

A Formula for Innovation in Government

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The article discusses innovation in government. It provides a definition for [*innovation*](#) and contributes an [*equation*](#) or a program to become innovative! [*A link between innovation and creativity*](#) is suggested, and methods to institute or [*mainstream innovation*](#) in an organization are reviewed.

Innovation and government organizations *can be* synonymous. Innovation is readily at hand. It is locked up in all government department and employees. While unleashing it is simple, mainstreaming it is hard work. There are many obstacles in the way. This article outlines a workable approach to introducing and establishing innovation in organizations.

Innovation

Innovation can be defined in different ways. Some people think it is coming up with new ideas. Others feel it is getting new ideas implemented. It may also be viewed as a complete process beginning with:

- opportunity or problem finding to
- discovering and developing solutions in the form of products or services and to
- their implementation.

Coming up with ideas is not difficult. Implementing ideas is a bit more challenging. The most difficult part of innovation however is finding the right challenge or problem.

The innovative person is not only actively looking for ideas and nurturing them to completion. This person is also actively looking for opportunities and problems to solve by anticipating changes, tracking trends and searching for new issues and challenges to tackle. This holds for organizations too, no matter whether they are in the private or public sector.

As usual this is easier said than done! But it is being done in many organizations including Canada's government.

A program to become innovative

An *equation* may be used to describe how an organization, a group or an individual can become innovative on a continual basis:

$$QR = C + P + PS$$

where QR stands for ***Quality Result***

C for ***Content***

P for ***Process*** and

PS for ***Process Skills***.

A result is a solution. This result is made up of ideas, issues, challenges, knowledge and experience: the content. A result is achieved because an organization, a group or an individual uses a complete process, a set of steps, to turn this content into something concrete. A *quality* result, typically happens when an organization, a group or a person has increased its *process skills*, its ability to execute the process with a high degree of skill. Seeking the right challenges, finding the right solutions and getting them implemented.

Processes exist in various shapes and forms. The one presented here is an 8 step process called Simplex™, developed by Dr. Min Basadur. By introducing creativity, each step comes alive with new ideas, possibilities, and viewpoints. Fortunately, *creativity* is a skill that can be re-learned and improved.

The link between Innovation and Creativity

Innovation has three core elements: *ideas*, *choice* and *action*.

Ideas

We hear a lot about thinking "outside of the box". This type of thinking deliberately encourages finding and considering various perspectives, view points and concepts. Finding and attacking an issue or challenge from a different angle allows us to generate new, different and interesting ideas that can potentially help us out. In an organization, this implies exercising the individual and collective skill of *active divergence*.

Choice

Once challenges or ideas are generated, reality and time dictate that a choice must be made. We know from research that quantity breeds quality. The more challenges, ideas or options the better the choice. In exercising logic and judgment, the skill of *active convergence*, these ideas or "could be"s are analyzed, evaluated, selected and transformed into "should be"s.

Action

Now that the choice is made it must be acted upon. The "should be" becomes an "is". Innovation exists only when action has been taken and a result, service or product that meets the initial challenge has emerged.

Creativity is part and parcel of each of the three elements. It is not restricted to "being open to ideas" as many people believe. Creativity can be boiled down to the ability

- to diverge or generate problem definitions, challenge statements, ideas, or options,
- to converge or choose the best among these options and finally
- to defer judgment or to separate divergence and convergence letting them happen in a 1-2 sequence.

Research demonstrates that we all are creative. With training and opportunity, our creativity can be enhanced, in many cases quite significantly.

Mainstreaming Innovation in an organization

The Ladder of Progression:

Becoming innovative does not happen overnight. Using the Quality Results equation, an organization can become progressively more innovative by:

- Making sure they have the right content. This is usually a constant preoccupation for most organizations. Getting the right mix of diverse people with insight, enthusiasm, ideas, experience and knowledge is a critical element.
- Having the right process. Seeing innovation as a process rather than an activity or an event is the second critical element. Look at innovative companies and you will see that they have one form or another of shared process across all their departments and divisions.
- Continuously developing good process skills. Promoting and constantly improving the process skills of innovation and creativity becomes an imperative for the organization.

As these three elements come together, an organization climbs a ladder of progression that leads to mainstreaming innovation-to innovative thinking 365 days of the year.

It all starts with the individual...*Innovation is individual work*. It starts in the minds of individuals and is sparked by creativity.

Innovation is team work. For an idea to survive and thrive, it needs the added content of other points of view.

Innovation is management. For innovation to happen successfully and consistently, the organizational environment must adopt a process perspective to challenges and problems and must encourage experimentation, risk, failure and genuine learning.

All of these points concern people and how they think and behave. Becoming innovative demands building and improving thinking skills and changing behaviour... So what is stopping you from taking the first step in introducing innovation in your organization?

For more information on this approach, please point your browser to the Actis Consulting Inc & DHR Associates web site at <http://www.actis.ca/actis/>

About the Authors:

Danny Lyonnais and Diane Houle-Rutherford are Associates of the Center for Research in Applied Creativity, former public servants and independent management consultants.

Founded by Dr. Min Basadur in 1981, The Center for Research in Applied Creativity's purpose is to release creativity and innovation in individuals, groups, and organizations. Its mission is to get applied creative thinking technology implemented in organizations. This includes improving thinking skills of individuals and groups, as well as anchoring and integrating these skills in the organization. This leads to the mainstreaming of innovation which is the key to the adaptability that effective organizations must have and the personal fulfillment individuals seek. The Center has grown into a worldwide network of associates, expert in applied creativity research and consultation. The internal experts catalyze creative problem solving and improve organizational effectiveness from within. The Center's goal is to transfer its knowledge to organizations and to make them self-sufficient.