POV: Don't Start with Creativity Training

The case for "situative, experiential learning"

Want your company to "be more innovative and creative"? Don't start with creativity training. Start with a project – a high-priority business issue that a passionate team can sink its teeth into and learn from. Companies sometimes introduce broad-based "innovation and creativity training" and then either "wait and see" or conduct a pilot project to "try out" what was learned, to determine if the investment paid off. It can be a long and disappointing road.

We've found that innovation efforts are far more successful if you start by delivering tangible business value as the priority, rather than focusing on creating an organizational "capacity for creativity and innovative thinking". The latter will follow assuming you learn from the former. Demonstrating bottom-line results gets management's attention and the return on investment can be measured.

Building an entrepreneurial, creative culture is critical for long-term growth, in which several types of training play an important role. But don't start there. Reshaping culture and mindset could take a hopelessly long time before you see tangible business results – leaving your organization frustrated and disillusioned. In the absence of any clear ROI, management understandably resists pouring more money into something so amorphous. Demonstrating the ROI of "creativity training" is extremely difficult. It's somewhat easier to map the benefits of providing training on

> Demonstrating the ROI of creativity training is extremely difficult.

specific techniques or methodologies (such as managing focus groups, interpreting consumer research data, or facilitating a divergent thinking workshop). But while it's legitimate to correlate this kind of training to the number of consumer insights identified or platforms or new product concepts generated, it's usually a stretch to point directly to the number of in-market successes, since so many other factors are at play between the creative "fuzzy front end" and the post-launch cycle.

The more direct, "no nonsense" path to demonstrating tangible, measurable results is by committing a team to a high-value business initiative from start to finish. Several kinds of training – if the impact can be correlated and measured -- play a critical role in supporting these initiatives.

Organizational culture thrives on stories and experiences. What better way to inspire a culture of "creativity and innovative thinking" than to point to a real story of business success? Increasingly, "situative learning" seems to be the preferred method for many blue chip organizations. Allowing employees to participate in the innovation process first-hand in a real situation (rather than primarily through classroom study) not only pays the bills, it also leads to "experiential learning" that is more authentic, relevant and deeply resonant. That learning can then be captured, evangelized and institutionalized.

> Increasingly, "situative learning" seems to be the preferred method for many blue chip organizations.

Next step? If you <u>are</u> going to start with a project, you'll need to take an innovative approach, since tackling a business issue in the same old way, using the same old tools will yield the same old results. But that's another topic.

About InnovationPoint LLC

InnovationPoint is a non-traditional consulting firm that helps its Fortune 1000 clients take a strategic approach to innovation. InnovationPoint blends traditional and unconventional methodologies to identify breakthrough opportunities, develop growth strategies and new products, and helps clients develop repeatable methodologies that drive innovation. InnovationPoint's clients include Hewlett-Packard, Cisco, PepsiCo, Frito-Lay, Philips, Charles Schwab and Nestlé.