



**INSPIRATION**  
**FOR INNOVATION**

**GIJS  
VAN  
WULFEN**

**BIS PUBLISHERS**

**101  
LESSONS  
FOR  
INNOVATORS**

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# HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Suppose you want to be a swimmer. You can read a book about swimming. You can do a web search on it. Or you can even walk around a swimming pool. But that still does not make you a swimmer. The only way to be a swimmer is by jumping into the water. The same is true for innovation. You can't learn innovation from reading a textbook. The only way to be an innovator is by doing it.

Why have I written this book then? In this book I share with you the highlights of my practical experience of innovation for thirty years: as a marketer in industry, a consultant, an entrepreneur, an innovation facilitator and a global speaker on the subject. So you can find here practical inspiration to be a better innovator in the hundred stories I am sharing with you.

As I am Dutch, I have quite an outspoken style and opinion. I try to cut out 'all the bullshit' and just tell you how I have experienced being an innovator. I am sharing insights, cases, quotes, lists and models; anything that might help you in practice to master innovation. I also ask some confronting questions for you to reflect on. After all, the most important lesson is number one hundred and one: your own personal lesson for innovation.

I would like to thank all the people who have struggled with innovation in practice and shared their stories, Frederik de Wal for an outstanding design yet again, all the people from BIS Publishers and their editors, and last but not least my beautiful future wife Anna, my 'Queen of Kefalas'.

Gijs van Wulfen

*PS. Please reach out to me at:  
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**01-08**

**INNOVATE  
LIKE AN  
EXPLORER**

# 01 WHAT IS INNOVATION?

Let's clarify what I mean by innovation as the term has been defined in so many ways.

Be aware I like to oversimplify it to make it clear for anyone – and not only for business professionals. In my view, innovation is 'doing new things or doing things in a new way'. Let me exemplify the three keywords in this definition.

**New:** Innovation comes from the Latin word *innovat*, which means to renew or alter. The combination of *in* and *novare* suggests, 'to come up with something entirely new'.<sup>1</sup> The question is, new for whom? In my view, a product or service is only new when the (internal) customer perceives it as new.

**Things:** Innovation can appear in many forms. People associate innovation with new technological inventions. But it can also be services, business models, markets, processes, customer experiences, ways

of organizing yourself, etcetera. In this way, the meaning of innovation applies to companies, healthcare institutions, non-profit organizations, and even governmental organisations.

**Doing:** Innovation has a concrete outcome and it is only successful when it is adopted by customers, (internal) users, clients, or whatever you may call them. Effective innovators, therefore, have a process in place to transform ideas into concrete outcomes. Be sure to use one.

My own favourite definition of innovation comes from Lewis Duncan: 'Innovation is the ability to convert ideas into invoices.'

<sup>1</sup> Max McKeown, *The Innovation Book*, Pearson, Harlow, United Kingdom, 2014, p. xxix.



An aerial photograph of a dry riverbed in a desert landscape. The riverbed is a long, straight, light-colored channel cutting through the dark, textured ground. The surrounding terrain is a mix of dark brown and black soil with some sparse, low-lying vegetation. The perspective is from a high angle, looking down at the riverbed as it recedes into the distance.

INNOVATE LIKE AN EXPLORER

## 02 URGENCY LED MAGELLAN TO THE WEST

The Spanish were aware that the lands of the Americas discovered by Columbus were not part of Asia, but formed a new continent.

Also, the eastern routes to Asia that went around Africa were granted to Portugal in the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas drafted by the Pope. The Spanish Crown had no other option than to explore a westward passage to the Spice Islands.

The fleet of captains Magellan and Faleiro left the Spanish harbor on September 20, 1519. It wasn't until October 21, 1520 that the fleet, with one ship having capsized, reached Cape Virgenes at 52°S latitude. There, they concluded that they found the southwest passage as the salty waters ran far inland. A second ship mutinied and headed back to Spain before the fleet finished the arduous trip through the 600-kilometer long strait.

This strait is known today as the Strait of Magellan. Magellan named the new body of water the Mar Pacifico (Pacific Ocean) for its apparent stillness.

Magellan's expedition holds an important lesson for innovators: There was an urgent need to establish direct commercial relations between Spain and the Asian empires. That's why the expedition got the support of the King of Spain. Be sure there is demand, support, and funding for your innovation expedition before you start.

## 03 COLUMBUS HAD THE COURAGE TO LOSE SIGHT OF THE SHORE

In 1492, Columbus assumed he had discovered a western route to the East. Unfortunately, though, his estimates on the distance he needed to travel were wrong. He estimated the distance from the Canary Islands to Japan to be about 3,000 Italian miles (3,700 km, or 2,300 statute miles), while in fact it was 19,600 km (12,200 miles).

After several weeks, having sailed off the map for some time, the fleet's crew began to panic. The men were terrified of never making it back home. Columbus faced mutiny only days before reaching the shore of what he believed were 'The Indies'.

So, what gave Columbus the courage to sail off the map? Columbus came from Genoa and was somewhat of an outsider. He was a passionate sailor who had nothing to lose. He was also motivated by an interest in personal wealth: Columbus had an agreement with the Spanish monarchs that if he succeeded, he would get a share of the profits. Finally, Columbus was enabled by new techniques of navigation, better knowledge of the Atlantic Ocean currents, and the development of the caravel, which made it possible for him to sail much closer to the wind.

It is true for any innovator: 'Man cannot discover new oceans unless he has the courage to lose sight of the shore.'

– Andre Gide



INNOVATE LIKE AN EXPLORER

# 04 PREPARATION BROUGHT AMUNDSEN TO REACH THE SOUTH POLE FIRST

The race to reach the South Pole was a big event at the beginning of the twentieth century. On October 19, 1911, Roald Amundsen, a Norwegian explorer, and four companions left their Antarctic base at the Bay of Wales with four light sledges and fifty-two dogs. On December 14, 1911, the team arrived at the South Pole, thirty-three to thirty-four days before Robert Falcon Scott, a British Royal Navy officer and his group. After ninety-nine days, Amundsen's team returned healthy and unharmed. However, on Scott's return trip to base, he and his four companions all succumbed to starvation and extreme cold.

Amundsen's expedition benefited from their simple primary focus of being first in that it entailed thorough preparation, meticulous planning, knowledge of Inuit Eskimo wilderness techniques, good equipment, appropriate clothing, skilled handling of sled dogs, and the effective use of skis.

Amundsen's attention to detail is evident in the improvements he made to the boots they would wear. In his preparation, he took the boots apart, making them large enough to fit a wooden sole. The weather could drop to any temperature without the cold getting through the wooden soles and the seven pairs of stockings. Amundsen's careful preparation also included his study of innovations in snow goggles. He chose leather goggles with a slit opening for the eyes (the Bjaaland patent). They gave perfect protection and no one on the team experienced signs of snow blindness.

The success factor of Amundsen's expedition was preparation: the ability to foresee difficulties and to take precautions to meet or avoid those difficulties.



INNOVATE LIKE AN EXPLORER

## 05 BEING FIRST ON EVEREST IS ALL ABOUT TEAMWORK

'Well George, we knocked the bastard off.' These were the first words of Edmund Hillary to his old friend George Low meeting him near the South Col of Mount Everest. George welcomed Hillary with hot tomato soup from a thermos flask. Hillary and Norgay, a Nepali-Indian Sherpa mountaineer, were the first ones confirmed to have reached the summit of Mount Everest.

The 1953 Everest expedition consisted of a huge team of over 400 people, including 362 porters, 20 Sherpa guides and almost 5,000 kilograms of baggage. Expedition leader John Hunt named two British mountaineers: Tom Bourdillon and Charles Evans as the first assault team. Hillary and Norgay were the second assault team. Bourdillon and Evans attempted the climb, but due to a failing oxygen system only reached the South Col, about 100 meters below the summit.

Then Hillary and Norgay got their chance. They reached the 8,848-meter high summit, the highest point on Earth, at 11:30 a.m. on May 29, 1953. It made Hillary famous.

Getting to the summit of Everest is all about teamwork, like innovation. As Hillary wrote, 'John Hunt and D Namgyal's lift to the depot on the South-East Ridge; George Low, Alf Gregory and Ang Nyima with their superb support at Camp IX; and the pioneer effort by Charles Evans and Tom Bourdillon to the South Summit. Their contribution had enabled us to make such good progress.'

## 06 THE APOLLO PROGRAM WAS ONE BIG EXPERIMENT

In 1957, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, the world's first satellite, into orbit. This event created urgency in the United States.

The Americans prioritized their Mercury program, which aimed to launch a man into space. On April 12, 1961 the Soviet Union stunned the world again when cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first man in space.

President John F. Kennedy felt he had to restore America's prestige and wanted to show American superiority. He declared 'I believe that this entire nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before the decade is out, of landing a man on the Moon and returning him safely to Earth.'

One of the success factors of the Apollo program – the program that followed the Mercury program designed to meet Kennedy's goal – was continuous testing and experimenting. The Apollo 10 was a full-dress rehearsal for Apollo 11. They flew almost precisely the same track over the lunar surface that Apollo 11 would be flying.

They took pictures of the descent and landing areas. This was very helpful according to Neil Armstrong: 'By the time we landed in July, we knew all the principal landmarks on our descent path by heart.'

On the morning of the launch, Fred Haise, Aldrin's back-up as lunar module pilot, ran through a 417-step checklist designed to ensure that every switch was set in the proper position. So, test, test, and test.

# 07 TEN INNOVATION LESSONS FROM FAMOUS EXPLORERS

**'Men wanted for hazardous journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger and safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in case of success.'**

This advertisement ran in a London newspaper in 1913. Could you have imagined answering it? If so, you are a real innovator.

Whether or not you would have, over one thousand men did. They were hoping to be chosen for an Antarctic polar expedition led by Sir Ernest Shackleton. He gained fame for his 1909 expedition to the South Pole. When I read this ad in one of my travel books it struck me that one hundred years later, this could have been an ad for an innovation project. Modern day innovation has striking similarities with historic voyages of discovery.

Having so many similarities to voyages of discovery, what practical lessons are there for innovators inspired by successful explorers like Columbus, Magellan, Amundsen, Hillary, and Armstrong?

1. Follow your passion.
2. Urgency creates momentum.
3. The challenge of being first makes you think outside the box.
4. It's all about teamwork.
5. Have the courage to lose the sight of the shore.
6. Preparation. Victory awaits him who has everything in order.
7. Focus to maintain speed.
8. The tenacity of Magellan is a character trait of real innovators.
9. Apply new technology.
10. Experiment and test.



# 08 WHEN SHOULD YOU NOT INNOVATE?

Innovation is so popular you might get the impression it's the right management instrument for every organization. As an innovator, I know it's not.

To illustrate, let's take a look at historical expeditions and why many of them failed: expeditions that never succeeded due to cold, heavy storms, or starvation, like that of John Franklin, whose entire fleet perished while looking for the legendary Northwest Passage in 1845. Or those who were not well prepared or who were inexperienced, like Andrée's that set out for the North Pole in a hydrogen balloon in 1897. Or expeditions that suffered from design faults and equipment malfunctions, like the Soyuz 1 in 1967 or Apollo 13 in 1970. Or expeditions that lacked the right leadership and team spirit, like the expedition leader Charles Francis Hall who was poisoned by his crew in 1871 on a Polar expedition.

Drawing from the learning experiences of both successful and failed expeditions, I have compiled a list of situations when you should not innovate. I am aware that this can be provoking. It's meant to be.

Twenty situations when you should not innovate:

1. When you are convinced your market will not change in the coming five years.
2. When your clients are even more conservative than you are.
3. When your old formulas will still generate great risk-free results for the coming years.
4. When brand and line extensions will bring you a lot of extra revenues and profits.
5. When you don't get enough money and manpower to follow through.
6. When your company is in a short-term crisis.
7. When your organization is working at full capacity to meet the current huge demand.
8. When everybody says: 'Innovate!', but no one wants to be responsible.

9. When you're uncertain about what you're looking for.
10. When there is no real business need and it's only something nice for the company to have.
20. When your latest innovations are already successful and still need further exploitation.

11. When you can't form a capable, harmonious team that truly excited about innovation.
12. When there is no support at the top.
13. When the people in your organization are not (yet) prepared to break their habits.
14. When people in your company are lazy – content to only copy from others.
15. When the organization doesn't have any kind of vision about its future course.
16. When long-term planning means looking just three months ahead.
17. When everyone fears failure.
18. When everyone will attack and ridicule the newness of an idea.
19. When important stakeholders will block it at any time.

So, when is the moment to innovate? Well, that's when you don't recognize any of the circumstances above. It's when there is an urgency to innovate, the organisation is financially well, and everyone is dedicated to a process of at least eighteen to thirty-six months. Pick the right moment; you'll only have one chance to initiate innovation.



**PERSONAL**

**REFLECTION**

**ARE YOU  
ABLE TO COME  
ORIGINAL IDEAS  
REST ARE**

**CURIOUS AND  
UP WITH  
WHILE THE  
STUCK IN  
CREATIVITY?**

**09-27**

**INNOVATION  
MINDSET**



## 09 OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE ALONE WILL KILL YOU

Operational excellence is a philosophy of ongoing improvement. But in practice a lot of companies focus exclusively on one aspect of this: doing things cheaper. Cost cutting is essential to keep companies profitable. But in the long run you cannot survive on doing the same things better and cheaper. The light bulb wasn't invented by continuously improving the candle.

New technology, new regulations, new competitors, and new business models will disrupt your market. Operational excellence gets you your profits today. Innovation excellence will get you your profits tomorrow. But there are no old roads to new destinations. How do you find them?

Be inspired by the famous words of the historical Apple campaign of 1997: Think Different: 'Here's to the crazy ones. The misfits. The rebels. The troublemakers. The round pegs in the square holes. The ones who see things differently. They're not fond of rules. And they have no respect for the status quo. You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them. About the only thing you can't do is ignore them. Because they change things. They push the human race forward. While some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius. Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who do.'

In an organisation you need both operational excellence and innovation excellence. They are like brother and sister. So, start listening to the misfits, the rebels, and the troublemakers in your organisation, and beyond.



# 10 WHY MOST MANAGERS FEAR INNOVATION

Once a CEO told me three 'truths about innovation' in his company. 'Gijs; I get to see a lot of wonderful plans for new innovative ideas, presented by eager, passionate good people, but experience taught me three things:

1. In the end it always takes more money than they initially promise.
2. In the end it always takes more time than they initially promise.
3. In the end the business case is always worse than they initially promise.'

Like this CEO, most managers are well aware that you have to take new roads before you reach the end of the present dead-end street. But at the same time, they have become reluctant to take those roads because they have been disappointed so many times before.

Saying yes to innovation is a step into the unknown for everyone involved. Not only for the innovation team, but also for those in management who have approved the project. It creates fear of failure. Why should we run the risk as long as the present business is still doing okay, anyway?

As innovator, you can fight this risk-adverse culture as a kind of modern Don Quixote fighting windmills. Or you can accept it. I tried myself to fight it and it brought me nowhere, to be quite honest. Only when I was frustrated in another job and finally accepted their conservative culture as normal, could I get management to see the benefit of taking risks.



# 11 IMPROVING IS A STEP INNOVATION IS A JUMP

Innovation is vague: so many people, so many opinions. In essence, everybody agrees that innovation refers to something new. A new product, service, process, business model, way to engage customers, whatever.

The vagary of innovation starts with many people agreeing about, 'what do you consider new?' Take for example the first ten Apple iPhones with release dates spanning from 2007 to 2015. Which of them do you consider new? I only consider the first iPhone new. That was a great big new idea. All other iPhones are improvements of the first device. Now don't get me wrong. Some of the next versions of the iPhones, which I use myself, add great value.

But that's not the point. The main criterion is the newness of the offering. Apple improved their iPhone, they did not innovate it. Later, their next real innovation was the iPad.

As a business economist, I love improvement. Striving for operational excellence and fostering improvements generates profits immediately. However, striving for innovation excellence will only generate profits the day after tomorrow. You improve in small steps and you innovate in big jumps. That's the difference between improvement and innovation. So please improve, but don't forget to innovate in time.

# 12 **CREATE A SHARED VISION OF THE FUTURE**

Not long ago, the CTO (Chief Technology Officer) said to a friend of mine, 'innovation is not a problem. We have plenty of innovative smart people in every department and at every level. That is our problem. They are disconnected.'

Do you recognise this disconnect? Organizational silos are a problem for large and small businesses alike. Farmers use different silos to separate different types of grain, which is excellent. A department that works well together is also excellent. But when employees interact poorly with others outside of their 'silo', it's hard to realise overall company goals.

When you want innovators among all those silos to work together, then you should start to facilitate to get a shared vision of the future: on the future of your markets, of your technologies, of your people, and consequently get a vision on the innovation goals of your organisation. When your organisation is 'siloed', it's not a wise idea to deploy a top-down strategy in making this vision. Be sure to connect key-people from every silo into your 'shared vision of the future' project. In this way they open their minds, get new insights, and as producers of the shared vision, will become ambassadors of this vision in their departments. Connecting your innovators in a shared vision is a great start to bring your organisation a shared passion, shared focus, and shared innovation results.

# 13 HOW TO GET RID OF OLD IDEAS

Innovation is the process of getting new ideas for simple solutions to solve relevant customer problems or needs. When there is a sudden need for innovation the first thing people do is **organize a brainstorming session**. But usually this approach doesn't lead to anything innovative. Because, when you brainstorm unprepared with the same group of colleagues, hardly anything new will appear. The problem is getting rid of the old ideas first.

I love this quote by the American businessman Dee Hock: 'The problem is never how to get new, innovative thoughts into your mind, but how to get old ones out. Every mind is a building filled with archaic furniture. Clean out a corner of your mind and creativity will instantly fill it.'

Once you've got the old ideas out of your mind, new ones come automatically! That's why it is essential that you first change

your thought patterns to get rid of the old ideas before you can create new ones. The key to breaking old thought patterns is acknowledging that they are outdated and keep you from the progress you really desire. You won't convince yourself of this by staying behind your desk. You have to go out into the world to challenge your old insights. There are four ways to replace old ideas with new insights.

### 1. Explore trends

By exploring trends yourself, you will realize the world is changing rapidly. Trends offer huge inspiration for new insights. So, study new ideas, concepts or business models based on new trends.

### 2. Explore technology

Technological developments are a wonderful source of inspiration. You will find technological resources at universities of technology, technology start-ups, and research centres linked to the non-

profit government agencies or large tech companies such as Google, Philips, Siemens, or Vodafone. And get into contact with market leaders such as Samsung, 3M, IBM, Ericsson, or Cap Gemini to explore their new technology. Soon, you'll find out that the way you have been doing things is fast becoming obsolete.

### 3. Explore Opportunities

Generate potential innovation opportunities for your organisation and seek inspiring sources for those opportunities. Go out and meet with inspiring people. One thing will lead to another. Your exploration journey will automatically take you off the familiar pathways your mind usually follows.

### 4. Explore Customer Frictions

Meeting customers in person and discovering their frictions are the most effective sources of inspiration when it comes to getting rid of old ideas. A customer friction is a relevant need, impulse, or wish

from a specific target group that is currently is left unsatisfied. Often, these are issues people struggle with daily in their personal and professional lives. You just have to meet your customers and talk with them, always asking the most important question: Why? Remember, 'The man who asks a question is a fool for a minute, the man who does not ask is a fool for life.' – Confucius

You need fresh, new insights to get fresh, new ideas.