

Thinking Managers

Edward de Bono of www.thinkingmanagers.com says too many companies talk about innovation, but do nothing about it.

More than Lip Service

These days many businesses pay lip service to the idea of innovation. But to say you want innovation and do nothing about it is obviously insufficient.

Many organisations have expressed to me the notion that they have too many new ideas. What an absurd notion - It is impossible to have too many ideas - you just pick the best ones.

There are too many organisations that still believe that they cannot do anything about creativity. They mistakenly believe that you have people who are creative and people who are not creative, and it is just a matter of waiting for the creative people to have new ideas. This is very old-fashioned.

It is possible to teach, learn and practise the deliberate and formal skills of lateral thinking in the same manner as teaching mathematics. Creativity is more than just a natural talent - it can be learnt.

Brainstorming is insufficient. A group of workshops generated 21,000 ideas for a steel company in one afternoon using one of the formal tools of lateral thinking. There were so many ideas that the company took nine months to sort through all the ideas that were generated. You won't get that level of creativity and innovation from brainstorming.

The first step is to give the responsibility of doing something about innovation to someone senior. This person should report regularly on what they have done.

Next, the senior staff in the organisation should be made aware of the importance of creativity and innovation, and what can be done about it. This could be done in the form of a lecture or seminar.

Structure must be put in place to encourage, channel and examine new ideas and innovation. With time you could set up a Centre for Innovation and Creativity.

You need to train a sufficient group of people formally in the deliberate creative methods of lateral thinking, using certified instructors, and so on. There is no value in not doing it properly and thoroughly.

At all times the chief executive must underline the importance of creativity and innovation to the company and also make it clear to people that new thinking will be noted, rewarded and acted upon. Expectations need to be clear.

A formal Creative Hit List should be drawn up and distributed to all. This focuses on areas where there is a need for new ideas. Employees at every level should be invited to have ideas around these listed areas.

Everyone is responsible for creativity and innovation!

About the author:

Edward de Bono is the world's leading authority in the field of creative thinking and the teaching of thinking as a skill.

