

Book Creative Genius

Peter Fisk
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Recommendation

If you flip open marketing expert Peter Fisk’s remarkable innovation handbook, you’ll find something useful on every page. After introducing Leonardo da Vinci as a model and enumerating his qualities, Fisk offers a choppy but interesting host of lenses, images, options, ideas, metaphors, models and approaches, all to provide new perspectives based on a synthesis of sound concepts that you might not think of combining. *BooksInShort* recommends Fisk’s manual to anyone seeking a guide to innovation that is immediately accessible and applicable. Though the cover shows no subhead, one appears on the title page promising “An Innovation Guide for Business Leaders, Border Crossers and Game Changers.” And that is what Fisk provides.

Take-Aways

- Successful innovation depends on design.
- Become more innovative by imitating Leonardo Da Vinci.
- Spark your creativity by expanding your notions of time and space.
- Generate new concepts by blending existing ideas, examining nearby markets, anticipating consumer desires and shifting how you manage creativity.
- Design combines ideas with practical beauty and focuses on pleasing customers.
- Ideas alone never constitute innovation; they must be manifest in the world.
- Your target market determines which aspects of a newly launched product you will have to emphasize.
- Don’t innovate alone; create with your customers or other organizations.
- Your innovation must create a “market vortex” that lets you define your market.
- Innovative companies are flexible, open, adaptive and eager to learn.

Summary

“Relentless Curiosity”

Inventor, scientist, artist and astronomer Leonardo da Vinci epitomized the border-crossing innovator. He generated new ideas, and often anticipated scientific and technological discoveries that became practical only in the last century. The secret to da Vinci’s boundless creativity was his view of the world. His relentless curiosity allowed him to see more, think on a grander scale and make original connections among disparate elements. He was brave, which allowed him to accept paradox, and to live with new and challenging concepts. Become more innovative by imitating Da Vinci. Methodically question and examine your world and how you perceive it.

Space Is the Place

Pretend you can travel through time. Project yourself forward and look around. Picture how the world might change and what new opportunities that future world might hold. Borrow the vision of renowned futurists like author H.G. Wells. Remember that innovation isn’t just new technology; it also includes changes in culture, lifestyle and ideation itself. Remain flexible in your thinking: Envisioning the future involves more than merely extrapolating from the present.

“In the midst of technological breakthrough and environmental breakdown, people are more emotional, expectant and demanding than ever before.”

Time will not be the only change; space will shift as well, and in a more complex way than time. Markets will shift and interpenetrate. For example, companies like Virgin Galactic already are extending their sphere of innovation into outer space. Ideas drive economies, and generating new perspectives is vital to economic success.

Preparing for the future means emphasizing choices that breed new thinking. It requires embracing concepts that cross categories, such as protecting new ideas by training people in “neurosecurity” or supporting “biobanks” that store biological tissue instead of money.

What Is Your Role?

What should innovative, creative thinkers do in the face of such change? You can encourage innovation by recognizing the forces at work in today’s markets. For instance, pay attention to the way that technology will continue to accelerate the pace of change, the complexity of society and the ever-increasing speed of machines. New risks will arise, causing anxiety and affecting people’s ability to adjust.

“Once you have a powerful idea, you want to make the most of it.”

Think of changing space and time to generate new ideas. First and most simply, contemplate the rise of the East: China’s and India’s economies are booming. Numerous Asian economies are pumping out new laptops, new phones and other innovations with inherent lessons to share. More subtly, look for “whitespaces” – that is, gaps in markets, underserved customers and niches that no company has addressed directly. Consider a product targeted to a niche audience and imagine how you might popularize it for a mass market. Strategize how you could expand a business-only service to work for individuals as well. Look to the upcoming new spaces that change will produce. For example, a rising global population will create water scarcities, while an increased number of aging people will need extra care and senior-friendly products.

“Innovation is about making people’s lives better.”

You can craft a wider variety of ideas by using role-playing and similar exercises. Futurist Arthur Koestler suggests going beyond the traditional view of seeing “the artist” as the only personification of creativity. An artist who sculpts a piece of marble is different from “the sage,” who provides inspiring ideas, and both differ from “the jester,” who hides behind humor while disrupting expectations. Try to inhabit each of these roles, and imagine how you would address a problem within that mind-set. Jane Henry, author of *Making Sense of Creativity*, submits that new concepts emerge through a kind of spontaneous “grace,” or luck. Talent also has an impact, because it helps you logically work out startling ideas, or link two or more thoughts in new ways. When you’re generating new concepts, find ways to resolve paradoxes. Think about uniting the global with the local or the real world with the virtual.

“Out of all the creative techniques that you will come across, the one that I found most powerful is the ability to connect two unconnected ideas.”

The “fusion” that occurs when you connect previously distinct categories – such as physics and business – may be the most creative wrinkle. Design, a distinct stage in the innovation process, offers a variation on such fusion in that all good design combines “function and form.”

Harnessing Design

Design, which is central to innovation, should have four essential characteristics:

1. **“Customer centricity”** – Designers should listen to people and conduct research to discover what they want but don’t know how to express.
2. **“Team experimentation”** – Designers should explore “possibilities and solutions” by working in groups to develop, test, and evaluate numerous concepts.
3. **“Rapid prototyping”** – Design groups build samples and models rather than merely discussing or evaluating a hypothesis. Using prototypes means considering markedly heightened realism, which avoids the risks associated with asking others to evaluate a theory. A prototype lets you “test and learn.” Ideas alone are never the innovation. Rather, they are like Lego blocks: Individual components offer little value in and of themselves, but by mixing and matching the right pieces you can build innovations.
4. **“Emotional appeal”** – Design emphasizes the way an innovation touches the customers’ feelings.

Shaping a Context

Reframing, a key step in design, involves changing the frame of reference – the context, situation, occasion, or purpose – in which people consider an “idea, problem, or opportunity.” Changing your item’s frame of reference helps you reach a new understanding of how it could appeal to others. Reframing lets you alter your competition, your audience and the values that other people discern when they observe your product.

“Innovation requires stretch and depth.”

Broadly speaking, you can place a product in three general contexts: “function, application or enablement.” The most basic, function, focuses on what a product does. Application frames a product or service in terms of how people use it. It emphasizes an innovation’s diverse purposes. Enablement asks: What does your innovation let people accomplish? Function is the core, application wraps around function, and enablement enfolds function and application. Design often also incorporates “co-creation” – developing products in a collaborative effort. That usually means involving customers in product generation, garnering useful perspectives from them and engaging them in every stage of the design process. Firms that have embraced customer participation in developing products include Boeing (the 787), Nike and Lego.

Design Virtues

Good design offers simplicity. Simplification produces innovative usage. Use “thoughtful reduction” to pare your product down to its essence, making it easier to use and quicker to learn or assemble. Clarify its essence by pointing out a “contrast” with other products or a “context” that gives consumers a reference point.

“One of the best ways to get new ideas is to look to other sectors, geographies and extreme users.”

Then identify your item’s emotional appeal. It should invoke a unique emotional reaction. Designed experiences range from the “subtle fragrance” that lingers in Singapore Airlines’ planes to the way Ritz Carlton employees are trained to address hotel guests warmly by name. When designing a customer experience, focus on the two most memorable moments: the peak of the experience and its conclusion.

“We live in a creative world, an ideas economy.”

Design includes an experimenting, filtering and sorting process. When you come up with new ideas, keep the best ones, not just the newest, as you seek unique possibilities. Design means focusing on solutions and bringing your concept into physical being. Your innovation must be appealing to customers, practical and efficient to mass-produce. Know your required investment. Examine your innovation in terms of your personal and corporate mission and your likely market success.

Launching Your Ideas

Consumers adopt a novel product in a five-stage process called the “diffusion of innovations.” “Innovators” (2.5% of the market) plunge in first. Next come popular, visionary leaders called “early adopters,” who make up about 13.5% of consumers. The next 34% of buyers comprise the “early majority.” They’re more “rational and cautious,” and let others convince them that new technologies are worth trying. The “late majority” forms the next 34% of customers, those who take action to keep up, not to lead. The remaining 16% of overall adopters are “laggards,” older, less-educated skeptics who prefer the status quo and resist change.

“Ideas are your most valuable assets. The question is how to realize that value.”

Different forces motivate these groups. Know which set of customers you’re addressing, and craft your message appropriately. Tell a simple story about your innovation that features a clear “enemy,” so buyers can become good guys by joining you. Emphasize your innovation’s benefits rather than its features. Structure your message using simple language; add striking visuals. You want your concepts to become “memes” that catch on and spread on their own. Place “sticky ideas” in the right context so influential “crowd connectors” see them.

Collaborative Partnerships

Collaborating with “creative partners,” such as companies or organizations, may complement your business strategy. For example, you could subcontract your product in a limited-time joint offering or license someone else’s product for a fixed term to gain access to new technology. You could also enter into a consortium, which exploits pooled expertise at the possible costs of sharing secrets and being anchored to a group’s actions. Those risks also arise in a “joint venture,” which means collaborating for a longer period. Preferably, these relationships will provide both parties with access to the skills they lack. “Partnerships can be the source of innovation even before they start,” but collaboration can also expose clashing visions and cultures. “Open innovation” allows companies that can’t afford research to share expenses. “Ideas exchanges,” such as InnoCentive, offer a “marketplace in ideas.”

Getting to Market

Coming up with a new concept might be easy. Figuring out how to bring it into existence and make it profitable in the marketplace “is the real creative challenge.” Whether you enter a sales environment first or follow others, you must create a “market vortex” that enables you to control your chosen forum and surmount obstacles by creating or shaping the market and introducing “game-changing” products. Protect your unique ideas via copyright, trademarks, and patents, or some combination, depending on the product. After you master your target market, look for “adjacent markets” that might be linked by business categories, geographic areas or market niches defined by “adjacent capabilities.” If your business doesn’t want to tackle this diffusion directly, consider licensing or franchising your product.

“Getting an innovation to market is just the start. Making it successful is the real creative challenge.”

As you innovate, think beyond generating only one good product and dominating one profitable market. Transform your organization to become continually creative, and build innovation into your company’s performance metrics. Measure a range of related factors, for example how much money you spend on research, how many new products you produce, how long it takes to bring them to market and what percentage of your revenue comes from innovation.

“Creative Culture”

“Reductionism, incrementalism and efficiency [are] the enemies of effective innovation in business today.” Innovative companies nurture their creative cultures and share a cluster of distinguishing characteristics. Rather than emphasizing hierarchy and formal titles, innovative companies have flatter organizational structures. They are open, task-focused and adaptable. They trust their employees and share information freely. Innovative organizations emphasize diversity over conformity and help staffers collaborate, network, and learn. They use teams in which employees can switch roles. Innovative organizations encourage their members to create schedules that fit their needs and to work in ways that suit their characters and personality types. These organizations’ leaders attract other creative people, spark their originality, and provide the tools, concepts, and continual challenges and rewards needed to fuel innovation.

About the Author

Peter Fisk, former CEO of the Chartered Institute of Marketing, is the author of *Customer Genius*, *Marketing Genius* and *Business Genius*.
