

Innovation and Commercialization Part 2 of 4

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Create, Adopt or Adapt

Cultures evolve and are transformed by the curiosity and dedication of only a few individuals. Game-changing inventions – the type that alter lives and life-patterns forever – can be attributed to a finite number of people. The remaining members of society are either early adopters or adapters. An essential part of every product life cycle, early adopters are those who are first to use a new technology, buy the latest fashions, try a new flavour. Adapters emerge later, coerced into aligning with forces around them, either because adherence to methods of the past is awkward or obsolete.

The Psychology of Creativity

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi – a “less well-known but probably one of the most serious management scholars of recent times” – in his widely-quoted thesis [Creativity - Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention](#)¹ describes creativity as “the attempt to expand the boundaries of a domain”. Mihaly has identified four major internal, yet surmountable obstacles to the creative process: too many demands; too many distractions from psychic energy; laziness, or lack of discipline; and, not knowing how to channel one’s creative energy.

Steve Jobs and Albert Einstein dealt with the first two obstacles in a similar manner: Einstein wore the same old sweater and baggy trousers every day; Jobs stocked his wardrobe with one colour-black. Each iconic inventor found the decision of what to wear each day - an example of what Mihaly calls “the wear and tear of existence” - a taxing drain on their creative reserves.

Laziness or lack of discipline can be overcome through increasing complexity of the task, keeping the mind engaged and curious. Creative energy can be harnessed by taking up a hobby: learn to draw; play a musical instrument, bridge or chess; or, cook like a gourmand. Mihaly claims that by internalizing and mastering the “system” – rules, rewards and rationale – of a non-essential domain, the human mind experiences a freedom within which to explore various pathways to stated goals, and transfers this skill set to other tasks. ¹ISBN 0-06-017133-2

Fascination with the Everyday

A recently-released BBC documentary [Isaac Newton: The Last Magician](#) reveals a curious, systematic mind and disciplined nature exemplary of the requirements observed and advocated by Mihaly. Newton was interested in practical problems (alleviation of flatulence: steep horse dung in ale, express juices, drink), kept meticulous notes (confessed to the sins of “making pies on a Sunday night” or “punching my sister”) and like many over-achievers, never felt that he had finished anything, nor had solved a problem for all time. Lastly, no apple fell on his head.

Tenacity and Famous Failures

One particular trait of most of the world’s most famous creators, inventors and leaders was pig-headedness, as they trudged and trail-blazed to the success(es) for which they are known. Michael Michalko – an acclaimed creativity expert with an approach different than that of the academic Mihaly – refers to the [10 famous failures-10 dreams fulfilled](#). Among them, Bill Gates, Abraham Lincoln, Oprah Winfrey, J.K. Rowling and from the food industry, Colonel Sanders:

The failure: Despite having the now-famous fried chicken recipe, he was rejected 1008 times before a restaurant took it in. 1008! Oh and he also went to all 1009 restaurants on his own by driving his van and sleeping in it.

The success: You see it yourself today. KFC is a worldwide brand in the fast food industry and the finger-licking good chicken is here to stay.

The Creative, Tenacious Entrepreneur

Entrepreneurs “expand the boundaries of a domain”. As creative as artists, they develop something new and tenaciously overcome and resist doubting dissenters. Moreover, they believe in the ability of their undertakings to change part of the present into a positive, promising future. **FF**

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