

Don't die of Innovation Indigestion!

I recently read an article from Mckinsey, by Dr. Waguih Ishak, the division vice president and chief technologist at Corning Research & Development Corporation. You can find the full article here:

<https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/creating-an-innovation-culture> but I am referencing a portion of this piece. I encourage you to follow the link and read the rest.

He touches on an important point, and almost off handedly, hits another very critical point on the innovation journey. The quote I would like to focus on is this:

Conventional wisdom holds that organizations die of starvation from a shortage of good ideas and projects. In reality, they are much more likely to die of indigestion. A surfeit of projects with inadequate staffing makes delivering on anything less likely.

DR. WAGUIH ISHAK

I have participated in, and led innovation efforts at multiple large enterprises over my career. When I read this quote, it resonated so strongly I felt compelled to draft this short piece. What grabbed my attention on this, is the idea that many leaders (including myself) have focused on ways to bring innovation in to drive more demand through improved engagement models and “cultural change”. This is often seen and celebrated as part of transformational change to drive business value, and all the other clichéd terms we like to use.

In reality, there is often more to be gained in focusing on first principles – focusing on the hard work of understanding our teams, understanding what we need to be successful, listening to our people and giving them room to innovate and explore the ideas they already have. We seem to celebrate work over value, and so often I see the valuable “thinking time” being driven out of our days.

We have an opportunity to stop – look at our teams and prioritize thinking. Learn to get to know the people we have and probe them for what they would do if they were the leader. Then we can select the best ideas and get out of the way – empowerment and space are unbelievably powerful innovation tools!

Demand without capacity is a fool's errand, and creation of capacity comes through prioritization of value over work, and a recognition that innovation must be nurtured and given space. As value is created, it must be celebrated, as failures are seen, they must be dissected to pull out the value of the lessons. Keep the focus on the VALUE PRODUCED, not the IDEAS GENERATED. Value measures will vary depending on the effort, but they must be a part of each effort, and a part of the mindset and story to ensure innovation is meaningful, even when risky and / or exploratory.