



Plasma People, Cardboard People

Why is faster the new fast?

PICTURE THIS: it's a large meeting room, in a big, non-descript city hotel. It's early evening, cocktail hour for the folks arriving at a national conference.

There's a lot of laughter, smiling, hand-shaking, as old acquaintances are renewed. It's an annual event for an industry that goes back many, many years. They are involved in designing specialized promotional displays for use in the retail sector.

Upon entering the room, you notice something – well, odd.

There's a group of folks on one side, you guess by their age, primarily baby boomers. Then there's a big, empty space down the middle of the room, and over on the other side there are a bunch of young people, chatting quietly. There just doesn't seem to be a lot of mingling between the two groups.

Intrigued, you endeavor to find out why there is this 'great divide', and walk over to chat with the baby-boomer crowd.

It turns out that they are the vanguard of this particular industry. For years, they've used tremendous amounts of creativity to come up with very unique, in-store displays – those cardboard display cases that you often see near the cash register. They've helped consumer goods companies and retailers move a lot of product. They're busy sharing their stories as to what they've been doing for the last year. They're

also here to learn about the latest leadership ideas, innovation techniques, and other insight that can help them keep their “edge” in the display market place.

You decide to move on to find out who the folks on the other side of the room are. It turns out that this younger group is having a similar conversation about in-store displays but their view of the promotional displays of the future is totally different. They foresee a highly interactive shopping experience where consumers enter a store and utilize a wide variety of very cool, very sophisticated technology.

Their discussion is about picking up a product in aisle 3, and having an RFID tag that is embedded within the product link to the plasma TV at the end of the aisle. This causes a quick promo-hit to run, letting the consumer know about a related, discounted accessory over in aisle 27. The consumer then picks up an item in aisle 12, which causes his Blackberry to buzz minutes later reminding him that the last time he purchased that product, he forgot to pick up the batteries for it. As the consumer goes through the checkout, they use the same Blackberry as a personal bank-card, simply swiping it over a wand, keying in their PIN, and then they’re done.

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Fascinated, you begin to think a bit more about the dynamics in the room. You go back and talk with the folks on the other side of the room – let’s call them the “cardboard people” – and ask them about this new world of interactive in-store plasma TV’s, and the “plasma people.”

They dismiss the concept with a wave of their hand, even though the technology that the ‘plasma people’ refer to already exists today.

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In an instant, I realize that there are many organizations in the world today that are in the same place as this organization. They've got their cardboard people, and their plasma people, and the two just don't see eye-to-eye.

If only you could get both groups to work together, combine their creative experience and insight – that would be magical.

A senior executive in the room of this conference was over-head saying, “... *people are engaged in survival tactics because they don't know what to do next ...*” There's a lot of this type of uncertainty within many industries.

The rate of change today – whether with business models, product lifecycles, skills and knowledge, marketing methodologies or customer support concepts – is speeding up. We live in a world where being faster is better than being fast.

That's why innovation is the most important word that you need to be thinking about. Innovation is all about adapting to the future – and if the future is coming at you faster, then you need to innovate faster. Innovation shouldn't be about trying to survive the future – it should be about thriving.

There are certain undeniable truths about the future:

- **It's incredibly fast.** Examples surround us. Product life-cycles are collapsing. Half of what students learn in their freshman year about science and technology is obsolete or revised by their senior year. There are furious rates of new scientific discovery. Time is being compressed.
- **It involves a huge adaptability gap.** The current generation of management within many organizations – baby boomers – have participated in countless “change management workshops,” reflecting the reality that many of them have long struggled with change. Gen-Connect – today’s 15 and under – will never think of change management issues. They just change.
- **It has a huge instantaneity.** The next generation thinks at video game speed. They scan 12 feet of shelf space per second and to them most news becomes old news within 36 hours of emerging. Everything is becoming instantaneous.
- **It hits you most when you don't expect it.** Old-hat ideas are always around. These ideas are exchanged and often percolate for a while, only to be dismissed as unrealistic. But add in the rapid emergence of new technologies, and suddenly these dismissed old-hat ideas get adopted. The next thing you know, the concept has steamrolled you into submission.
- **It's being defined by renegades.** Increasingly, the future of many industries are being defined by industry expatriates. When a real innovator can't innovate within a company, they step outside, form a startup, and spark massive industry change on their own. Before you know, they've reinvented you.
- **It involves partnership.** Old business models involved asking, “what can we do to run our business better?” The

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new business model involves asking: "What can we do to run our customers, suppliers and partners business better?"

- **It involves intensity.** We must learn to run our business at video-game intensity: in fast paced markets, we need fast paced business capabilities.
- **It's bigger than you think.** Think GoogleCar or iPlane. Complacency is a dangerous thing, particular when every organization is faced with constant, relentless external innovation from unexpected competitors.
- **It involves everyone.** With rapid change, everyone in an organization must innovate. To adapt to the future, you can't rely on "brilliant ideas" from a bunch of "innovation elitists," or think that only special people can "do" innovation. Thriving in the future has a leadership that involves everyone in innovation. No idea is too dumb, no opportunity is too small.
- **It comes from experiential capital.** With a fast future, you've got to learn and relearn. Corporate equity isn't just money: it's the cumulative experience and knowledge of the team.

- **It requires a combination of skills.** It involves figuring out how to get the plasma people and the cardboard people to use their combined strengths, insights and capabilities to do something magical.
- **It involves understanding how to link rapidly emerging trends to radical ideas in order to do things differently.** And it involves doing that fast – actually, faster than fast.

Forget about the concept of innovation as simply involving the design of cool new products.

In the high-velocity economy, where faster is the new fast, it's your ability to adapt, change, and evolve, through a constant flood of new ideas, that will define your potential for success.

That's what innovation is, and that's the focus of this book.