

Put yourself at the heart of the problem

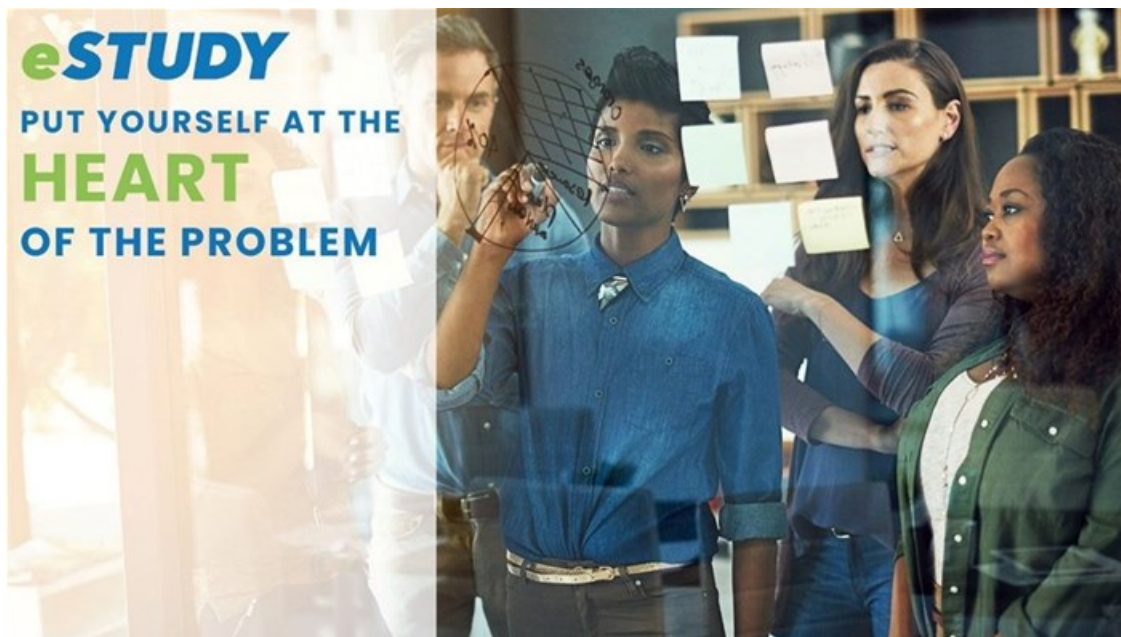
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Let's embrace innovation and dive into the heart of challenges to unlock creativity and foster groundbreaking ideas. Learn how to transform leaders into problem solvers.

Explore the power of immersion and humanity in innovation. Discover how stepping into customers' shoes can ignite fresh perspectives and ideas.

Uncover the untapped potential within your workforce and empower employees to contribute innovative ideas and boost motivation across your organisation.



In the world of business and leadership, innovation isn't just a buzzword; it's a necessity for survival and growth.

John Grant, a renowned consultant and author, recently shared a captivating anecdote about how he helped a major DIY chain's leadership team embark on an innovation journey. Through his experience, we uncover a powerful lesson – that to truly innovate, you must immerse yourself as a human being at the center of the challenge. The story not only illustrates this concept but also provides valuable insights into fostering innovation within your own organisation.

The unconventional workshop: A gateway to innovation

John Grant's engagement with a group of senior executives, including finance directors and CEOs, may seem typical. However, the approach he took was far from ordinary. Grant was asked to guide them through a workshop focused on the topic of storage, a common product in the DIY chain's inventory. Instead of diving straight into solutions and strategies, Grant prompted the leaders to introspect.

He tasked each participant with bringing a photograph of their most cluttered and embarrassing storage area at home. The results were both amusing and enlightening. The finance director, who hadn't accessed his garage in a decade, was among those sharing their storage woes. This activity not only broke the ice but also ignited a genuine connection with the problem at hand.

As Grant recounted, a lighthearted competition emerged, with participants playfully competing to display the most chaotic storage space. Amid the laughter, a profound shift occurred – these high-ranking professionals transformed into individuals, each grappling with a relatable challenge. This transformation laid the foundation for true innovation.

Lessons unveiled: Humanity in innovation

This unconventional approach bore fruit. The leaders transitioned from focusing solely on selling storage solutions to envisioning an entire service system. The service involved offering storage solutions for people with space constraints, charging them on a monthly basis. This shift in perspective led to a groundbreaking idea that went beyond the confines of better shelves.

The core lesson here is crystal clear – *to innovate successfully, one must immerse themselves in the very human essence of the problem*. This concept resonates with what digital experts often term the "user journey." In essence, the most successful innovators possess a profound understanding of the subjective, human facets of the problem they're addressing.

The exercise achieved more than just innovation; it briefly transported the participants away from their corporate roles. It allowed them to step into the shoes of their customers. This shift in perspective created an environment conducive to fostering new, groundbreaking ideas.

Igniting the innovation fire: Cultivating idea flow

This underscores the untapped potential within an organisation's workforce. Studies have consistently shown that a significant portion – around 80% – of innovative ideas within a company stem from its employees. Encouraging and facilitating the expression of these ideas not only enhances overall performance but also boosts motivation across the board.

So, how can you, as a leader, create an atmosphere where innovation flourishes? Let's delve into the strategies:

1. Changing your mindset

- *Dispelling misconceptions*

Grant cautions against two common misconceptions that hinder innovation:

- Problem-solving isn't solely management's responsibility: By trying to solve all problems, managers inadvertently stifle the creative potential of their team. This leads to dependency on managers for solutions, rather than empowering employees to think critically.
- Value of ideas isn't based on scale: Don't dismiss small ideas in favor of grand ones. Small solutions that tackle everyday issues can accumulate to create significant positive impacts. Their practicality and ease of implementation make them valuable contributors to company efficiency and quality.

- *Recognising the role of staff*

Why are employees a goldmine of innovative ideas?

- Proximity to the front lines: Employees possess an intimate understanding of their roles and interact directly with customers, suppliers, and other stakeholders. This puts them in a prime position to identify bottlenecks, inefficiencies, and emerging opportunities.
- Sensitivity to weak signals: Employees can detect subtle indicators of potential issues or opportunities that might not be immediately apparent through formal reports and statistics. Their insights are invaluable for maintaining differentiation and competitiveness.

2. Adopting the right approach

- Escaping the "idea box" trap

Grant warns against the limitations of the "idea box" approach:

In this system, a central department evaluates and implements ideas, creating a disconnected process.

It results in delayed feedback for idea contributors and often leads to ideas being implemented by individuals without direct involvement in the problem.

A successful IMS relies on intrinsic motivations and effective management practices:

- **Staff Motivation:** A robust IMS aligns with employees' fundamental motivations, such as control over their work environment, recognition from managers, and leaving a lasting impact on the company.
- **Managerial Involvement:** Line managers play a pivotal role in idea management. They become the primary point of contact for idea sharing and prompt feedback. This fosters a sense of trust and accountability within the team.
- **Collaboration and Trust:** Grant advocates for regular meetings where ideas are discussed. Encourage collaboration between highly motivated employees and those who may be hesitant. This mentorship approach creates a domino effect, encouraging even the most reserved to contribute.
- **Transparency and Communication:** Sharing team-wide challenges and information empowers employees to devise solutions. Transparency reinforces trust and equips team members with the resources they need to make impactful changes.
- **Seeking Feedback:** Invite colleagues to assess your own ideas. This not only gathers diverse perspectives but also instills a sense of ownership, paving the way for idea implementation.

In conclusion, innovation thrives when we break away from corporate titles and embrace the human element within challenges. It is of utmost importance to put oneself in the shoes of those affected by the problem. This approach, coupled with a shift in mindset and a structured idea management system, can unleash the creative potential of your team. By recognising that employees are the pulse of innovation, you can transform your organisation into a breeding ground for groundbreaking ideas that shape the future.

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