
Drucker on Implementing Innovation

Adapted from *Managing the Nonprofit Organization*
by Peter F. Drucker

Usually, there is no lack of ideas in nonprofit organizations. What's more often lacking is the willingness and the ability to convert those ideas into effective results.

One strategy is practically infallible: Refocus and change the organization when you are successful. When everything is going beautifully. When everybody says, "Don't rock the boat. If it ain't broke, don't fix it." At that point, let's hope you have some character in the organization who is willing to be unpopular by saying, "Let's *improve* it." If you don't improve it, you go downhill pretty fast.

To then make an innovative strategy successful, you must find a way to bring new ideas to life.

That starts with finding people on your staff who are receptive—those who welcome the new, who want to succeed and, at the same time, have enough stature, enough clout in the organization so that, if it works for them, the rest of the organization will say, "Well, there must be something to it."

Even when you find the people who are excited about the new, don't omit testing the idea. Don't omit the pilot stage. If you do, and skip from concept to the full scale, even tiny and easily correctible flaws will destroy the innovation.

Another common mistake is to patch up the old rather than to

go all-out for the new. There comes a point when one has to look at what the job requires and design for that job, rather than saying, "This is how we've always done it. Let's improve it a little bit." This is one of the critical decisions. It's one of the crucial tasks of the executive to say, "Enough is enough. Let's stop improving. There are too many patches on those pants."

Don't assume that there is just one right strategy for innovation. Every one requires thinking through anew. Don't say, "We have been successful six times in introducing the new this way, so that must be the *right* way. That's our formula now." Say instead, "Maybe this needs to be done differently."

Before you go into an innovative strategy, don't say, "This is how we do it." Say, "Let's find out what this needs. Where is the right place in the market? Who are the customers, the beneficiaries? What is the right way to deliver it? What is the right way to introduce it?" Let's not start out with what we know. Let's start out with what we need to learn.

When a strategy or an action doesn't seem to be working, the rule is, "If at first you don't succeed, try once more. Then do something else." The first time around, a new strategy very often doesn't work. Then one must sit down and ask what has been learned. "Maybe we pushed too hard when we had success. Or we thought we had won and slackened our efforts." Or maybe the service isn't quite right. Try to improve it, to change it and make another major effort.

**MODULE 5: EVIDENCE-BASED IMPLEMENTATION
OF EVIDENCE-BASED INNOVATIONS—READING**

THE DRUCKER PRIZE 2016

If it still really doesn't work, move on. Go to work where the results are. There is only so much time and so many resources, and there is so much work to be done.