WRITTEN BY

PETER BENKOVIČ
Co-Founder
Maxman Consultants

maxman CONSULTANTS

DRIVING SUSTAINABLE INNOVATION

Organizations, teams and individuals are under increasing pressure to innovate. Innovate or perish. The good news is that if you want your people to take a proactive approach to innovation in your organization, you have a solution in your hands.

LONGBOWS AND MUSKETS

In the English medieval army (1250 – 1450), longbowmen were critical factors of several decisive victories during the Hundred Years' War between England and France. The longbow was a very effective and efficient weapon and a skilled archer could shoot up to 12 arrows per minute.

At the beginning of the 16th century, a musket came into service which was a muzzle-loaded long gun. The rate of fire was three shots per minute, its range of fire was approximately 10-15% less than longbow. Inevitable firearms already replaced archers in the Middle Ages for two reasons:

It took many years to become a skilled archer. The basics of shooting a musket could be learned in a few days and soldiers were shooting effectively in a few months. The construction and material of the medieval bow provided a minimum of possibilities for innovation. The first muskets consisted of several parts, each offering possibilities for innovation.

INNOVATION CYCLE

If we look back over several centuries of human development, many innovations have followed a similar pattern to that of the bow and the musket. Something is used for a long time until it reaches the limits of further improvement. A major innovation then emerges which offers a completely different approach to solving the same problem. The result is development in a different direction. A breakthrough innovation – the musket – gradually underwent other innovations. Some had the character of gradual improvement, e. g. transition from smoothbore to rifling, while other were more fundamental: the transition from muzzle loading to breech loading or the transition from one round per trigger squeeze fire to full auto cyclic fire. The results of many innovations can be seen in today's military, hunting and sporting firearms.

INDIVIDUAL MINDSET

Are you a person who starts a new project only after finishing the previous one or who starts a new project having left the previous one unfinished? At the same time, do you always solve just one problem, or do you work on solving several problems at the same time? Do you prefer gradual changes or do you like quick and dramatic changes?

Answers to these questions describe different manifestations of your problem-solving styles. If you are more identified with the former alternatives in each sentence, you are probably an Adaptor. If you identify with the latter ones, you are probably an Innovator.

Adaptors do things better, act, think in the "standard" way, are good at continuous improvement, need more structure, finish work/projects and focus on the system. Adaptors prefer a safe and stable environment, fixed rules and step-by-step change.

> **Creating context-supporting innovation requires managers and leaders to implement and consistently follow four principles: talk less and listen more, command less and ask more.**

It is obvious that driving sustainable innovation requires the cooperation of both. If we want fundamental innovation ("from bow to musket"), innovators should have more space. If the innovation is already in the world, the process of implementation and gradual improvement begins. Adaptors should have more space. An innovation that is not followed by consistent implementation (and gradual improvement) is unlikely to gain traction in the market.

CONTEXT MATTERS THE MOST

The context in which we work (structure, processes, leadership style) has a significant impact on driving sustainable innovation from significant support to significant restriction. The path to a supportive context is not easy and simple. Someone who always follows this path, quite unexpectedly surprises those around them with amazing innovations.

PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE ENVIRONMENT.

PSE in the workplace is an environment where employees feel comfortable being vulnerable and sharing their thoughts, feelings, and ideas with their colleagues. People can challenge the status quo to make things better in their workplace without being punished or ostracized. Trust, respect, and a sense of belonging are key elements that contribute to creating a psychologically safe environment. PSE is not just a buzzword, it is a necessity. If we want people to proactively come up with innovations we need an independent PSE survey. The obtained results can help you improve communication and teamwork.

IMPACT OF THE STRUCTURE

As a leadership coach for individuals and teams, I increasingly encounter the negative impact that organizational structures and processes have on overall effectiveness. Get inspired by the book 'The Surprising Power of Liberating Structures: Simple Rules to Unleash A Culture of Innovation' by Henri Lipmanowicz, Keith McCandless. Implement exercises, processes, and methods helping to eliminate the negative effects of the structure. You can also download the Liberating Structures app to your mobile.

MANAGEMENT 3.0

Management 3.0 is more than just a framework; it's a mindset that incorporates a flexible set of tools, practices, and activities designed to empower workers to better manage their organizations. It offers valuable insights, practical exercises, and real-world examples to help improve how teams and systems function.

BE BRAVE

Creating context-supporting innovation requires managers and leaders to implement and consistently follow four principles: talk less and listen more, command less and ask more. Managers and leaders are afraid of this, because it means they have to give up some formal authority and power.

FINALLY

Take a critical look at your team or organization. Still using a longbow, while your competitor is shooting with a simple musket? If you already have a musket, are you satisfied with muzzle loading? Have you got a high-performance assault rifle and missed the chance to develop a superior sporting/hunting rifle? Do not wait, act now!