

# The Bridge™

Bridging the  
Innovation  
Opportunity  
gap™

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an Executive Brief from Agile Northwest

September 2010

## Innovation is Risky - But Rewarding - Business

Welcome to the September issue of The Bridge!

In our last brief we talked about innovation as it relates to the culture of your company and we looked at two sample companies to help us understand the difference between a culture that breeds innovation and one that kills or stifles it. In this briefing I would like to discuss some of the other factors involved with being successful at innovation.



Innovation doesn't happen in a vacuum but rather through risk, collaboration and passion. I often find myself envisioning new ideas, innovative software and new technologies however if I keep them to myself they are not likely to get anywhere except on that merry-go-round in my mind. Don't get me wrong it's important to marinate on your visions and ideas and know the right time to share them with others. However, if they are never shared they are likely never to materialize. As we innovate we need to share our ideas with others to allow them to breathe and grow. I am not a wine connoisseur but I understand wine is best after you let it breathe. I believe the same is true for vision, ideas and innovation when the time is right, you need to let them breath in the light of collaboration of others.



Innovation is risky and requires commitment to see it through. If we want to grow our businesses we have to take risks, if we want to try new things it requires risk and if we want to apply innovation to our culture and our business it will take risk. In the old economy staying where you were was acceptable and allowed you to maintain. However in today's economy I believe those that stay where they are will not find themselves in business in a few years. The new economic paradigm is requiring innovation for survival. How is your organization setup to encourage and facilitate innovation? Do you allow staff to

collaborate, share their passion and risk innovation to get the organization to the next level?

I have included an article by Griffith Lindell entitled "Commitment to Innovation" which goes into details about the need for risk, passion and collaboration as it relates to being innovative.

With this ground work laid for innovation and creating a culture for innovation, the next briefing will release our innovation opportunity gap assessment to help your organization identify your gap score. The gap between where you are and where you could be with appropriately applied innovation from a technology stand point as well as a cultural standpoint.

Thank you for taking your time to read our Brief, please let us know how we can serve you!

Regards,

Wende Jones  
President, Agile Northwest

## Customer Highlight...

Local non-profit uses Agile Northwest to incorporate PCI compliant aspstorefrontdotnet software to increase online donor capabilities as well as donor tracking metrics.

## Happenings...

- ▲ Wende Jones, CEO, honored as Biblical Entrepreneur Rookie of the Year by Nehemiah Project International Ministries, in Atlanta GA September 25, 2010.
- ▲ Wende Jones will be launching her book, The God Port in Atlanta in September, 2010.
- ▲ Agile Survey Engine will be used in the annual IMC conference to track evaluations.
- ▲ Agile an Exhibitor at annual Confab conference in Reno, October 23-25, 2010.

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# Commitment to Innovation

by P. Griffith Lindell

Innovation is a shared attribute of people and organizations. A company - really a group of people - committed to innovative thinking, fuels both the personal and the corporate commitments needed to move it to the next level. Cadillac once came to market with a commercial that posted, "Great Performers Are Always Creating A Higher Standard." An interesting market position that begs the question: Whether you are at the top, or striving for that position, what does it take to move to an even higher level as a person and as an organization?

Have you observed that true champions have an enduring quality--they don't start strong then fade away? When they attain the championship round, true champions can never be accused of being misplaced. They are expected to be there. Each time the Olympics season is upon us, or the World Series or Super Bowl, we are reminded that staying on top takes a Herculean effort and being the best is not easily repeated. So, how do champions move to an even higher level?

## Innovation Risk – Moving To The Next Level

The answer may be found in using the sport of gymnastics as our framework metaphor for it provides us a model for thinking about how you can innovate. A foundational attribute of innovation is risk, which, in gymnastics, is a move that is flat out dangerous and is especially difficult to perform in a competition.

Learning to do a risky move involves making many mistakes. What separates the good gymnast from the champion is that the mistakes are stepping-stones to greatness - each learning opportunity. Risky moves are carefully planned and practiced – practiced to the point that they become almost second nature. Consider that for the Olympic gymnast, the Risky Move is performed in the context of 150 moves for 6 events – but it can be a make or break move. Risky moves involve giving it your all – practicing with abandon: performing with abandon. Risky moves, especially, involve the full and complete mental affirmation of commitment to put it all on the line.

Innovation that flows out of risks associated with sports are not much different from the risks we take in business. Both involve preparation before performance. The gymnast has many choices for creating a risky move. First and foremost, they must choose a move that fits their routine and their performing personality. Just like executives and managers within an organization. Risky moves must fit the culture of the company, and those making the risk must be willing to be wholly committed to the move. Whether its acquiring companies or technologies, either of which may be complementary or competitive, taking that risk demands means you know "your routine," your plan, and that you know who you are as a company. The risk is managed against your core

purpose. It is practiced under the umbrella of your values. It fulfills in some way your mission.

Hefty capital spending, integration of IT resources into effective and efficient planning and management systems, appropriate distribution of R/D and engineering resources, all demand the proper risk-taking behavior that disciplined preparation provides. What then is proper preparation? It may be in:

- ▲ A firm's commitment to sharing vision and strategy;
- ▲ Resource allocation of time, treasure (money), teams and other tangible support;
- ▲ Learning the requirements of a target market;
- ▲ The potential impact of competitive forces - or even simply just recognizing them; and,
- ▲ The culture of the company (core values, behaviors that are rewarded, real power of the team {formal and informal}) that fosters risk-taking and personal and/or team entrepreneurship.

## Fresh Perspectives Are Vital To Innovation

Collaboration and consensus-building drives better business decisions – consequently better innovation. However, it is not just about seeking advice, not about just talking things over with others – it is from whom the advice is sought. Commitment to a process that fosters collaboration. Seeking external advice. Are you talking things through with a trusted team of external advisors? Are you listening to your customers? Your vendors? Your suppliers? A consultant? It is not only the what, it is the who that is giving the advice. Often, objective outsiders organize their observations in a way that is counter-intuitive to the company culture – a good thing – bringing out the impediments to innovation success.

Research has also shown that internal collaboration that results from participative management in a flat organization drives innovative thinking. According to Sirota, Mischkind and Meltzer in *The Enthusiastic Employee*, camaraderie that grows in a collaborative environment is one of the fundamental desires of employees. Solving problems together, incorporating competing views of how people think and what they value, drives well-rounded decisions. Your key employee turnover may be a key to the answer to how well you collaborate. Your ability to innovate – how many innovations in products, procedures or process have emerged in the last year? – is another way to gauge your collaboration.

## Person Passion Fuels Innovative Thinking

Without passion for a new way of doing process, a continuous improvement in products - a unique, new way of getting stuff done - the businessperson will have a tough go-of-it.

It was Ryan Hoback<sup>1</sup> who expressed it this way:

"I live to create...I eat, sleep, walk and talk about innovation, creativity and new business....You see, this is passion, and this is what successful business organizations are built on.

Passion. Passion is the driving force and inner desire ... which makes you want to continually pursue going above and beyond.”

A commitment to innovation demands that kind of energy. The day-to-“dayness” of running an IT department can overwhelm. Without passion, you may easily let the important details slide and only focus on one, small aspect of your work that you enjoy. Not good for you, really. Certainly not good for the business.

Passion is not a substitute for business understanding and even acumen. Passion cannot replace product understanding, positioning strategy or planning excellence. But without passion, each of those attributes is like a balloon that is not tightly tied – the air leaks out. Tom Peters pointed out in his book *In Search of Excellence*, “Nothing good or great can be done in the absence of enthusiasm.” That’s the knot that holds the air in the balloon.

Passion is what will help you discipline yourself to get up early, work late, learn new business practices, work with cranky team members, and begin all over again the next day often doing the same things.

Passion is a choice and it must become your daily choice, no matter how you feel physically, no matter the economy, no matter how tired you may be: you must choose to set those feelings aside and be passionate about your new pursuit.

Risk. Collaboration. Passion. Three elements of innovation. Innovative thinking takes personal commitment to change, to improve, to share, and to collaborate, building on each other’s ideas. A corporate culture that rewards risk, fosters collaboration and looks for the new and better way drives innovation. Rewards and recognition must support the individual’s commitment to taking risk and driving continuous innovation. Finally, remember what Peter Drucker warned many years ago: “Innovate or Die.”

Are you and your organization committed to innovation?

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*I [http://www.motivatedentrepreneur.com/articles/The\\_passion\\_of\\_business.shtml](http://www.motivatedentrepreneur.com/articles/The_passion_of_business.shtml)*

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