

YES! AND... CREATIVE GORILLA # 46

It is difficult to drive innovation in some cultures but there are ways to achieve it...

Make Innovation Happen...

"If something is too hard to do, then it's not worth doing. You just stick that guitar in the closet next to your shortwave radio, your karate outfit and your unicycle and we'll go inside and watch TV."

Matt Groening, cartoonist. *The Simpsons*



"Cycling in the Netherlands"

How can you make innovation happen in cultures where it struggles to thrive?

The Netherlands is very flat. Trust me; I have just spent a few days cycling round the "green heart" of Holland. It is very flat, very windy and a cyclist's paradise. There are cycle tracks and cycle signposts all over, in towns and country. Where you have to use roads they put large cycle lanes down each side so the cars have to squeeze through in single formation.

Everything appears geared (no pun intended) to the cyclist. Everywhere you look there are cycle racks, commuter cycle parks at the station and two storey cycle parks in Amsterdam. All full. Schoolteachers cycle past us, leading groups of

children on bikes. Old ladies do their shopping on their bikes. Cycling is part of the culture.

Whilst fighting a blustery headwind, I compared the Dutch infrastructure to Britain. Yes, we have spent (charity) money on a national cycle network, which is great if you want a cycling holiday but still leaves dangerous roads if you want to commute or go to the shops.

We spend money on cycle lanes too; we have one near our house. It runs for 100 metres down a wide hill until the road narrows and the cycle lane stops, exposing you to the high speed traffic again. Two kilometres further on there is another lane that runs for fifty metres. We are spending money on infrastructure and encouraging people to get out of their cars and on to cycles, but really we are playing at it. Cycling, especially in cities, is for the zealot and the brave.

Thinking about that led me to relate it to innovation, using cycling as a metaphor. The British cycling metaphor relates to companies who play at innovation. They say it is a strategic goal or a value, they encourage people to innovate and they throw some money at training, but they don't put sufficient infrastructure in place or build the right climate.

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Consequently people get discouraged and disillusioned.

SO

How might you relate the "Dutch" model - encourage cycling from a young age, build a real "every day" infrastructure and give priority to it - to business? Here are some thoughts:

- Have top level commitment and role modelling
- Fund it properly
- Make it part of the day job - include it in job descriptions, targets and rewards at all levels
- Use a consistent innovation approach / method across the company
- Train new inductees in the innovation approach and flexible thinking skills as soon as they join
- Build an innovation infrastructure that encourages people to develop and share ideas, moving the ideas forward quickly and providing fast decision making

Of course one big factor encouraging people to cycle in the Netherlands is that the country is flat. How would you relate that to business? How can you make the innovation equivalent of a "flat landscape"?

ACTION

Get on your innovation bike. Think of one thing you might do in your work area to encourage innovation for yourself and amongst your colleagues. Add it to your "to do" list as a priority.

TO CLOSE

I came back from holiday feeling fit, refreshed and yes, younger. The next day I went for a haircut, came home and asked my wife what she thought.

My eight year old son piped up, "It's ok but you can see the bald bits at the front now." The family collapsed in laughter. "On yer bike, son" I replied.

My suggestion for the business equivalent of a "flat landscape" is to have the right climate for innovation and to make it enjoyable.

May your ideas fly this week, but don't back pedal on them.

John Brooker | Facilitate, Innovate, Transform.



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