HOW MULTIDISIPLINAIRY TEAMS TEND TO CONSTRAIN RADICAL INNOVATION

strategic designer

radical innovation

road to success
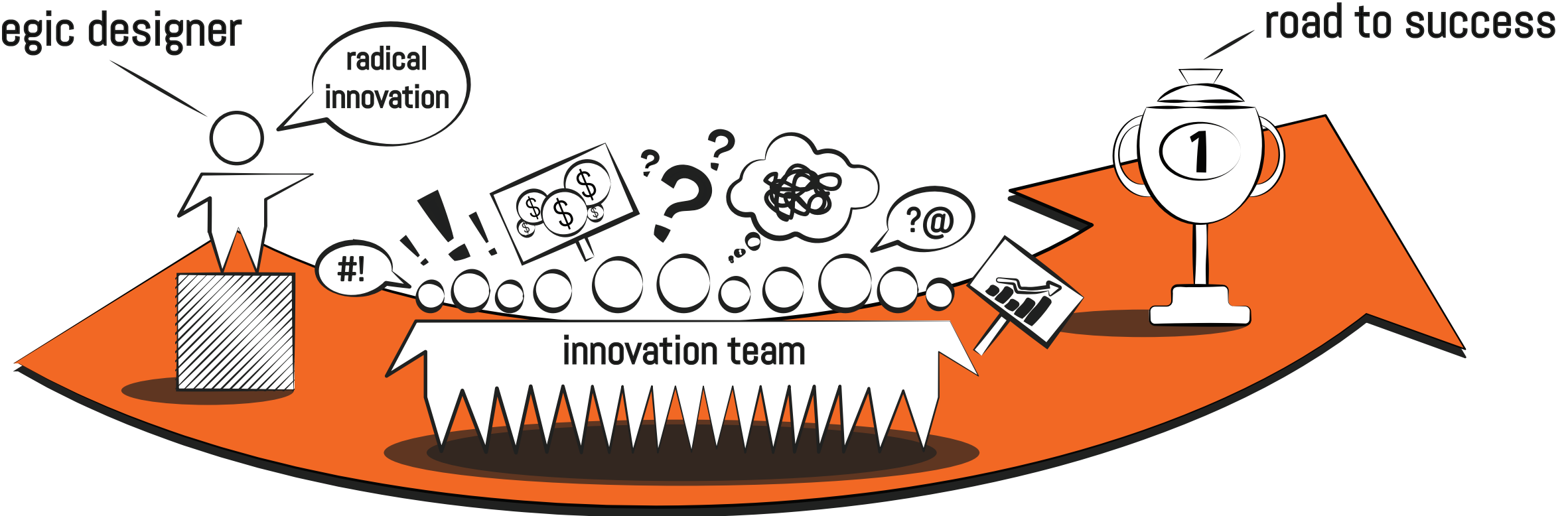
innovation team

" I think that strategic designers can enable others to be inspiring, instead of being only inspiring themselves "
- R. Donkers

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Although strategic designers should definitely work closely together with the whole innovation team, it should be their role to take the lead in providing inspiration, especially in the earlier stage of an innovation process. This is because, regarding radical innovation, there are quite some pitfalls for a designer to work closely together with a multidisciplinary innovation team that include marketers, managers or engineers.
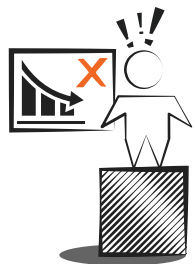
To begin with, designers often have a visionary perspective and approach towards solving problems. Marketers however, tend to look at the past instead of the future, and look for rational, or 'proven' solutions based on current 'rules' of the market (Beverland, 2008). Consequently, marketers often favour incremental innovation, even when breakthrough innovation is required.

Likewise, managers within innovation teams tend to make decisions rationally, instead of intuitively. Thereby, managers tend to favour incremental innovation over radical innovation and are constantly looking at decisions with a risk-reduction mind-set (Calabretta, Gemser & Wijnberg). This is augmented by the fact that a manager often perceives innovation from a monetary (risk versus benefit) perspective and thus prefers short-term returns (Christensen, Kaufman & Shih, 2010).

Furthermore, multidisciplinary innovation teams, especially when engineers are involved, often require comprehensive methods in order to mutually communicate (Jackson, 1996). Thereupon, creative sessions and inspirational approaches may become more rational instead of intuitive. However, radical innovation often involves uncertainty, complexity, lack of information and time pressure, demonstrating the need for an intuitive decision making approach instead of a rigid rational or analytical approach (Calabretta, Gemser & Wijnberg).

Concluding: as Beverland argues, strategic designers should be able to generate design-inspired innovations. Indeed, in order to create support amongst the innovation team, designers should create communal understanding. But as multidisciplinary teams tend to constrain radical innovation, the strategic designer should set the basis for inspirational approaches with a design perspective in order to maximise creative input in innovation, and think outside of the box.

References

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