

Why innovation requires a holistic approach

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How to Tell If a Company Is Good at Innovating or Just Good at PR

The video was beautiful. Obviously professionally produced, it highlighted the space the company had set up for **innovation**. Drone footage showed an open space replete with sticky notes. A 3D printer whirled in the background. A foosball table was involved. Clearly, money was being spent.

But further investigation showed that the video was nothing more than a beautiful piece of “innoganda” — **innovation** propaganda describing an effort that had little hope of driving any material impact.

In many organizations, **innovation** has gone from fringe to buzzword to a must-have. There are a variety of legitimate reasons for companies to bolster their **innovation** capabilities, ranging from fighting against current and emerging competitors to raising morale and attracting younger employees.

There are companies that pursue **innovation** with rigor. Some are well-publicized **innovation** poster children like Alphabet (**Google**), **Amazon.com**, **Disney Pixar**, **3M**, and **Philips**. Some are still under the radar screen, like **Globe Telecom** in the Philippines, **Tata Sons** in India, or **DSM** in the Netherlands.

These rigorous innovators **direct innovation strategically**, with **innovation** efforts integrated into strategic planning and resource allocation systems. They **pursue innovation rigorously**, with a [disciplined process](#) and supporting tools to help spot, shape, and seize opportunities to innovate. They **resource innovation intensively**, dedicating top talent to pursuing ideas rather than hoping that miracles will happen in free-thinking Fridays, special-purpose Sundays, or other constrained efforts. They **monitor innovation methodically**, making sure that the most-promising ideas are identified and accelerated, and the least-promising ideas are shut down before they turn into capacity-draining [zombies](#). Finally, they **nurture it carefully**, recognizing that organizations are wired to operate today’s business more efficiently, not to experiment and discover tomorrow’s business.

Companies running innoganda campaigns, on the other hand, approach the problem in a

piecemeal fashion. Maybe they hire a chief **innovation** officer but don't give him or her any budget or staff. Perhaps, like the company in the video, they build a gleaming **innovation** lab that sits empty except for when the media, customers, or tax-break-providing government officials are around. An increasingly popular move is to issue a press release announcing an "accelerator" or "incubator" or other means to build or interact with the "startup community" without any thought as to what should be accelerated or incubated. Or, finally, they might hold an idea jam session or hackathon without anyone having a [clue](#) about what happens next with ideas that get jammed or hacked.

There is nothing *wrong* with tapping someone on the shoulder and asking them to drive **innovation** in a company, creating a space for innovators to do their work, or interacting with startups. As part of a thoughtful, strategic **innovation** effort, these can be important puzzle pieces.

But on their own, these point solutions have no impact. Worse, they run the risk of poisoning the word "**innovation**" inside an organization for generations.

The next time you suspect that someone is spinning an innoganda campaign, politely ask them five questions:

- What is the most exciting **real** project you are working on?
- How does that project fit the organization's strategy?
- How far along are you in the development process?
- How do you plan to accelerate the path from idea to impact?
- What portion of the company investment portfolio has been set aside to work on these ideas?

Blank stares or gobbledygook answers tell you all you need to know.

Innovation is hard, particularly inside established organizations with deeply rooted systems **designed** to root out the kind of variation that actually helps **innovation**. Innoganda doesn't help. In fact, it can hurt. Let's commit to talking less about "**innovation**" and instead commit to more thoughtful action.

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