

Right brain structured innovation

Businesses differentiate themselves from other players in the market through the innovations they bring into their products and solutions

Business in the 21st century is driven by innovation. Organisations that are better aligned with their customers' needs and preferences, and introduce product and service innovations accordingly, will dominate the market and drive industry trends. Research indicates that organisations that foster a 'right-brained' work culture focussed on creativity, intuition, passion, beliefs and fun are likely to generate innovative products and service concepts, define breakthroughs in industry trends and deliver better financial results.

So why then do organisations operate in an ecosystem that emphasises performance, and not at least adequately, enough, innovation?

Organisational studies indicate that this trend may be attributed to the pattern of the growth cycle in organisations. All organisations typically progress through the 'S-curve' growth cycle where early entrepreneurial phases include high innovation and ideation, and creative approaches stay dominant. This is followed by an emphasis on structure to facilitate process and execution, and help the organisation expand. However, as the organisation grows, emphasis on process and structure increasingly becomes intense and leads to a stage where the organisations may move towards 'full-fledged sickness'. The sickness may be demonstrated through a culture that emphasises risk-averse decision-making styles, short-term successes and a bottomline-oriented approach, typically observed in left-brain-centric work cultures.

Innovative organisations: While most organisations tend to take a left-brain-centric approach to manage their business, some organisations invested in both innovation and performance while growing their businesses. These organisations encourage both left-brain and right-brain behaviour to build world-class institutions and deliver products and solutions of excellence and ingenuity. Importantly the leadership in these organisations have also understood that adopting a balanced work approach ensures that innovation and the limits of possibility are explored (right-brain capabilities) within a structured framework that defines performance standards and financial viability (left-brain capabilities). In effect these organisations have enabled the environment within which structured innovation



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processes can be facilitated. Below are examples of such balanced environments.

Steve Jobs and Apple Computers: Steve Jobs was undoubtedly the most popular creative genius of our times. The world admires him for the skills he brought into the integration of critical and creative concepts. All of his entrepreneurial ventures and products such as the Apple computer, Macintosh, NeXT Computer, Toy Story, Finding Nemo, iMac, iPod, iTunes, iPhone and iPad stand testimony to this. His genius lay in his ability to effortlessly combine innovative ideas with sharp business acumen, and drive game-changing products in the technology and entertainment industry.

William L. McKnight and 3M: 3M has been an innovation firm for over a decade now, introducing products of everyday use with simple features that enhance their utility to a whole new level. 3M owes its innovative culture to its founder William L. McKnight, who founded his business with the principle that 'management that is destructively critical when mistakes are made kills initiative'. He believed that initiative people should be encouraged to ensure continued business growth. Another key principle that guides the organisation is aligning products to the needs of the client. Today, 3M has created thousands of products that delight customers with their simplicity and effectiveness.

Innovations and community impact: Aside from driving innovation-based business approaches, several organisations have also adopted innovation-based strategies to develop products and services that drive wider community impact.

The Jaipur Foot: The Jaipur Foot or Jaipur Leg is an inexpensive and effective rubber-based prosthetic leg developed to assist people with below-knee amputations. The product was developed in 1969 by Masterji Ram Chander under the guidance of Dr P.K. Sethi to offer renewed hope and freedom of movement for victims of landmine explosions in Rajasthan.

At a cost of approximately \$30, the Jaipur Foot has received international recognition as an inexpensive, quick-to-fit and easy-to-manufacture product. The Jaipur Foot is fitted free of

cost by the Bhagwan Mahavir Viklang Sahyata Samiti in Rajasthan, and has helped millions of people overcome their limb disability.

In recognition of his great service, Dr Sethi was awarded the Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership, and conferred the Padma Shri by the Government of India in 1981.

Mirakle Couriers: Mirakle Couriers is a logistics services company that uniquely combines community service with commercial business sense. The organisation drives employability and sustained livelihood for nearly 70 hearing impaired individuals, who are employed at the company's back-office data management and courier delivery functions. The company's hardworking female staff manage the back-end operations with professionalism and efficiency, while the talented and well-trained male courier agents manage courier delivery. They use safe public transport and stay conscious of their environment while carrying out their everyday courier delivery functions.

The company started its modest operations from a one-room office in 2009, and has today expanded to two offices, and coordinates delivery of a staggering 50,000 shipments per month. Dhruv Lakra, CEO, Mirakle Couriers states that the company was founded to create a "middle way between social work and conventional

business", and effectively taps into the superior visual skills which hearing-impaired individuals have to create in order to improve employability prospects for them.

Indian Railways Online Reservation System: As the largest rail network in the world, the Indian Railways manages high volume passenger traffic and travel reservations on a daily basis.

However, with the introduction of the online reservation system a couple of decades ago, the Indian Railways has revolutionised the way passengers manage their train journey schedules, doing so independently using the rail network's modern systems. This has also led to significant savings on commission and booking charge expenses for the Indian Railways and passengers respectively, and helped modernise train travel in the country.

Today, businesses differentiate themselves from other players in the market through innovations that they bring into their products and solutions. It is therefore imperative that they employ an innovation-focussed approach to drive their business, and adopt a working structure that enables creativity and experimentation. Importantly, this would entail engaging employees to be involved in wide-ranging work within a structured environment, enabling them to unleash their creative potential and create highly innovative products and solutions. ♦