



# MIND THUMPER:

## Engaging in Disciplined Thinking about Innovation

### CHIEF EXPLORER'S KNOWLEDGE BANK

Mentoring Resources for Helping to Develop Modern-Day Renaissance Leaders

(To participate in the Renaissance Expedition join the LinkedIn Site of Donald Simpson)

*“The way in which we respond to the world is influenced greatly by the perceptions we have of our world. Thus we need to pay increased attention to surfacing our underlying assumptions which drive our behaviour.”*

- Don Simpson

#### Key Challenge (Being Addressed in This Mind Thumper)

To engage individuals in reflecting and reacting to a number of assumptions about innovation in order to clarify and activate their own understanding of and commitment to the practice of innovation.

#### Setting the Context for this Challenge

Since the way in which we view an issue or a challenge (our assumptions) strongly influences the way in which we address that challenge then it is important to surface these assumptions, which are often held unconsciously.

Here are some select examples of the assumptions on innovation, which are driving the way the Innovation Expedition addresses the challenges of innovation. Read and reflect on these assumptions and note the assumptions which are unclear to you and any with which you strongly disagree.

In periods of fundamental change, such as the one in which we are living, it is the innovators who help organizations to survive and thrive. Innovation matters, not just in terms of productivity and economic well-being, but also in terms of community, personal and cultural development.

Innovation is much more than discovery research – important as that research is. Innovation, as it is now being perceived, involves a complex supply chain of Research + Design + Development + Demonstration + Deployment into the market (R+D+D+D+D). Innovation is more than just an idea – it is an idea that has been made to work.

## Setting the Context for this Challenge

1. Although some individuals may be more intuitively innovative than others, our assumption is that innovation is a discipline that can be taught and learned. It is something that can be developed as a set of skills and competencies. Our assumption is that many people can be innovators, not just a few.
2. Innovation is a requirement for Canada's future across all sectors of social and economic activity: it is not just nice to have, it is a necessity.
3. Innovation is about more than science or technology – it is also about people, relationships, processes and resources. Innovation then can be characterized as being both technological and social (organizational and behavioural).
4. Innovations can be focused on incremental change (continuous improvement) or on breakthroughs.
5. The basic requirement of a successful innovation is that it either meets a demand or creates one and is sustainable in doing so over time. To qualify as an innovation a change must be visible to others and must offer a lasting impact.
6. Innovation can occur and needs to be encouraged at all levels within an organization. Innovations can occur at the individual, team, organizational or interorganizational level.
7. The focus of innovation efforts can be on:
  - innovations in products and services
  - process innovations (changing the way work is done)
  - innovations in culture (changing the organizational structure and the operating principles including changing attitudes and behaviours)
8. Innovation can involve either "a better way to do an old thing" or "a better thing to do". An innovation can be as basic as a procedural change in a recruitment process or a marketing approach

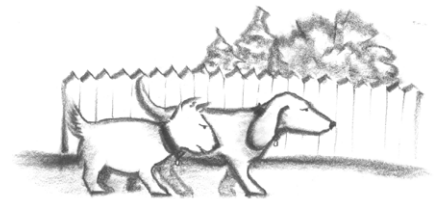
OR

as complex as developing a new breakthrough product or a different approach for establishing a beachhead in a new market.
9. The primary business innovation "system" is called "capitalism" – and the primary mechanisms of capitalism are the markets and the firm.
10. Firms rely on customers and investors for resources to support innovation – the absence of either suggests that the innovation is not worth the risk.
11. The primary driver of successful business innovation is access to a market of an appropriate size, given the return on investment (ROI) needed for the innovation to make commercial and practical sense. Appropriate market size varies by product/service, but small markets rarely produce the return innovators require to sustain their product or service and secure the ROI needed.
12. Innovators have to overcome hurdles to take their product to market – these include government regulation, the lack of infrastructure, the competencies of the firm and the speed at which competitors move.
13. Disruptive innovations – innovations that change the nature of a market and its customers' behaviour – force other innovations.
14. Focused innovation in today's fast fast-changing knowledge economy must encompass something more fundamental than new technologies and new products, important as they may be. It involves a new perspective on the world; a new mode of thought; a major transformation in the structure of organizations; new criteria for selecting, supporting and rewarding leaders; and new operating principles.

This approach encompasses the development of a new culture of innovation. To reap the benefits, individuals, organizations and communities must engage in a process of cultural change.
15. A major barrier to innovation is not only the creation of good ideas. More often it is a problem of dissemination. There is a long history of breakthrough innovations that have taken large amounts of time to become widely accepted. There is also a history of breakthrough products being created and ignored in one organizational culture and those same products being quickly picked up and commercially exploited by a more innovative organization.
16. The move to establish an innovation economy is often hindered by the unconscious reliance of key power brokers (who control the allocation of resources) on standard planning and control processes to determine what innovative ideas are deserving of support.

## Key Learnings from this Mind Thumper

- The drive to build an innovation driven economy and a culture of innovation in organizations is one of the principle forces behind the changing nature of leadership in the knowledge economy.
- Innovation is more than a product – it can also involve an operating process, a support system, service or a new way of structuring an organization.
- This integrative approach encompasses the development of a new culture of innovation. To reap the benefits individuals, organizations and communities must engage in a process of cultural change.
- The conversion of good ideas into innovations that find champions for their introduction and acceptance are major barriers to the creation of an innovation driven culture. This is a significant problem in Canadian efforts to commercialize exciting innovations.
- A difficult but critical challenge for those with an instinct for practicing innovation is the need to help key influencers to recognize that the move to establish an innovation economy involves a major shift in organizational culture and demands the same type of cross-cultural understanding that one applies when preparing to live in an entirely different cultural community which operates under significantly different sets of assumptions.
- There is a huge challenge (which offers significant potential payoffs) facing individuals, organizations and communities to inspire and support their colleagues to:
  - understand the innovation process
  - establish a supportive environment for practicing innovations
  - educate the community about
  - this important process, and provide frameworks, guides, tools, and appropriate work experiences to help interested individuals hone their skills as entrepreneurial, collaborative innovators who can provide the necessary change leadership.



## Continuing Your Personal Journey to Learn How to Innovate

- Review other Mind Thumpers in this series, starting with Topic 5 (The Changing Nature of Networks and their Significance ).
- Review the Innovation Expedition website ([www.innovationexpedition.com](http://www.innovationexpedition.com)) or connect with the team ([hello@innovationexpedition.com](mailto:hello@innovationexpedition.com)) in order to explore other products and services of the Expedition which might support your network-building efforts.

Visit our special Innovation Dialogue ([www.innovationdialogue.com](http://www.innovationdialogue.com)) workspace within the Innovation Watch website ([www.innovationwatch.com](http://www.innovationwatch.com)).