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INNOVATION *as* LANGUAGE ACTION

*By learning seven foundational practices, anyone can
become a skillful innovator.*

Something big is missing in our understanding of innovation. Popular magazines annually venerate top innovators with special articles and profiles of the “Top 50” or “Top 100.” The Amazon.com Web site lists 8,400 books with “innovation” in their titles. Books on innovation are frequent bestsellers—for example, Christenson’s *The Innovator’s Dilemma*, Foster’s *Creative Destruction*, and Slywotsky’s *Value Migration*. Our technology and business graduates have been steeped in stories of technologies that changed the world—and many dream of one day doing likewise.

Despite all the experience and advice recorded by ten thousand authors, 96% of innovation initiatives fail (*Business Week*, Aug. 1, 2005, “Get Creative”). That’s an abysmal 1-in-25 success rate. Many people are openly dissatisfied with their ability to get the wisdom of the literature to work for them. Our own students and clients complain often about their technological innovations not being accepted and used. They are baffled, as were we, by the reality that the best ideas often did not make it and many were pushed aside by worse ideas. What is missing? What does it take to help a good technology “win”?