exchange of value are the driving forces. The winner will be the company that is able to organise itself in the most inspirational and innovative ways.

Doorway 8: Learning

How can you activate the space between what you know and what you don't know?

Employee education is growing 10,000% faster than academia. Yet, the problem with most businesses is not that they know too little, but that they don't know what they don't know. We have been conditioned to focus on the destination rather than the journey. Today, it is more likely that information about the journey is more valuable than arriving at the destination.

So, where does the future start in your business...?