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## Creativity is not enough

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*Without innovation to lend it value, a creative proposition won't make any difference to an organization's fortunes.*

*Pure creativity, in and of itself, is pretty useless, unless the idea is suitable, appropriate to achieving organization goals, and implemented.*



"Creativity alone was not enough — I needed a couple of extra hands." \_ Ravikanth

Every now and then I get into this conversation with someone where I say that I work in innovation, and they reply, 'Ah, creativity!' and I say, 'No, I mean innovation.' After a puzzled silence, I'm asked 'What's the difference?'

It's not a very surprising question. Most people use the terms creativity and innovation interchangeably, to generally suggest the creation of something new. In an organizational context, however, creativity forms one step in the larger innovation continuum. Creativity is a mental ability for seeing things differently, resulting in the generation of new ideas or concepts; innovation encompasses a larger context and involves taking these ideas forward towards achieving organizational goals. Creativity is about originality; innovation is about value-creation.

In a business, then, creative thought will not, by itself, result in adding value to an organization's topline ... or bottomline. There are many steps in between where the possibility of success could be enhanced - or the entire effort could slide between the cracks - and this includes the evaluation of good ideas and the seamless execution of the chosen ones. The sad fact is, pure creativity, in and of itself, is pretty useless, unless the idea is suitable, appropriate to achieving organization goals, and implemented.

Nothing illustrates this more vividly than a look at all the zany patents that litter patent offices all over the world. They are mute (if hilarity-inducing) testimony, to the amazing creative potential in man. They are also testimony to the wasted effort that results when creativity is rampant, and yet untrammelled by any customer-centric logic. Excerpted below are some prize gems - if you'd like to browse through more, take a visit to [www.totallyabsurd.com](http://www.totallyabsurd.com) and to [www.patent.freeserve.co.uk](http://www.patent.freeserve.co.uk) - guaranteed to cheer you up on a rainy day. Note: All these are registered patents (patent numbers have been deleted in interest of brevity), so their ... er ... intellectual property has been protected.

Many inventions reveal their creator's serious concerns. One inventor was worried about the cleanliness of post-war survivors, when he devised the "human car wash" - consisting of a mobile trailer where customers would be strapped into a hanging harness and merely have to dangle in a fixed position, as the conveyor belt moved them from wetting station, the soapy spray station, through the rinsing station to the final blow-drying station. Another inventor was worried about world famine and thought it would get solved by having snow and ice-balls from Antarctica pumped to the Australian desert, accelerated by the Earth's rotation. Given the dry-patch Australia is suffering right now, maybe this one is worth another dekho.

I'd love to meet the man who designed the 'spider ladder.' It's a thin flexible latex rubber strip which follows the inner contours of the bath, with suction pads attached to the top edge of the bath, to enable spiders to climb out of the bath." I am not sure if this would work, requiring as it does, spiders to follow the path obligingly. This must be one insect-friendly soul, but I doubt his invention saw the light of commercial day.

Apparently many inventors are serious pet-owners worried about their loved ones - there are ear-guards to protect doggies from a bath, diapers that attach themselves to birds with a harness, even an automatic petting post where a mechanical hand pats the four-legged friend when the master is at work.

Now here's something that could actually be used by actuarial companies - a 'life expectancy watch.' Strapped on your wrist and programmed to give your expected life expectancy based on answers punched in by you regarding your lifestyle, this could be a daily reminder of mortality - and may actually get those couch potatoes off to exercise, if they didn't get depressed to death when they looked at it.

Before I sound like a complete wet blanket, let me hasten to add that I thoroughly enjoy surfing sites on weird and wacky patents - they demonstrate the unflagging optimism of mankind, and the wish to make the world a better place to live in. Each of these patents was evidently important to its creator, who took serious effort to document the idea and stamp it with ownership. They are also original and creative, yet, many of them are unlikely to make the leap off the paper into a commercial proposition.

What will make the difference is whether ideas pertain to problems that are real (and not imagined by the creator), that are experienced by a large number of customers (I doubt human car washes or bird-diapers would number among these) and how well the idea actually solves these problems (hurling snow to Australia may not work out financially viable). Of course, hidden among the weird and the wacky could well be tomorrow's breakthrough, blockbuster product, waiting for the right venture capitalist to spot it. (I'd like a life-expectancy watch myself, egging me to go for a walk.)

The real hidden value, though, in the patent lists is the reminder that creativity and idea-generation is rarely a critical problem - the human mind is capable of infinite ingenuity. In aiming for value-creating innovation, however, the idea needs to be relevant, appropriate and executed well - now that's another story altogether.

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