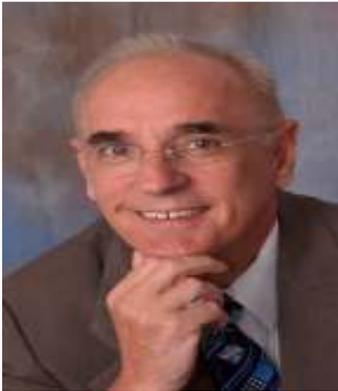




## There is a Huge Difference between Creativity and Innovation



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This is currently one of my pet peeves; that is, the continuing confusion by so many people about the **difference between creativity and innovation**. For many, the two are seen as being the same thing.

As in: if you are creative you are also innovative and if you are innovative you are also creative. This reflects a massive misunderstanding of what innovation – and creativity – are all about.

### The Fun of Creation

To be creative is to generate a new idea, product, process or thing that, usually either no-one else or at most just a few people have come up with. That idea or product might be startlingly new, imaginative or unique.

But there is no presumption in the concept of creativity that says a creator is someone who also stays with this new idea or product through to broad social acceptance. A creator might well build a new product. **But creating something new is a far cry from getting others to accept and use it.**

That is because to do this requires a level of **determination and persistence** that might have to be **sustained for many years**. That is the act of innovation will last well after the original creative thrill has evaporated in the **hard grind of the often herculean task** of getting people to accept and use something new and unfamiliar.

Being creative is all about the act. The thrill and the joy that goes with doing something new, getting out of the rut. It is an act which provides intense intellectual pleasure to the creator. It's all about intensity of experience. **That's a far cry from what innovation is all about, as we shall see below.**

### But Innovation Usually Requires a Long Grind

Let's take a couple of examples of innovators. I think we would all agree that Bill Gates of Microsoft fame and Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook would both be regarded as innovators. Yet neither created the basic product that took them to fame.

In the case of Bill Gates, **he acquired DOS from Seattle Computer** and then later parlayed this into a huge fortune. And Mark Zuckerberg, as we saw in the enlightening film, "The Social Network" didn't actually come up with the idea for a social network himself. He **actually got the idea from the Winklevoss twins** and their company HarvardConnection and then did it himself instead of working for them. He then ran with it until it too took off in a big way.

**In other words, neither Bill Gates nor Mark Zuckerberg created the idea behind the product that later made them famous. But that is not to deprecate their contribution.**

Their first incalculably valuable contribution was to recognize that the ideas and products that they got from others had huge potential value. Their second huge contribution was to **stick with the ideas through thick and thin, to mobilize the resources around it necessary for acceptance and to promote the idea until it gained critical mass and broad social acceptance.**

It's very hard to launch a new product and even harder to gain market acceptance if a new market is being created for it. To achieve this is a tremendous feat requiring steely determination, great courage, grit and sheer persistence. It requires the energy and focus to keep on going even when everyone else is either ignoring or even making fun of the idea.

**Innovators are often fast followers rather than creators.** They have the **ability to recognize something new for its breakthrough potential.** Then they apply their prodigious capabilities of determination, courage, focus and execution to bring the concept to reality.

This is what separates the sheep from the goats, the creators from the innovators. To be an innovator is to have these particular qualities of execution in great measure in a way that very few people possess.

**The hallmark of innovation is first the ability to recognize a world-changing idea and/or product. Secondly it is to provide the focus, determination and persistence to get it accepted against the longest of odds over what may turn out to be a very long period of time.**

In other words, innovation focuses not on the initial experience and the pleasure that comes from it, but on the hard slog that comes after. The act of creation is the fun part. The innovation part is the really hard bit.

In creation you take the first exhilarating step. Innovation is the other 1000 miles over tough, forbidding terrain. It is going to be painful, dangerous, often frustrating, maybe even sometimes boring, and nowhere is there any presumption that you will actually make it.

**And all the time the innovator has to have faith in their original vision!**

### **The Child is Father of the Plan....**

A politically incorrect example might be in order to illustrate the difference between creativity and innovation. Think of the creator as being the father of the child.

For the creation there was an initial effort needed and the father was there at the creation. But after that his role might well be finished.

The mother too was there at the creation. But the only way that child is going to make it is if someone – usually the mother – spends 15-20 grueling years nurturing and supporting the child until maturity.

That effort takes not just the original act of creation, but the determination, guts and long-term focus to go right through that process, no matter how hard, difficult and maybe even occasionally unrewarding it might be. In other words, in our little analogy, it's the father who is the creator and the mother who is the innovator, as well as a creator.

The father doesn't need any fortitude or determination at all. His role is just the initial tiny spark.

**But if the mother doesn't have the fortitude and determination to keep going way after the original act of creation has long been forgotten, the child – the innovation – doesn't happen.**

**That's the difference between creativity and innovation.**

### **Can You be Too Creative?**

The answer is yes. There is a mountain of evidence out there that **being too creative is the enemy of being innovative**. That is because someone creative can have so many ideas that he or she can never devote the effort to one that is needed to bring it to fruition or to market.

And being prolifically creative can also be an excuse to avoid the hard work that makes for innovation. It's much more fun throwing out ideas for other people to follow up on than it is to actually have to make one of them work. As they say, ideas are two a penny. **It's execution that makes the difference.**

Of course there are many innovators who also did create the original idea and product that made them famous. Steve Jobs is one notable example. Bob Noyce, one of the original founders of Intel, is another.

But that doesn't disprove what we have just said. There are a vanishingly small number of people who are both creative and innovative. That's because its **way easier to be creative than it is to be innovative**. Most successful innovators are fast followers rather than original creators.

Of course we are not saying that it is somehow a problem to be creative. Far from it! We need the creators. But if you are supposed to innovate in your area, just don't confuse people who are creative with people who are innovative.

### **They may be both, but it's very unlikely.**

#### **Implications**

**Most programs that claim to be about innovation are actually mainly or wholly about being more creative.** We are not knocking that in itself. After all, it can be very valuable to be creative.

But as we have pointed out above, **creativity is only a small part of innovation**. And being just creative only might merely play to show ponies with flashy ideas, but who lack the chops for the tough, long-haul.

There are some companies that use tests for creativity to see if their people are innovative. These include assessments like the Watson-Glaser and the Torrance test for creativity. Once again these can be useful. But they are not usually going to find your innovators. **The problem is that it's much easier to identify a creator than an innovator.**

There are very few tests for identifying innovators. We have one which is very effective. It identifies those amongst your employees who are innovators that you would not have usually guessed to be such. Often these people are introverted and shy and, even if they are also creative, often don't want to show it.

So you need a test to find your innovators, otherwise you just won't know who they are. In that case they will usually either leave you, or just die on the vine. ***Either way their potential will be lost to your organization.***

#### **Recommendations**

- **Make sure your innovation programs teach the difference between creativity and innovativeness**
- **Use the Perth HIPI (High-Potential Innovator Program) to identify your innovators**
- **Include this in your leadership development programs so future leaders become aware of this too.**

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