

Inspiring-Innovation™

This paper introduces an open-systems approach to the new business of business and the new business of design, whereby process, product and person influence each other in all directions. In this sense, inspiring-innovation™ is a creative opportunity for an organisation to get to know itself, as well as others to get to know the organisation.

A successful business is not just in business to survive but to thrive. Depending upon the history, memory and experience of an organisation, it will sit somewhere on a meaningful continuum where survival (usually economic) is at one end and realisation of creative potential is at the other.

Organisations are simply groups of people who supply through product or service, other people. Organisations are run by people for people. An organisation of people can never (ontologically) be the same as another. Even if organisations were to share the exact same work force, the agent or purpose which binds them together is its differentiation. This uniqueness gives an organisation the power to create. Its very existence relies on its ability to stand out from everyone else. Organisations are therefore in their essence meaningful, whether that manifests itself through the mediation of a physical, social, intellectual, emotional or spiritual offer.

Discovering and harnessing an organisation's uniqueness, by aligning the development of its people and processes with the development of its products and services, is fast becoming a central strategy for ensuring survival and moving confidently towards living an organisation's shared aspirations. It is the premise of this paper that inspiring-innovation™ is a powerful and creative opportunity for enabling an organisation to get to know itself i.e. its creative uniqueness, as well as enabling others, in a more conventional sense, to get to know the organisation e.g., through customer centred branding, the invention of new and emerging markets, and shifting patterns of customer choice.

The aim of this paper is to point to some emerging principles and actions of inspiring-innovation™. The focus is on the systemic and developmental nature of inspiring-innovation™, whilst the reader is invited to close the ambiguous gap between theory and practice.

The new business of business

Innovation is the reproduction of creative ideas and inventions on a meaningful scale and within cost effective

parameters (Senge, 1992). Innovation is undoubtedly central to business survival. Yet, the average life span of an organisation is only between 40 and 50 years (Kim, 1995) - one and a half working generations. To stand out in a world of rapid, relentless and unsettling change is a constant challenge.

Today, the ultimate developmental question for an organisation to ask itself is no longer how do we innovate? But, why do we innovate? This encourages an organisation to ask two further questions: What does it want? How will it know when it has got it? These two questions raise issues related to the inspiration of an organisation e.g., its awareness and understanding of its unique purpose (or reason to exist), and the importance of co-creating a shared vision of its desired future. The problem is either organisations do not know how-to discover their uniqueness, or they are unable to creatively harness their uniqueness. This in turn addresses the creativity of an organisation - its ability to actualise its inspiration. This is ever more tricky as we have reached a point in history where traditional and modern sources of meaning are eroding and where the inspiration and creativity of an organisation are inhibited by an array of socio-cultural assumptions (Harman, 1997). These include: materialism (which denies the reality of a living universe), reductionism (which fosters experiences of fragmentation and disassociation), positivism (which shrinks our experience of the world to our five senses), objectivism (which distances us from subjective experience and from building relationships with others, the world and with ourselves), hyper-individualism (which creates consumer cultures and undermines caring, connectedness and community), and economic values (where everything is viewed in monetary terms and discounts the future of any experiences which cannot be quantified and commodified). These assumptions affect how we work and play. We are therefore faced with two socio-cultural challenges: to hospice the death of ways of working which no longer work; and, to midwife the birth of more creative, nourishing, authentic, open and vital futures (Hurley, 1997).

To this effect, we are already witnessing a social and cultural transition with the emergence of a new Integral Culture, a new constructive synthesis of Traditionalism and Modernism (Ray, 1996). The Cultural Creatives who are the bearers of this Integral Culture, by their very nature operate at the cutting edge of change, and share an intimate web of humanistic values. This includes a

desire to approach life as a creative work. Similarly, organisations need to learn how to infuse the work place with more creativity, passion and playfulness. Not to be personally nourished by work, which takes up 60% of our lives, is no longer a realistic payoff (Leider, 1998).

Integral Culture is inspired, encouraged and supported by the advances in the New Sciences of quantum physics, holistic biology, and complexity and chaos theory, with their discoveries of non-locality, ecological interdependence, and self-organising systems. Our understanding of the world in which we live and work is radically transforming. New science and new technology is dramatically changing society.

To address this new and growing community of inner directeds (Mitchell, 1997) business is also having to transform, such that the new business of business is to play a creative role in developing vital cultures and contributing to societal learning. The responsibility is inescapable, for business touches everyone. Successful businesses of the future will learn to not only anticipate, but champion, these changes. This requires more than just incremental change in how organisations presently think, learn and create, but whole system step-change.

Inspiring-innovation

In the metaphoric sense in which this term is used, I refer to the potential of changing inspiration into innovative - and visa versa. In this sense, inspiring-innovation™ is a developmental opportunity to align and harness the creative potential of not only an organisation's products and services but also its people and processes. This plural (both/and rather than either/or) ambition requires a creative leap, to step out of a system of work which no longer works, to one which values the creative spirit, purpose and vision of an organisation. Inspiring-innovation™ plays a vital role in aligning the I-ness of every internal and external customer, and harnessing the we-ness of an organisation as an organic system. Unlike innovation for the sake of innovation which usually establishes a precedent for internal conflict and confrontation and external confusion and self-interest, inspiring-innovation™ is generated through a systemic approach which gets to the heart of an organisation's uniqueness. The inspiration, creativity and design dimensions of an organisation are thereby intimately interconnected in a strategic and vital manner (see figure 1).

An organisation, as an organic system, shares similar phenomeno-logical and developmental characteristics with our own individual inspiration and creativity. For example, our own inspirational experiences have a raw-ness or qualia. Qualia are qualities of the mind which are

elementary in their nature e.g., the painful-ness of pain, the blue-ness of blue, or the heavi-ness quale of our own physical presence in the world. It has been suggested that qualia are not things but processes, which resonates with our own intimate experience of a stream of conscious-ness. Similarly, discovering and harnessing the unique-ness of an organisation creates a clear, forward sense of flowing time and meaning.

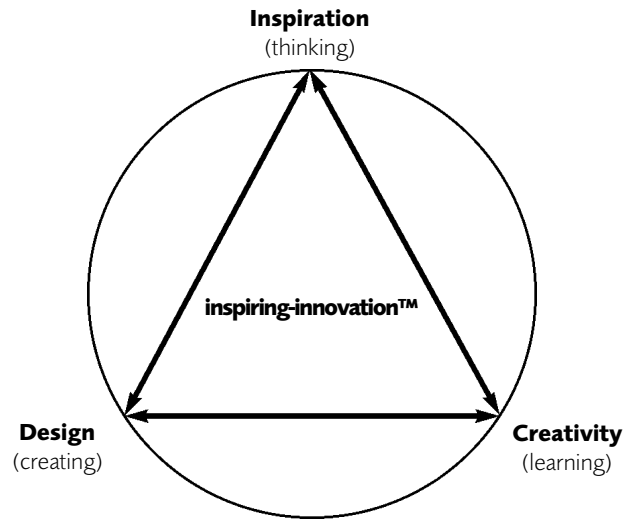


Figure 1. Inspiring-innovation™

In turn, creativity emerges from inspiration - such that the essence of a creative individual/community is its ability to get to know itself (Meyerson, 1997) - harnessing the creative tension between current reality and a desired reality. Mastery of this creative tension leads to a fundamental shift in our whole position towards reality, where current reality becomes an ally and not an enemy. By unfolding the responsibility of being here in the world, an organisation is able to establish what it knows from what it does not know. Learning and development occurs along this boundary between known and unknown (see figure 2). The higher and more generative the learning, the greater an organisation's capacity to take meaningful, rewarding and strategic leaps out of their comfort zone and into the unknown (Benson, 1991).

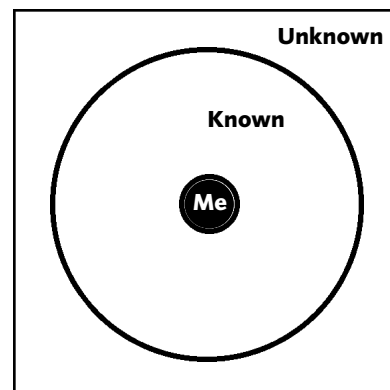


Figure 2. Organisational comfort zone

Rather than rely on words and illustrations, inspiring-innovation™ is also an opportunity to animate a shared vision. Whilst the new business of business is to nourish life, the new and emergent business of design is to mediate this nourishment. By creating interventions (whether product or service based) that maximise learning, encourage vitality and promote a clarity of purpose, inspiring-innovation™ offers glimpses of living and experiencing the future. Inspiring-innovation™ is therefore an ideal vehicle for replenishing and revitalising an organisation's vision, and for an organisation to replenish and revitalise society. New Product Innovation naturally emerges as an organisation closes the dialogic (free flow of meaning, Bohm, 1987) gap between the here and now, and possible futures. The disciplines of Organisational Development (OD) and Organisational Transformation (OT) support and facilitate the human dimension of this type of development where there is a genuine commitment to relationships (e.g., trust & leadership), integrity, continuous renewal, wholeness and open-systems.

Aligning and harnessing the flow of meaning IN an organisation

Open-systems theory suggest that all things somehow, somehow, link up and influence each other in all directions (Bertalanffy, 1950). This is true in the micro sense when we observe the quantum nature of subatomic wave/particles, and in the macro sense when we discovered the self-organising nature of the universe (Laszlo, 1996).

Like a quantum wave, whereby a flow of meaning resonates through space-time, an organisational vision is like a field of resonating energy aligning the experiences and actions of the work force towards a meaningful vision of the future (see figure 3). In a field filled space there are no unimportant players (Wheatley, 1992). Fields, although invisible, bring with them the wondrous capacity to turn inspiration into innovation.

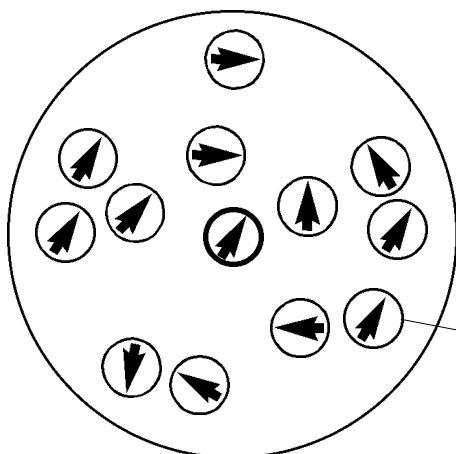


Figure 3a.
An unaligned, closed organisation

Individual uniqueness
not valued and harnessed

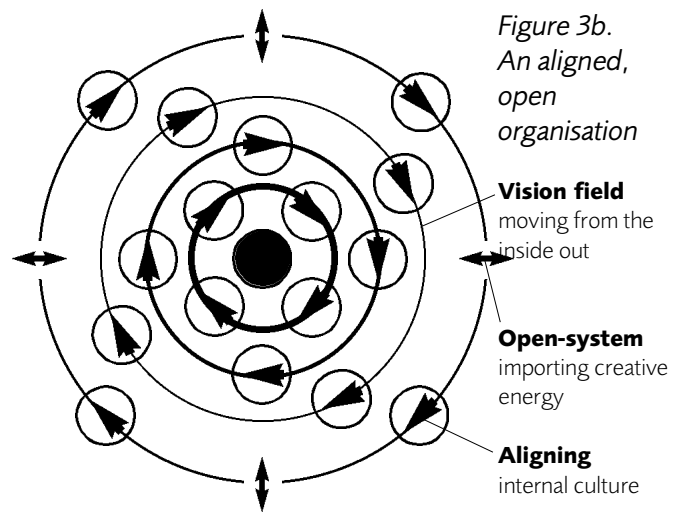


Figure 3b.
An aligned, open organisation

Vision field
moving from the inside out

Open-system
importing creative energy

Aligning
internal culture

The key to renewing creative energy beyond its initial inertia, is an organisation's ability to feel outside the system - to be self-organising, living and open. This is in contrast to a closed system which is unable to interchange energy with its surroundings. Whatever energy it started with will ultimately be used up. Closed organisations move from order and contentment, to chaos and denial. Open organisations move from chaos and confusion, to order and renewal (Janssen, 1982). Open-systems therefore expand indefinitely by importing creative energy and exporting entropy (the inverse measure of the systems capacity to change).

Whilst a shared vision aligns and inspires an internal culture, and an open system maximises learning, there may still be noise or interference in the space between individuals, functions and levels. In order to develop and harness a frictionless flow of meaning in and around the system, we can refer to the quantum reality of superconductors, superfluids and laser beams which exhibit the highest degree of group agency in the microphysical world (Zohar, 1994).

Unlike glass which has no order and no unity, crystal which has order but no unity, or gas which has unity but no order, superconductors, superfluids and laser beams are highly ordered and highly unified. Each indeterminate particle fills all the space all the time, such that the I-ness of every individual and the we-ness of an organisation can overlap and merge to create a supercoherent entity (see figure 4).

Harnessing the creative flow of meaning in and around an organisation helps people to maintain ownership of process and product. Inspiring-innovation™ therefore creates and develops an organisational learning community which is truly participative, plural, flexible, emergent and purposeful.

Aligning and harnessing the flow of meaning THROUGH an organisation

Inspiring-innovation™ works from the inside out as well as the outside in, where everything is relation-al. Indeed, we can only become something more than ourselves through a relationship with others or through experience (a relationship mediated through an object - something other than ourselves and not someone else - with ourselves). It is through such liaisons that we grow and realise our potentialities.

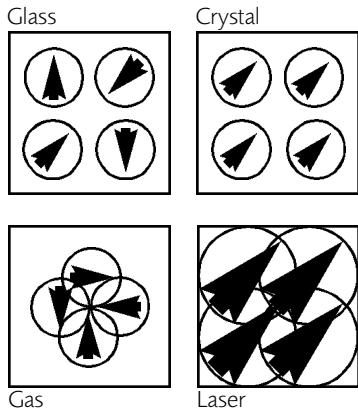


Figure 4. Supercoherence

Inspiring-innovation™ therefore:

- explores the flux of experience that makes us alive, animated and unique.
- creates opportunities for an organisation to share and refine their unique contribution.
- and, in turn enables society to nourish and value meaningful work.

Whilst an organisation's unique purpose enables it to work with the flow of life, a shared vision is the cornerstone to a fully participative work force, where trust, co-operation and ownership are fully integrated and valued. Inspiring-innovation™ increases the probability of NPI which is not only aligned with an organisations strategic agenda, but which is also autopoietic in its nature i.e. upholding and nurturing its creative integrity.

Inspiring-innovation™ therefore stimulates the continual exchange and creation, rather than accumulation, of information, knowledge and experience. The quality and quantity of this exchange is proportionate to an organisation's level of inspiration, or capacity to self-organise. Inspiring-innovation™ therefore generates an emotionally charged design field which flows in and through an organisation (see figure 5).

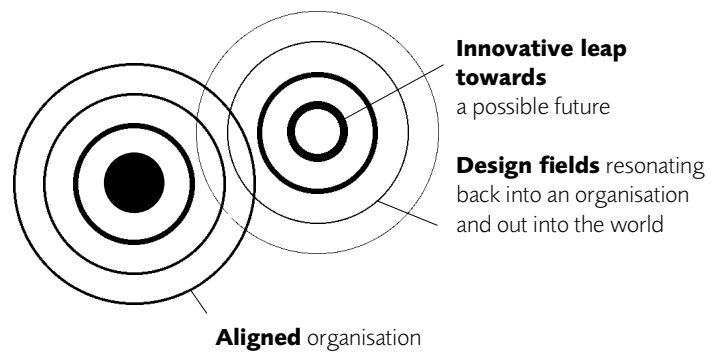


Figure 5. Reflexive waves of possibilities

This reflexive wave of vibrating possibilities fuels the rhythm of growth and shifts the conventional approach to innovation from:

- inventing a corporate mission, to discovering an organisation's purpose;
- an internal culture who are told to innovate, to one which is inspired to innovate;
- an imposed vision, to a shared vision;
- conflict and detachment, to trust, co-operation and ownership;
- limited learning, to maximised learning;
- linear thinking, to systemic thinking;
- NPI, to inspiring-innovation™;
- and, a reactive present, to a creative and vital future.

Inspiring-innovation™ therefore seeks the continual evolution and expansion of potential. By learning to be in genuine relationship with the world and with itself, an organisation can evoke the human spirit and realise its true creative potential.

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