

The Brainstorm Leadership Manual for Unleashing Creative Genius!

SmartStorming[®]

The Game-Changing Process for Generating
Bigger, Better ideas

SmartStorming

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Chapter 1

Innovation: The New Darwinism

*“It is not the strongest of the species that survives,
nor the most intelligent that survives.
It is the one that is the most adaptable to change.”*
– Charles Darwin

In case you haven't noticed, chaos and disruptive change are the new business-as-usual.

The upheaval over the past several years in business, the economy, politics, technology, education, and society in general are not anomalies. They are the new world order (or lack thereof). The speed at which things change is faster than ever, and accelerating every day.

If you get the sense that no one knows what is going to happen next, like it or not, that is probably the case. Decades-old, global organizations, once viewed as invincible, tumble overnight. Yesterday's disruptive technology leaders suddenly become irrelevant. And highly skilled business professionals, once coveted by their loyal employers, are out of work with little notice and with few viable prospects. Except to reinvent themselves.

Reinvention has become the new, critical skill set—for corporations, start-ups, governments, educational institutions, workgroups, and individuals.

Of course none of this should come as a surprise. We have actually been hearing about this evolutionary shift for years, on television news, in magazines, newsletters, and in countless blogs. Scores of books have addressed it, and Harvard Business School professors have lectured on it. The topic: Innovation.

Of course, “innovation” doesn't sound quite so intimidating as “continuous reinvention” or, worse, “chaos.” But in today's world, they are all one in the same.

While it might seem counterintuitive, choosing to ignore this state of continuous change actually means assuming even greater risk than embracing it. Whatever the economy may be doing, however unstable the markets may be, change will rage on. Spending time, energy, and resources desperately searching for some long-term stability will be fruitless, because while you are

striving to maintain the status quo, the wave of change will be passing you by. The only real choice facing us today is to innovate or slip into irrelevance.

Innovation, or the ability to not only handle, but embrace continuous change, is the new Darwinism in business. Where not long ago, “survival of the fittest,” at least in business terms, was all about operational efficiency—faster plus cheaper equaled better—today the big dogs at the top of the corporate food chain are those who are willing to continuously reinvent themselves, proactively reevaluate their product or service offerings, and redirect their efforts. Today’s market leaders are the companies that introduce us to the new, new thing, the bleeding-edge technology, the better mousetrap, the reinvented wheel, even before we know we want it. This new paradigm of chaos is just as challenging for them; the only difference is, they dive right in—and use it to their advantage. Risky? To be sure. But not nearly as risky as standing still.

Who are they, these more evolved corporate organisms that seem to have adapted so masterfully to the chaotic, twenty-first century economic environment? We hesitate to even name them, for fear that, by the time you read this, they will be yesterday’s news. But for the moment, they are companies we all know and revere—Apple, Facebook, Google, Amazon, Starbucks, Nike. And there are hundreds and even thousands more you’ve never heard of, visionary companies that are taking risks, breaking the rules, establishing new standards, delivering incredible value, delighting their customers, and then starting the process all over again...and again, and again. These companies come in all shapes and sizes, and exist in every industry—technology, biotech, pharmaceutical, automotive, consumer packaged goods, even your favorite local or online retailer—you name it, they’re out there, outthinking and outdoing everyone else in their fields. But they all have one thing in common: They passionately pursue innovation.

In this new innovation frontier, everything is possible. Old, limiting assumptions are no longer perceived as boundaries, but rather as new points of departure for discovery, and the unknown is transformed from a treacherous place of risk into a playground of new possibilities. The battle cry for this brave new world is “Create Forward!”

The intersection of the consumer and technology

If you’re wondering what brought about this cataclysmic shift in the modern business environment, this absolute, unequivocal requirement for

innovation, just take a look in a mirror. It's you. And me. All of us. Armed with today's all-empowering technology that provides not only knowledge, but control over virtually every commercial and personal interaction, consumers are the driving force behind the relentless demand for innovation. By "consumer," we mean anyone who makes a decision to purchase or otherwise acquire something from someone else. The woman shopping for the best, most comfortable, performance-enhancing running shoe available today. The young urbanite researching the lightest, most durable bicycle for city riding. The guy deciding which toothpaste to buy, the one that whitens teeth, reduces tartar, promises fewer cavities, or all of the above. A purchasing manager choosing a new materials supplier. The head of corporate marketing searching for a new ad agency and then demanding only the best, freshest, most unexpected thinking from them once they're engaged. They are all consumers; they are all in the market for something from someone. And they hold all the cards.

As it ends up, knowledge really is power, and consumers have knowledge like they've never had it before, knowledge that ultimately gives them virtually limitless choices for anything they want or need. In the not-so-distant past, it was a different story. Consumers had relatively limited access to information when they were in the market for a product or service—a company's reputation (gleaned through referrals or word of mouth); advertising, public relations, and editorial press coverage (in print publications, TV, radio, outdoor or direct mail); facts gained through the direct selling efforts of the company being considered. Yesterday's consumers did the best they could, but in fact, it was always pretty much a seller's market. "I have what you need, Mr. and Ms. Consumer. Come and get it—on my terms—or do without." This was the unspoken message delivered by most businesses in the past.

What ultimately turned the tables were computers, and specifically the Internet, with its virtually unlimited access to information and ultimately vast, powerful social networks. Today in a nanosecond, with just a few small movements of the fingers, anyone, anywhere can discover everything there is to know about anything, right now, this second, 24/7/365. They can compare and contrast, find reviews, prices, special promotions and discounts, specifications, and detailed accounts of others' experiences. And then they can share all of this information and personal perspective with hundreds, thousands, even millions of others with whom they are directly or tangentially connected.

What, at this precise moment in time, is the best, most innovative offering out there? Which companies compete in this space? Which have the best reputations? Which offer the best prices? Which provide the best customer service? Which are financially secure? In short, who and what can provide exactly what I need—with absolutely no compromise whatsoever—right now? If you aren't at the top of the list of responses to that question, you are out of the game.

Technology and connectivity have made competition fiercer than ever before. The other guys are always right there, lurking in the shadows, waiting to step in and steal your customer at the first opportunity. And consumers aren't just shopping in their own neighborhoods. This instantaneous accessibility of information and options is global. Depending on your need and circumstances, your number one choice might be in any state or country, on any continent, in any time zone. They are all just a click, an email, a text message, a phone call, and an overnight shipment away.

All this power makes consumers remarkably fickle. Customer loyalty? Don't count on it. What consumers love today, they will lose interest in tomorrow and disdain next week. Consider the PalmPilot, the BlackBerry, and the iPhone. Are you Mac or PC? Starbucks or Dunkin' Donuts? Whatever happened to Krispy Kreme and Kodak? Remember when AOL ruled the online world? (No, really, it did.)

Today's consumers are constantly moving targets. Their tastes, interests, and demands evolve, not every day, but every moment. If companies are to survive and thrive, they must make every effort to stay ahead of those consumers, zigging, zagging, ebbing, flowing, doing whatever it takes to keep up the pace and sustain the evolutionary momentum. It's exhausting and it's exhilarating. But make no mistake, it's non-negotiable.

Chaos or opportunity? For those willing to do the dance, it is both.

Today's consumers are more knowledgeable, more sophisticated, more discriminating, more demanding, less forgiving, less devoted, and less willing to compromise than ever before. They understand that they call the shots and expect total compliance from the companies they give their business to. They are king of the jungle, and they know it.

But the smartest business leaders know it, too. In survey after survey, corporate executives rank creativity and innovation as among the most critical elements of contemporary business success. Yet in one study, only one in eight CEOs surveyed said their companies were innovating very well.ⁱ And it's no

wonder. This shift in power from company to consumer, from provider to acquirer, has happened rather suddenly. Many companies have been caught with their corporate pants down, and they aren't really sure how to pull them back up.

Many companies, especially larger, more established ones, have deeply entrenched cultures and massive operational infrastructures that make it difficult to be nimble. Plans need to be formulated, systems need to be redesigned, roles and responsibilities need to be reconsidered, processes need to be adapted. It takes time. It costs money. It needs to be studied, evaluated, tested, fine-tuned. Such companies try to slow down change because change takes time. And meanwhile, the consumer forgets they exist.

Today, companies face an important choice:

1. Embrace change, innovate continuously, and stay ahead of their competition, doing whatever it takes to meet constantly evolving consumer demand;
2. Wait for others to break new ground and then play catch-up, forever scrambling to match the latest development introduced by the market leaders; or
3. Do nothing. Stay right where they are and quickly slip into irrelevance and, finally, extinction.

By the way, this requirement for innovation doesn't only apply to global market leaders. It is a challenge facing all businesses, from Wall Street to Main Street, as well as schools, governments, entrepreneurs, sole proprietors, and even individuals, who must also continually reinvent themselves, upgrading the value they deliver to their employers or customers. It is often noted that the top careers a decade from now don't even exist today. How does one prepare for such a future? Not by learning how to perform a specific job function, but by learning how to think more creatively and reinvent oneself every day.

What is innovation, and how do we do it?

All this talk about innovation and the fact that it's an absolute imperative for success! So just what is innovation, anyway? We have already introduced the notion that innovation involves reinvention. To go a bit further, innovation is sometimes defined as the introduction of something new or different that provides greater value. Generally speaking, innovation can happen in one of three ways:

1. Do or create something new that has never been done before.
2. Do or create something that has been done before, but do it better.
3. Take two or more different things and combine them in a way that has never been done before.

So for example, when the Internet was first made available to the public, it was a true innovation in the sense that it offered something that had never been offered before. When eBay first launched its website, it was innovative in that it provided something that had been around for a long time, public auctions, but in a better, more accessible way, in an easy-to-use online venue. And the iPhone took a number of things that had been available to consumers—a mobile phone, contact database, online calendar, wireless Internet access, digital music and photography, and other capabilities—and combined them all in a single, revolutionary device that was unquestionably innovative. In each case, something new was introduced, and it provided greater value.

As for how the magic of innovation actually takes place, well, it's not exactly "magic." Innovation is the end product of an idea. Without an initial idea, there can be no "doing something that hasn't been done before," "doing something better," or "combining things in a way that has never been done before."

Innovation always starts with a great idea.

But to be an innovation leader in today's world requires more than a great idea. To stay ahead of the pack, you must have lots of great ideas. Where once a company could thrive for decades with just one breakthrough concept for a successful product or service, today they must have a great idea every year, every quarter, in some cases, every month. Because if they don't, someone else surely will.

In short, it takes a continuous stream of fresh, new thinking to power the engines of innovation.

Which leads us to brainstorming

When it comes to innovation, it generally takes more than a single person or one way of thinking about things to turn a good, creative idea into a new reality. Even legendary innovators like Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, and Steve Jobs collaborated with other colleagues to bring their ideas to life.

It seems that while some people are really good at coming up with that original creative thought, others are great at figuring out all the details about

just how that idea might actually work. Some people are excellent at planning how to implement the idea, others at how to make it happen efficiently and affordably, and still others at how to make the idea aesthetically pleasing or how to market it effectively. The point is that different people have different creative-thinking strengths. Put them all together, and the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts. It seems two (or even more) heads really are better than one.

All of those people working together to produce or develop an idea? Sounds a lot like a brainstorm. It is hard to imagine any group of individuals trying to solve a problem or capitalize on an opportunity that doesn't rely heavily on some form of group idea-generation process to conceive, develop, and refine new ideas. In fact, brainstorming is the number one methodology used by groups to innovate. Every day, in offices, conference rooms, classrooms, living rooms, and garages across the globe, tens of thousands of brainstorming sessions are held. For our purposes, we define "brainstorming" as two or more people getting together to generate and/or develop new ideas. You do it. I do it. We all do it.

The goal of this book is to help you rethink forever the way you approach creative problem solving and, specifically, group brainstorming, by learning, understanding, and applying a methodology we call SmartStorming. Once you learn how to SmartStorm, you will never brainstorm the same way again. SmartStorming is an innovative, step-by-step process for producing fresh, new, creative ideas. It is comprehensive, easy to understand and apply, and proven effective.

How does SmartStorming fit into our world of chaotic change? Ironically, in order to successfully navigate in this unpredictable new environment, you must have somewhat predictable structures, tools, and methodologies you can depend on. Of course, in such a world, truly useful processes must not only be dependable, but practical and flexible. And so, while SmartStorming does provide a proven, consistent process, its various planning methods, tools, and techniques are timeless and infinitely customizable for any situation, problem, or opportunity. In a way, it adapts to any challenge.

SmartStorming is an evolutionary advance in the area of creative problem solving and idea generation, and it is going to revolutionize the way you work. It is more efficient, more effective, and more enjoyable. It is that better mousetrap.

Before we get into SmartStorming specifics, however, we need to take a look at the current state of things: traditional, old-school brainstorming, what it is, what's good about it, what's not so good, and why.

Hopefully, this will be the last time you ever look at brainstorming in quite the same way.

What to remember:

- Today, chaos and disruptive change are the new business-as-usual.
- Business success is based on your ability to innovate. You must innovate or slip into irrelevance.
- Generally speaking, innovation can happen in one of three ways:
 - Do or create something new that has never been done before.
 - Do or create something that has been done before, but do it better.
 - Take two or more different things and combine them in a way that has never been done before.
- Innovation is fueled by new ideas—lots and lots of ideas. No ideas, no innovation.
- Brainstorming is the most widely used method for generating new ideas.
- SmartStorming provides a better way to brainstorm in our world of continuous reinvention...an evolutionary advance in the area of creative problem solving and idea generation.

ⁱ Kambil, A. (2002). Good ideas are not enough: Adding execution muscle to innovation engines. Accenture survey of Chief Executive Magazine readers . Accenture.