

# Innovate with Less Risk and Lower Cost

John Brooker & Jeff Parker

*“Innovation management  
has become a complex  
topic – in fact  
a fog of complexity”*

This article answers two questions. How can you:

- Cut through the complexity of innovation?
- Build the capability to innovate and innovate quickly?

## A Fog of Complexity

To begin answering these questions, let's move to Devon, England in 1972. I was in a team walking 45 miles and 10 hills across Dartmoor. We camped overnight. In the morning, we woke to thick fog.

Many on the team did not know what to do, but one boy took out his compass and navigated us, step by step, to the next checkpoint, using the nearest rocks and grassy mounds as guidance. A great feat.

How does this story relate to innovation? We believe that innovation management has become a complex topic – a *fog of complexity*. We would like to use this metaphor to explain how you can navigate that complexity.

## Summarise the Complexity

In simple terms, we can summarise the complexity of innovation in the form of the acronym CLAGS, (clag is another word for fog):

- Culture
- Leadership
- Approach
- Governance
- Strategy.

How might leaders respond to this complexity?

## Three Typical Responses

### CHOOSE TO IGNORE IT

Leaders close their eyes, ignore the fog or do nothing and hope the need to innovate will go away.

### GRASP AT TENDRILS

They pull at tendrils, set up idea schemes or training programmes and trust these will work.

### SEEK TO CONTROL IT

They set up an organisational change programme, to control the complexity, to blow away the fog.

There are examples of where these responses have worked, competitors go bankrupt, an idea from the scheme transforms the company, the change programme delivers; but they have high risks.



## High Risks

### LOWER VALUE

The share price or government funding may fall as analysts seek more innovative and profitable companies.

### DISENGAGED STAFF

Staff become disillusioned when ideas are not taken up or when nothing happens after training.

### HIGH COSTS

There may be high up front costs, long lead times and the loss of other opportunities. Worse, there may be little innovation.

## Work With Complexity

There is another way. We tackle complex issues, with a change approach called Solution Focus. It includes these principles:

- Take small steps, like the navigator on Dartmoor
- Tap the resources and innate capability within your people
- Encourage interaction, because that's where many ideas arise
- Keep things as simple as possible, but no more
- Treat each situation as different.

It is well tried and tested in many companies and you can apply it to help people innovate, especially within organisations that have no need to innovate rapidly or prolifically.

## A Case Study

To explain, let us use a case study of a company we work with Unipart Technology Logistics (UTL, part of the Unipart Group). [www.utl.co.uk](http://www.utl.co.uk)

The MD called us because she was interested in innovation. How could we help her? We explained the approach and later in the year went for a site visit.

### SITE VISIT

When we visited the site, we observed they had several strengths. They:

- Had set up new and innovative areas of business outside of their core process
- Had lean processes and the latest technology

- Are adept at continual improvement
- Had a climate that encourages change

Our first question after the visit was, “Why do you need our help?”

### THEIR ISSUES

The MD explained:

- They have pockets of innovation, but it is in silos and driven by client requests for new services outside of the core business
- Because competitors are lean and also use the latest technology, their core service is becoming commoditised; it is hard to differentiate
- They are not winning open bids because of this.

Her conclusion was that they needed to innovate more radically in their core business.

### WHAT THEY HAD TRIED

We asked them what they had tried before. They had tried a few things but with little success. They had:

- Set up an idea scheme, but this did not achieve much
- Set up an innovation committee (Group wide)
- Floated radical ideas, but had never found the time or situation to address these.

## THE WORKSHOPS

To move UTL forward, we planned an Inn8® Workshop Programme to use our Inn8® Approach, a structured way to address opportunities with three layers, the Inn8 Climate, Model (see Page 3) and Toolkit.

### PRIOR TO THESE WORKSHOPS

The MD:

- Outlined a basic innovation strategy, to pursue radical innovation in the core business so that people knew the kind of opportunities the company sought
- Set dates for the workshops, with time in between each workshop to allow for operational needs. [This space between workshops is not a requirement, we have run successful workshops over consecutive days as well]
- Formed a multifunction team of senior people, including herself
- Had the team read John's book, “Innovate to Learn, Don't Learn to Innovate”. [On Amazon]



## THE INN8® MODEL

The Inn8® Model helps you to exploit opportunities in a systematic, consistent and innovative way. At each Stage, there are three steps to:

1. Broaden your outlook and gather or generate information
2. Focus your outlook to assemble, prioritise and choose key information
3. Decide to move on, revert to the last stage, pause to gather information, or abandon the proposition.

This broadening and narrowing of outlook is important if people are to innovate successfully.

## THE INN8® WORKSHOP PROGRAMME

### WORKSHOP 1

The team gathered for a half day workshop. In this they:

- Consolidated understanding of the Inn8 Approach and Model
- Began to develop as a team and nurtured a climate for people to be innovative
- Learned how they might identify more unique opportunities that their competitors might not.

### WORKSHOP 2

Three weeks later, fitting around their operational needs, they attended a one day workshop to:

- Identify and explore the opportunity
- Create a final topic for innovation
- Agree the information they needed, which was primarily a diagram of the core process; not everyone was aware of this process.

### WORKSHOP 3

In the third workshop, a two-day event, the team first reviewed the core business diagram a team member had drafted.

This enabled everyone to understand it. It is difficult to innovate without good knowledge.

After this step the team generated ideas, chose and honed two radical propositions and shaped a strategy to execute them.

This gave them the confidence to know they could implement their solutions.

Next, they made a brief plan to move forward immediately.

## RESULTS

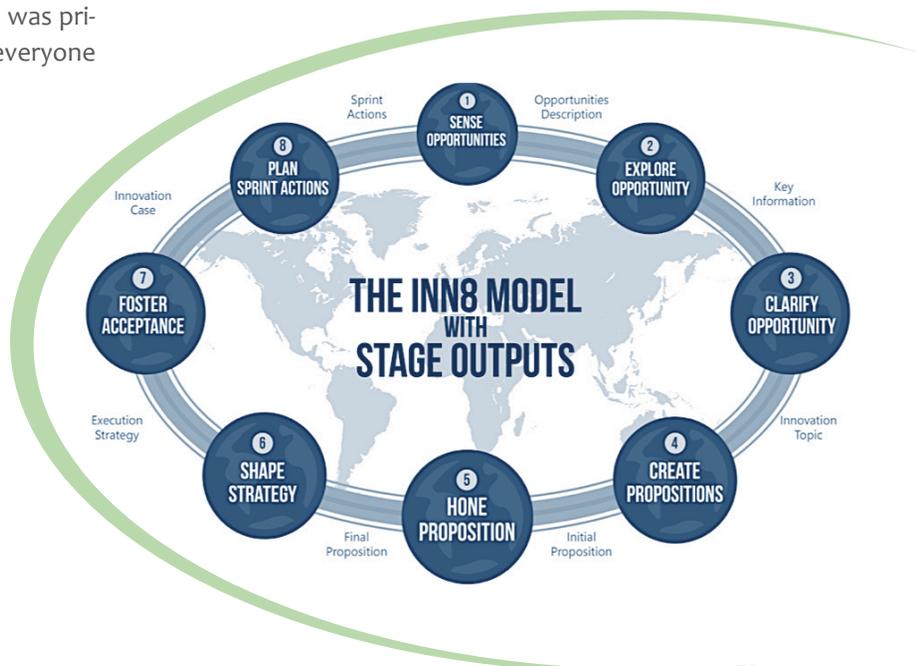
Of two radical propositions created:

- The top priority has been resourced and is moving forward
- They have put the second project on hold until they complete an allied project
- They have captured a number of incremental ideas to implement
- They have begun building an innovative climate
- They have appointed an innovation manager.

## BENEFITS OF APPROACH

In their words, UTL found:

- The very practical structured process, delivered two propositions immediately that could change service delivery to clients; something they did not dream of doing in just 3.5 days
- The innate knowledge of the cross functional team created a better result and fostered support to implement the propositions
- The programme fostered an innovative climate and required no training course; the team learned in house, while innovating
- The Unipart Group have licenced the Inn8 Approach to use as their in house structure to innovate.





## Moving On

Two questions you might ask are:

- How do you deal with complexity moving forward?
- How do you sustain innovative capability?

The answer is to use the Solution Focus principles to guide what you do, as you implement the proposition you created.

Deal with issues in the CLAGS areas as you meet them during implementation and reduce time and energy wasted on developing policy or processes you do not need.

Leaders lead by example as they implement the proposition. Implementation beats exhortation every time. As people see the organisation innovate, the culture will slowly change. Success taps the resources and energy of your people. Revise your strategy when needed and when you need more propositions, involve more people.

With this approach, you obtain a virtuous circle. Step by step you create a tangible output, and this gives people greater confidence.

## A Viable Alternative

Organisations that must manage multiple innovations on a rapid scale may consider this approach too simplistic. We have no argument with that, the complexity has been built for them.

However, there are many organisations that have no need for complexity, seek to be more innovative and are unsure how to move forward. Coupling the Solution Focus Approach with the Inn8 Approach, is a viable response, “a compass”. Certainly more viable than doing nothing or grasping at “tendrils of fog.”

## In Summary

Innovation management has become a metaphorical fog of complexity that we can summarise under the acronym of CLAGS.

To learn more on Inn8®, please read our book “Innovate to Learn, Don’t Learn to Innovate”. Buy it on Amazon now, or download Section 1 at our website, where you can also download a brochure on the Inn8® Workshop Programme.

This complexity can drive leaders to respond in ways that can be high risk for their organisation. They may ignore it, try one-off initiatives such as idea schemes or initiate full organisational change programmes.

There is another way. You can use a Solution Focused approach, coupled with the structured Inn8 Approach and a multifunctional team.

This way, you take small steps, encourage interaction and trust in the capability of your people. This will reduce your costs, engage your staff and enable you to innovate more quickly, i.e. it will reduce risk.

A case study showed that this approach created two radical propositions that the company is implementing. Senior managers explored the opportunity, developed the propositions and worked out the execution strategy. As a result, they are more likely to support implementation efforts and lead their staff to do this.

This way does not defeat complexity, but enables leaders to work with it, using the implementation of the proposition to tackle issues with the CLAGS.

Once the first proposition is on the implementation path, leaders can spread capability by involving more people to create and implement further propositions.



 **Yes! And.**  
Think Innovatively

### Contact Us

Speak: +44 20 8869 9990

Write: [hi@yesand.eu](mailto:hi@yesand.eu)

Read: [www.yesand.eu](http://www.yesand.eu)