

The Ten Faces of Innovation

The right project at the right time can spark a culture of innovation that takes on a life of its own. Here are ten types of innovators that can make it happen.

by Tom Kelley

There is growing recognition that fostering a culture of innovation is critical to success, as important as mapping out competitive strategies or maintaining good margins. A recent **Boston Consulting Group** survey covering nearly 50 countries and all sorts of businesses reported that nine out of ten senior executives believe generating growth through innovation is essential for success in their industry. Having optimized operations and finances, many companies are now recognizing that growth through innovation is their best strategy to compete in a world marketplace in which some of the players may have lower-cost resources. Whether you sell consumer electronics or financial services, the frequency with which you must innovate and replenish your offerings is rapidly increasing.

The ten innovation personas described here are not necessarily the most powerful

people you will ever meet; they don't have to be, because each persona brings its own tools, its own skills, its own point of view. In a post-disciplinary world where the old descriptors can be constraining, these new roles can empower a new generation of innovators. They give individuals permission to make their own unique contribution to the social ecology and performance of the team.

Make sure these ten personas have a place in your organization. Together you can do extraordinary things.

The Learning Personas

The first three personas are driven by the idea that no matter how successful a company currently is, no one can afford to be complacent.

1. The Anthropologist brings new learning and insights into the organization by

observing human behaviour and developing a deep understanding of how people interact physically and emotionally with products, services, and spaces. Anthropologists practice the Zen principle of 'beginner's mind'. Even with extensive educational backgrounds and lots of experience in the field, these people seem unusually willing to set aside what they 'know', looking past tradition and even their own preconceived notions.

If you want fresh and insightful observations, you have to be innovative about where and how you collect those observations. For instance, let's say you want to gain insight into improving a patient's experience in a busy hospital. Ask the doctors or nurses? Talk to lots of patients? Circulate a thoughtfully prepared survey? All of these approaches sound reasonable, but IDEO's **Roshi Gvechi** opted for a more radical

technique. Roshi, who has a background in film and new media, decided to bring a video camera right into the hospital room. With the permission of the patient and hospital staff, she and her camera essentially moved in with a woman undergoing hip-replacement surgery. Roshi set up her video camera in the corner to run a few seconds every minute for 48 hours straight. To get the full experience firsthand, she stayed in the room herself for two days, occasionally squeezing in a catnap in a reclining chair next to the bed.

After seeing the video and talking to Roshi, I'm convinced that we're just scratching the surface for this novel technique. My advice is to pull out your video camera or find someone with a cinematographer's bent. What if you set up a camera to record the activity in a retail store? A factory floor? Your offices? Not to spy on your staff, but to gain a better understanding of the ebbs and flows of your customers and your business. The next time you're looking for new discoveries, instead of holding a focus group, why not focus a lens on real customers, gaining insight into how they interact with your products, your services, your spaces. Picking up on their smallest nuances can offer tremendous opportunities.

2. The Experimenter prototypes new ideas continuously, learning by a process of enlightened trial and error. Taking calculated risks to achieve success through a state of 'experimentation as implementa-

tion', this second persona may be the most classic role an innovator plays. Great inventors come to mind when we think of experimenters, people like **da Vinci** and **Thomas Edison**. But when it comes to innovation, Experimenters don't need to be geniuses. What they share is a passion for hard work, a curious mind, and an openness to serendipity. Like Edison, they strive

for inspiration but never shy away from perspiration. Few people stop to consider where the name for the ubiquitous spray lubricant WD-40 came from, but it actually refers to the 39 failed experiments in coming up with the perfect water-displacement formula before the company finally achieved success. Experimenters love to play, to try different ideas and approaches. They make sure everything's faster, less expensive, and hopefully more fun. Experimenters embrace little failures at the early stages to avoid big mistakes later on. They work with teams of all shapes and sizes. They invite in colleagues, partners, customers, investors, even kids to try out their works-in-process – all the possible stakeholders who might have insights that could make the prototype better. Experimenters delight in how fast they take a concept from words to sketch, to model, to a successful new offering.

3. The Cross-Pollinator explores other industries and cultures, then translates those findings to fit the unique needs of your enterprise. Cross-pollinators can create something new and better through the unexpected juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated ideas or concepts. They often innovate by discovering a clever solution in one context or industry, then translating it successfully to another. For example, it was a Cross-Pollinator who transplanted the idea of a piano keyboard from the musical world to create early manual typewriters in

the business world, which of course evolved step by step into the electronic keyboards we all use today. Computer pioneers got the idea for **IBM** punch cards – and arguably even the digital computer itself – from a punch-card system for weaving complex fabric patterns on a silk loom.

In the corporate world, you can usually spot people in Cross-Pollinator mode:

they're the traveler who ranges far and wide for business and pleasure, returning to share not just what they *saw* but also what they *learned*; the voracious reader devouring books, magazines, and online sources to keep themselves and the team abreast of popular trends and topics. Well rounded, they usually sport multiple interests that lend them the experience necessary to take an idea from one business challenge and apply it in a fresh context.

Organizing Personas

The next three personas are *organizing roles*, played by individuals who are savvy about the often counterintuitive process of how organizations move ideas forward.

4. The Hurdler knows the path to innovation is strewn with obstacles and develops a knack for overcoming or outsmarting those roadblocks. Hurdlers get a charge out of trying to do something that's never been done before. They know that you don't always have to tackle a challenge head-on if you can find a way to sidestep it.

Shortly after **Toyota** launched its new Lexus brand in the U.S., the automaker had a quality issue that was a borderline recall problem. I can imagine someone advocating 'the voice of reason' and suggesting that the company suppress the issue or try to smooth it over quietly. Instead, they contacted every Lexus owner and informed them of the issue. And what they did next was to flip the situation. To minimize any inconvenience, they sent a technician to owners' homes and offices to do a diagnostic and – if necessary – a repair on-site. While they were at it, they cleaned the cars, something which has become a part of the Lexus formula ever since. As far as I know, the idea of making house calls to every Lexus owner was unprecedented in the history of the automotive industry. Instead of damaging the brand, the inspection program gave every Lexus owner the chance to brag about the extraordinary service that came with their new car. This turned into a key part of their long-term strategy to build a luxury brand from scratch and raise it to #1 in customer satisfaction.

We all know a Hurdler when we see one, the kind of tireless problem-solver who overcomes obstacles so naturally that

In a post-disciplinary world where the old descriptors can be constraining, these new roles can empower a new generation of innovators.

sometimes it seems as if they weren't even there. Hurdlers can be savvy risk takers, and are often the most street-smart members of your team. Breaking rules comes naturally, and they know how to cleverly work outside the system. Give them a constraint, a tight deadline, a small budget, and they're likely to excel.

5. The Collaborator helps bring eclectic groups together, and often leads from the middle of the pack to create new combinations and multidisciplinary solutions. Collaborators stir up the pot. They bring people together to get things done, and are proactive cross-trainers, willing and able to leap organizational boundaries to coax us out of our silos. When energy or enthusiasm flags, there is no better cheerleader. The Collaborator is that rare person who truly values the team over the individual, and project accomplishments beyond individual achievements.

Just down the street from IDEO's Palo Alto campus is a **Whole Foods** supermarket. Whole Foods' rise is more than simply the tale of a well-designed store or the growing popularity of wellness and healthier foods. By challenging conventional wisdom about labour and management, the chain is literally offering a new way to manage a labour-intensive business. In an industry plagued by razor-thin margins, the company earned nearly \$200 million in profit over the last two years.

One of the secrets to Whole Foods' success is the collaborative model that permeates the operation. While the big chains have plenty of managers and clerks, Whole Foods generates more creative, engaged, project-oriented teams. Each store has eight in-house teams, and each does its own hiring. New employees are hired by the bakery team, the seafood team, or whatever group they're joining. A month after you're hired, two-thirds of your fellow employees must vote to keep you on. In other words, you've got to pull your weight. And like the best project teams everywhere, the Whole Foods functional groups have a lot of say in everything from what they stock in their area to how they display the food. Increased sales and profits for a team translate into extra compensation for members. The lesson from Collaborators is simple: transform the

work of your organization into projects headed by teams. Give them a powerful role in their work. You're bound to reap positive results.

6. The Director not only gathers together a talented cast and crew, but also helps to spark their creative talents. You know the Director: she's the person mapping out the production, crafting the scenes, bringing out the best among actors and actresses, getting it done.

One standout Director among the clients I've met in the past few years is **Claudia Kotchka**, vice president of design, innovation, and strategy at **Procter & Gamble**, who was recently described in *Fortune* magazine as "the most powerful design executive in the country." Reporting directly to CEO **A. G. Lafley**, Claudia is part of P&G's new secret formula for success. She's adept at playing the Anthropologist and Collaborator roles, but her true calling is as a Director. She uses sheer force of personality to coax, cajole, and corral people into seeing things her way. Among many other initiatives, she helped set up a corporate

wood that "directing is 90 per cent casting." Great Directors build a team of people who need little direction and can lead by example themselves.

The Building Personas

The four remaining personas are *building roles* that apply insights from the learning roles and channel the empowerment from the organizing roles to make innovation happen.

7. The Experience Architect designs compelling experiences that go beyond mere functionality to connect at a deeper level with customers' latent or expressed needs. Their experiences stand out from the crowd. They keep you from being relegated to the commodity world, where price is the only point of comparison. They engage your senses, incorporating tactile sensations, orchestrating the clever use of sound, searching for opportunities to add smell or taste.

One way to get started in this role is to look at every aspect of your business and ask, "Is this ordinary, or at least slightly extraordinary?" Experience Architects fend off the

We all know a Hurdler when we see one: the kind of tireless problem-solver who overcomes obstacles so naturally that sometimes it seems as if they weren't even there.

innovation fund and then asked managers in P&G's global business units to suggest "problems worth solving" – the kind of things that kept them up at night. She rejected 90 per cent of the proposals, mostly because she considered them "not hard enough," but ended up with a great list of projects to move forward on collectively. We think P&G has created an innovation-driven strategy that's bound to produce results.

Directors are unlike all the other personas because their main purpose is to inspire and direct other people, developing chemistry in teams, targeting strategic opportunities, and generating innovation momentum. There's an old adage in Holly-

ordinary wherever they find it, fighting against the forces of entropy and commoditization. Asking this question is a remarkably simple and effective approach: how's the experience of calling your customer-service line – ordinary or extraordinary? What's the experience of a first-time customer? You can also apply this methodology to the experience *inside* your company. How tasty is the menu when your hot project team has a noontime meeting: ordinary or extraordinary? How extraordinary is the first day as a new employee? Ask **FedEx**, **Callaway Golf**, or **JetBlue Airlines**, or any of a hundred other companies who shook loose of the ordinary and realized extraordinary returns.

8. The Set Designer creates a stage on which innovation team members can do their best work, transforming physical environments into powerful tools to influence behaviour and attitude. Companies like **Pixar** and **Industrial Light & Magic** recognize that the right office environments can help nourish and sustain a creative culture. When a business team doubles its usable output after reinventing its space and a sports team discovers a renewed winning ability in a brand-new stadium, they are demonstrating the value of the Set Designer. We all know lousy spaces when we see them, yet all too many companies keep churning them out. Oh, we've got computers and mobile phones and networked printers, but the space rarely sings.

When **Procter & Gamble** decided it needed a special place to nurture fresh new initiatives, we helped them design a space they call The Gym, a 10,000-squarefoot innovation center. One key decision was to build The Gym in a location near the majority of P&G Cincinnati employees – in other words, they wanted an 'off-site' to be built 'on-site'. Three large learning areas called Initiative Spaces feature an open design with easily movable furniture, lots of low-tech surfaces to write on, and stick-up Post-its for shoulder-to-shoulder collaboration. The Gym is a blend of the ultramodern and the casual – there's an informal café and the latest in information and display technology. P&G sees The Gym as a place where teams can collaborate and ideate, not just about new products and services but also about the process of innovation that keeps it ahead of the curve. Look around your organization. Do you have a lot of dull hallways? Is there something simple you could do to increase spontaneous interaction and relaxed collaboration?

9. The Caregiver builds on the metaphor of a health care professional to deliver customer care in a manner that goes beyond mere service. Good Caregivers anticipate customer needs and are ready to look after them. When you see a service that's really in demand, there's usually a Caregiver at the heart of it. A wine shop that teaches its customers how to enjoy the pleasures of wine without ever talking down to them is demonstrating the Caregiver role. The

Caregiver is the foundation of human-powered innovation.

We all crave a good Caregiver. Why else would personal trainers be so popular? Why are some hairdressers in such high demand? Think of that great waitress or restaurant owner who shines attention upon you – the Caregiver who makes you feel

Stories persuade in a way that facts, reports, and market trends seldom do, because stories make an emotional connection.

you are the only customer in the room. Caregivers take extra pains to understand each individual customer. Why? Because the best care is geared to personal interests and needs. Small variations can be the difference between making you feel like you have "special customer status" or, conversely, like a "customer unit" being processed by a bland service machine. Caregivers know that many services can be made simpler and a lot more human.

10. The Storyteller builds both internal morale and external awareness through compelling narratives that communicate a fundamental human value or reinforce a specific cultural trait. Companies from **Dell** to **Starbucks** have lots of corporate legends that support their brands and build camaraderie within their teams. **Medtronic**, celebrated for its product innovation and consistently high growth, reinforces its culture with straight-from-the-heart storytelling from patients' firsthand narratives of how the products changed – or even saved – their lives.

Brand-savvy modern organizations also know how to tell a good story. They capture our imagination with compelling narratives of initiative, hard work, and, yes, innovation. Whether we consciously realize it or not, businesses are constantly telling stories to their customers, their partners, and themselves. There's the story of a great collaboration, the story of a novel product or a full-bodied service – even the classic tale of a great venture launched in a garage. Sto-

ries persuade in a way that facts, reports, and market trends seldom do, because stories make an emotional connection. The Storyteller brings a team together. Their work becomes part of the lore of the organization over many years.

No matter how small or large your company, the organization is constantly col-

lecting and spreading stories about your business, your values, and your achievements. Mythic stories endure because they become shared symbols. Passed along from person to person and generation to generation, the best myths have a ring of authenticity and tell an underlying truth. Think about the myths you tell, and always strive for authenticity.

In Closing

As you get to know these ten personas, keep in mind that they're not inherent personality traits or 'types' that are permanently attached to one individual. They are available to nearly anyone on your team, and people can switch roles, reflecting their multifaceted capabilities. These personas are about *being* innovation, rather than merely *doing* innovation. Taking on one or more of the roles is a conscious step toward becoming an innovator in your daily life.

This isn't about a competition between the individual innovation roles: it's about a team effort to expand the overall potential of your organization. The right innovation project at the right time can spur a company-wide movement, generating an afterglow that permeates the workplace – sparking a culture of innovation that takes on a life of its own. **R**

.....
This is an excerpt from *The Ten Faces of Innovation: IDEO's Strategies for Beating the Devil's Advocate & Driving Creativity Throughout Your Organization* (Doubleday, 2005). Tom Kelley is also the author of *The Art of Innovation* (Currency, 2001). He is general manager of world-renowned design firm IDEO, which was founded by his brother, David. He lives in Silicon Valley, California.