

JOURNAL OF SMALL BUSINESS
STRATEGY

Book Review

The Ten Faces of Innovation

By Tom Kelley with Jonathan Littman

ISBN 0-385-51207-4

Reviewed by

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For decades we have recognized that small businesses owners need to create a “learning” organization in order to both innovate and accelerate the innovation process. The challenge is how to attain this goal. *The Ten Faces of Innovation* describes a clear and doable framework for designing and managing such an organization. Tom Kelley offers the framework by providing an inside glimpse at IDEO’s success and by putting a human face on the innovation process.

Small business owners who judge a book by its cover may overlook this book, because the cover shows the image of ten different people each having a distinctive attribute. Many owners have fewer than ten employees or may have little extra staff time to devote to only innovation. On the other hand, the small business owner who looks beyond the cover will find how to overcome the frequently played “devil advocate’s” role that can “drown out a new initiative in negativity.” More importantly, the owner will find a practical approach to transforming their company into a company with “360 degrees of innovation” through the help of Kelley’s ten people-centric approach.

Tom Kelley’s people-centric approach to innovation is refreshing and the key to its practicality. In addition, Kelley’s people-centric approach bumps up against the typical product innovation model that seeks organizational structures and processes so

that any employee can help the organization innovate. Kelley believes the roles that people play are central to any company innovation and the heart of the process should facilitate their roles. Kelley’s approach is also refreshing, because it does not depend on the sole entrepreneur as the only source of inspiration, vision, and innovation. Instead Kelley describes innovation as the synergy of ten distinct roles that can be played by ten or fewer people.

Kelley’s people-centric approach fully incorporates all the positive aspects of diversity. Research has clearly shown that diversity of employees is a key part of every leading company. Kelley’s approach focuses that diversity on innovation by identifying ten different roles: The anthropologist who observes how people interact physically and emotionally with the company’s products and services; the experimenter who prototypes new ideas continuously and learning by a enlightened trial and error process; the cross-pollinator who explores other industries and cultures for revelations that uniquely fit the company; the hurdler who knows the path to innovation is strewn with obstacles and develops a knack for overcoming the roadblocks; the collaborator who brings eclectic groups together; the director who gathers together talented people and sparks their creative talents; the experience architect who designs compelling experiences that go beyond mere functionality; the set designers who creates

the stage for the innovation team; the caregiver who anticipates customer needs and ready to look after them; the storyteller who builds both internal morale and external awareness through compelling narratives.

These ten roles are the heart of a company's ability to learn and remind us that a company does not learn. Instead, the people in the company learn. Likewise, the company does not have a culture and organizational memory. Instead, the people in the company create its culture and remember its past successes and failures. Consequently, Kelley organizes the ten roles into three sets of learning roles essential to innovation. The anthropologist, experimenter, and cross-pollinator keep the company from becoming too internally focused and humble enough to question their own view of the world. The hurdler, collaborator, and director are the organizers who are also savvy about the counterintuitive process of how the company may need to move ideas forward. Lastly, the experience architect, set designer, caregiver, and storyteller apply the insights gained from other learning roles to empower the company to make innovation happen.

As general manager of the Silicon Valley-based design firm IDEO, Kelley tells the secrets of how his imaginative company uses their employees' innovative energy to produce one innovative success after another, and he richly illustrates those secrets with new product and service ideas as well as explanations of how the ten roles work together to produce their continuous steam of innovation. The book clearly supports Kelley's underlying message: "Innovation is definitely not self-starting or self-perpetuating. People make it happen through their imagination, willpower, and perseverance. . . . The only real path to innovation is through people."