

Three Us to rule them all

Innovation to some is about the light-bulb moment – that idea that pops into your head which is simple, but elegant, and will transform everything. To others, innovation equates only to technology. Undeniably innovations like the internet and smartphones have transformed our lives, but technology on its own isn't innovative. It only becomes so when we adopt it. That is why innovation is inherently a people business. If we don't adopt new technologies, or ways of doing things, innovation is doomed to fail.

Failure and innovation are inevitably bedfellows. Depending on which studies you believe, between 70% and 90% of innovation fails. This is why innovative organizations need to be able to cope with failure and, more importantly, learn from it. Most large organizations are starting to embrace this style of innovation but want to fail fast, and fail cheaply, while increasing the likelihood of success by putting innovation processes in place.

That's where people-centred innovation comes in. It starts by figuring out where users are in their innovation journey and where opportunities lie to help them to improve the ways that they work, rest and play. Sadly, it isn't as easy as asking people what they want – because they don't always know. As Henry Ford once famously said: "If I asked people what they wanted, they would have said 'faster horses'."



Dr Nicola Millard, BT's head of customer insight and futures, looks at how to keep people at the centre of innovation

This is why making innovation tangible and real is important. The benefits of innovation can often only be realized when it is used in context. Prototypes, experiments and proofs of concept are all vital components in getting people hands on and experimenting with new ways of doing things. This approach can uncover what works, what doesn't and what strategies and processes need to be put in place to help adoption.

Stacking the odds

But how can we stack the odds and make innovation work better? The answers lie in some fascinating, but convoluted, psychology. In simple terms, it boils down to the 3 Us. Is it useful? Is it usable? And finally, who else is using it?

Usefulness includes a couple of critical factors:

- Will it help me get to my goal? We are

unlikely to adopt any innovation unless we think it will fit the task at hand and will get us to our goal effectively. This has very little to do with actual functionality (how it works), and all to do with beliefs (why it's important to change).

- Will it make life easier for me/make me more productive? This is about confidence as to whether it will work in the first place. The "WIFMs" come in here (what's in it for me?) – if users think it is going to take more effort to learn new ways of doing things than they think it's worth, they are unlikely to do it.

Of course, if the users' answers are "no" to both these questions, you have a problem. Equally, the answer might potentially be "yes", but the user needs a bit of convincing. Just assuming that everyone will "get it" without any education or training may cause people to reject innovation on the basis that it is too difficult.

Usability is probably the easiest bit as it is a relatively mature design discipline – also often called "design thinking". This is about designing with people in mind – ensuring that innovation supports the variety of ways and contexts in which users work, and are as intuitive and easy as possible to use. We are inherently lazy creatures, so making the path to adoption the easiest one is critical. As part of this, it's desirable to involve users in the design process as they are probably best placed



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to know what would, and would not, make things easier. It also gives them control over their future destiny (which is also likely to increase their buy-in).

Confidence begets adoption

Innovations that are perceived to be both useful and usable have a better chance of being used. However, there is another set of factors that come into play that determine whether they are adopted or not – how confident people are in using them, and whether users think that people like them are embracing them. To improve adoption, we need to consider:

- Education: in the case of enterprise technologies, it isn't uncommon for users to come in on a Monday morning to find new, mysterious things have been

dropped onto their desktop. The problem is that no one has told them what they are, or how to use them. It takes a lot more to change long-established habits and behaviours than dropping technology in from on high. It may seem obvious that telling people about new innovations may well increase their acceptance of them, but it is rarely done in practice.

- Risk reduction: innovation could make our lives better – except when it doesn't. Rather than acting rationally about innovation, we are often unconsciously weighing up risks versus rewards and costs versus benefits. Do we think that doing things a different way is inherently risky? In the context of innovations such as artificial intelligence, there may be a fear that innovation will make us redun-

dant. What is the risk associated with not adopting innovation – will it mean that we start to miss out on things?

- Social influence: the likelihood of adoption of innovations such as social networks is whether other people we know – our boss, our peers, our friends – are using them. A social network of one would be a lousy social network. That's why leaders and influencers who lead by example can provide powerful peer pressure for adoption – not just on social networks. Who wants to appear to be lagging behind their peers?

By keeping the 3 Us in mind when introducing and testing innovations, organizations are far more likely to reap the benefits, rather than set themselves up for failure. Think: useful, usable, used.