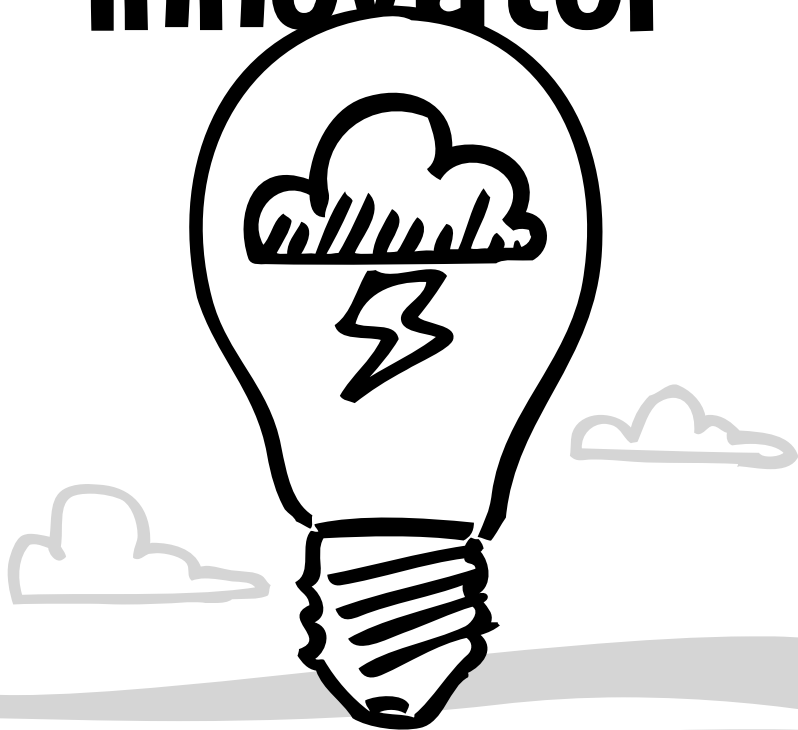


thoughts from a
GRUMPY
innovator



written & illustrated by costas papaikonomou

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This is the second edition, June 2013

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ISBN 978-94-021341-7-9

*to Patricia, Spiro and Dimi
who melt my grumpiness away, instantly.*

**If the grass weren't greener on the
other side, humanity would still be in caves
with no intention to mow any of it.**

Kudos

"9/10 ... it also turns out his book is touched with genius ... aphorisms, many of which are as pointed as they are funny. If only all business books could be this entertaining."

Tim Hulse

Editor @ British Airways, Business Book of the Month

★★★★ - "This book is a *lot* of fun."

BookIdeas.com

"Flippantly Flipping Fabulous. An antidote of sunshine for true innovators and intrapreneurs struggling in the web of corporate ambiguity!"

Arun Prabhu,

Commercial Innovation Director @ Arla Foods

★★★★ - "A collection of thoughts and observations regarding the bizarre and illogical world of commercial innovation"

San Francisco Book Review

"I was grumpy wishing I had written it. It now sits officially on the top of the 'books I will steal from shamelessly' pile."

Dave McCaughan,

Director of Strategic Planning @ McCann

"This book is packed with witty observations that make serious points"

Frank Dillon

Business Editor @ The Irish Times

"...the kind of read where you will find yourself laughing at the wit, or agreeing sadly..."

John P. Muldoon's Innovation Blog

"Funny, witty, insightful and fresh but most importantly..."

200% spot on !"

Diamantis Economou

Global Group Marketing Director @ DeLonghi Group

"Fun, easy read on avoiding & navigating the challenges companies face today in evolving their businesses.

Written with an entrepreneurial feel most true innovators can relate to!! :-)"

Rick Castanho, UX Strategist @ Lowes

"Highly entertaining and raises some disturbing points on innovation and corporations within a lively context of professional self-parody and humour."

Gavin Dickinson

Consumer & trade insights @ GDCTI

"Innovation and humour go together excellently, as Costas Papaikonomou convincingly proves."

Technology Weekly

"Ah, the sweet smell of nails hit squarely on the head."

Darrell Mann

Systematic Innovation E-zine

★★★★ - "Innovative and Not Very Grumpy. Behind the wit, and what makes the humor shine through the brief remarks, is his earnestness about and depth of knowledge of his subject."

Portland Book Review

Thoughts from a Grumpy Innovator

This little book is the narcissistic result of posting thoughts onto Twitter™ over a number of years, mostly on the topic of mass market innovation.

A couple of themes have emerged, which form the chapters of this book – each with a central narrative, thought or plain grump.

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My interest is in the intrinsic, systemic reasons commercial innovation works the way it does. Which I can summarize for you right here as being quite *odd*, to say the least.

If you're looking for a business management book with clear-cut tips and tricks, then I'm sorry. You won't find an extensive list of innovation success stories to copy, nor an Innovate-O-Matic toolbox to plunder. There is no

12-step process that will guarantee a successful launch of your new idea.

So I'm afraid I can't promise you'll make millions after reading this book, but I do hope you'll smile every now and then.

Premise: I'm grumpy and I shouldn't be

Anyone celebrating the tenacity of successful innovators is probably ignoring the far larger number of tenacious idiots pursuing bad ideas. If you think about the classic description of what character traits help people succeed in turning an innovative idea into a profitable business stream – winners and losers at this particular game are frighteningly similar:

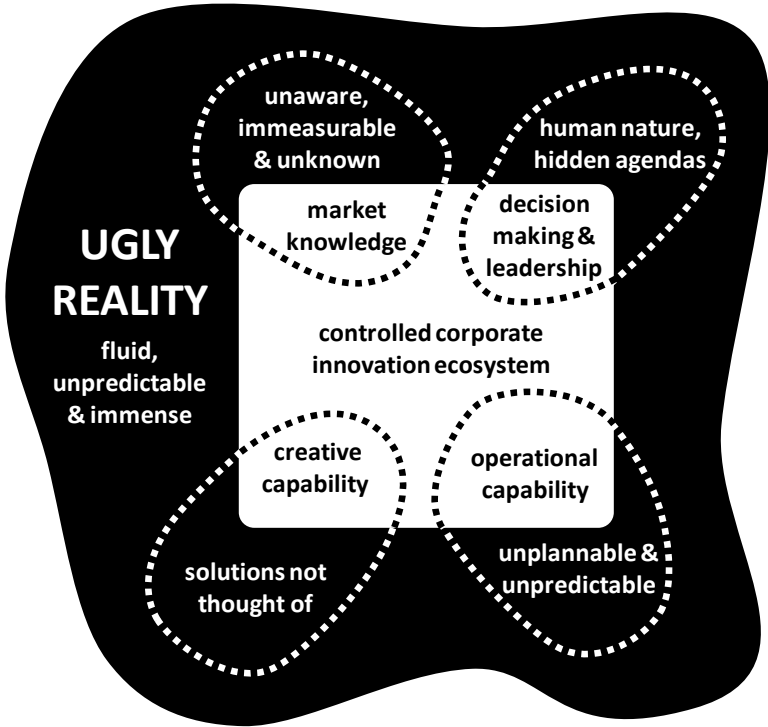
- ***Dogged determination***
- ***Blind devotion to their idea***
- ***Unshakable confidence, against all odds***

There must be a fine line between getting it very right or very wrong. In fact, I think there's a paradox hidden in there.

Companies are structured entities, with defined procedures and efficient processes that ensure things get done. Even the messiest of businesses are organized to some level. In stark contrast, the *reality* they operate in is unpredictable, fluid, ugly and most of all: immense. In this simple contrast lies a beautiful paradox: it is the reason there will always be new opportunities & needs for new things *and* it is the main reason for failing at successfully doing so. The attributes that guarantee new opportunities are the opposite of what an efficient corporate system thrives upon.

The chart below shows how the four capabilities crucial to running a business are hampered in the context of

innovation¹. Within the neatly controlled corporate ecosystem, they do as they're asked to and all is fine – as long as they keep looking inward.



I've found most of the failures in innovation can be brought back to individuals and teams in denial of the

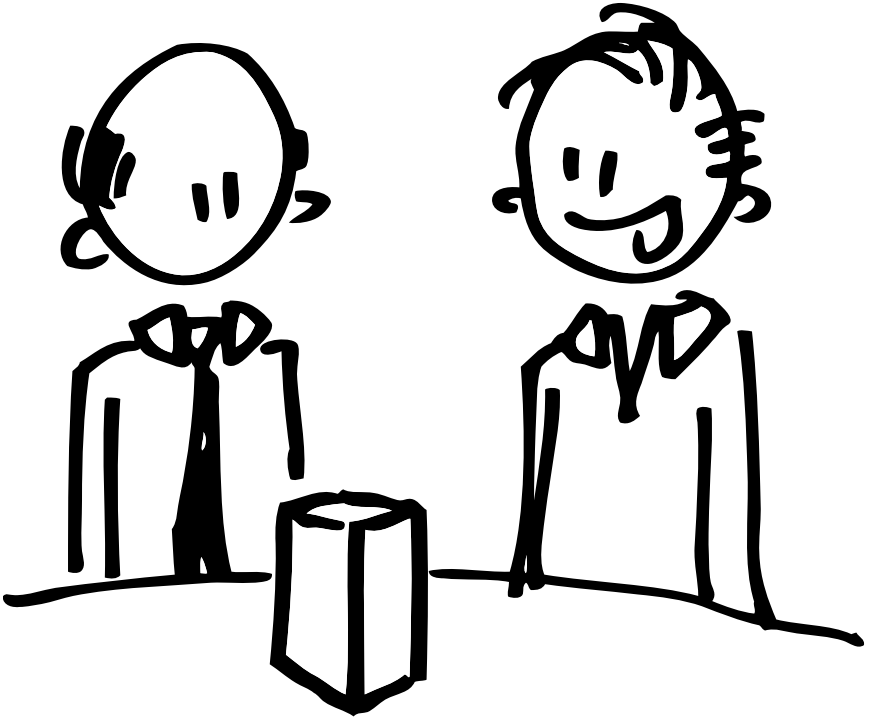
¹ Yes, you can slice business up many other ways too. But this particular way happens to work well for my story.

reality outside of their campus walls, totally unnecessarily.

This little book holds some of the thoughts I had seeing this happen. If you have experience in the innovation arena, you may recognize attitudes, situations and odd behaviours. Don't worry, we'll keep those our little secret.

Costas Papaikonomou
The Hague, June 2013

The Art Of Beanbags & Funny Hats



**I KNOW IT'S JUST A BOX.
BUT WAIT 'TILL YOU HEAR THE
SINGLE-MINDED BENEFIT.**

The Art Of Beanbags & Funny Hats

Every solution has a problematic history, by definition. In that sense, the skills behind successful innovation could be framed as the ability to create solutions for problems before anyone realizes what a nuisance they are.

Successful innovation is not about dreaming up what would be science fiction today, but about foreseeing what will be plain vanilla tomorrow.

You can imagine most creative professionals do not find that thought particularly motivating, which is why such a large chunk of this discipline appears to be about putting the 'art' of being creative up on an ever higher pedestal than the output it generates. Much of the world of innovation is populated by creative gurus, visionary high priests who scatter riddles across 2x2 diagrams to paint your future portfolio. Well, implement creativity like a religion and you'll need miracles to be successful.

Breakthrough ideas often feed creative egos, not consumer needs. If anything, successful new products and services are like the weather; about 90% the same as yesterday's products. This isn't to say the world needs no game changing innovation; it's merely that too many businesses waste time looking *outside* the box when their market still has plenty room left to grow and differentiate *inside* it.

For some of the world's leading companies and brand teams, success seems based on historical serendipities, luck, or lack of competition. Nevertheless stupendous

amounts of money are wasted on turning an innovation project into a show.

Maybe creative capability is genuinely seen as something much more difficult than it really is? Then again, if Edison really meant it being 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration he would have invented deodorant. Or GoreTex. What's making this all so difficult?

- ☛ ***A belief you need to be uncomfortable to work outside your comfort zone.*** *Funny hats, beanbags and humiliating 'energizers'. A whole industry has grown around the mantra that in order for people to take creative risk, they should be made to feel even more uneasy than they already are.*
- ☛ ***Features rather than benefits?*** *The first decade of the new millennium brought high-end software and technology into consumers' daily lives, in a way previously unheard of. With it came an insatiable drive for new features in order to provide marginal difference between devices and social media, a trend which seems to be trickling down into physical mass markets. What happened to thinking about benefits first? If anything, added features often introduce another hurdle between a consumer and the benefit they're trying to get from a product. They also distract attention from the core that's attracting consumers to your products.*
- ☛ ***Re-inventing predecessors' wheels.*** *In many corporate ecosystems the responsibility for innovation lies with the marketing department, a discipline known for high job rotation. Which from an innovation standpoint is fine, as long as the*

track record is kept diligently. And often it isn't. New marketing & brand managers waste plenty of their time redeveloping ideas that have bombed many times before.

☛ ***Believing your own spin.*** *In mature FMCG categories, the reality is that everyone needs to push the envelope on what can be claimed in order to stand out from the crowd. But the line between substantiated claims and spin is thin. No problem. Think homeopathy. In practice this leads to claims that sound credible in respect of the brand equity or previous claims, rather than being based on new developments. And that's when a credible myth all too easily becomes the new benchmark for truth.*

☛ ***Marketing executive's lives and their consumers' lives couldn't be further apart.*** *Having empathy with your target consumer does not mean bringing to market only the products you'd buy yourself. On the contrary. Corporate professionals dealing with mass market innovation tend to belong to a society's top 2% income level, with the other 98% being their target. This target is seldom as interested in 'on-the-go' or 'stress relief' or 'personalization' as one may hope.*

So what to do? Well, first of all assume there is a solution for any creative problem and trust that it won't require black magic to uncover it.

☛ ***Make time, not space.*** *You don't need to be in a Hungarian lakeside castle to be creative. In fact, the environment is mostly irrelevant as long as it's comfortable – that's why beds and bathtubs ignite*

new ideas. What you need most is TIME. Uninterrupted time to work on the innovation task, alone or as a group – to understand the problem, the context and to work on solutions. If you do your homework, a couple of days is often enough to crack even the toughest nuts.

- ☛ ***An un-filtered look at the (consumer) context.*** All you need is some rigor in pinpointing what the real needs are, for relevant answers to pop out painlessly. Real insight carries far. Note this involves more listening and reading to what consumers actually say and less reading of macro-economic trends or your brand vision deck.
- ☛ ***Cherish the small incremental ideas.*** Most growth challenges do not require breakthrough solutions. Give small ideas a chance.
- ☛ ***Reality first – then brand equity.*** Stay in touch with the physical attributes of your product before getting carried away by what you wish were possible. The touch, the smell, the chemistry, the taste, the sounds... Nothing beats a trip to your factory and R&D lab before getting to work on a consumer problem.