

## Book Review

*The Ten Faces of Innovation: Strategies for Heightening Creativity*  
by Tom Kelley (with Jonathan Littman)  
Croydon: Profile Books, 2006



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It appears increasingly difficult to author a book on innovation that does not contain a litany of clichés. This book is no different! It employs the same tried and tested examples of 3M, Pixar, Medtronic, BMW, Virgin, etc. and people such as da Vinci, Edison, Forde, Dyson, Lucas and Branson. However, the very nature of innovation calls for many examples and this book contains quite a few useful cases that may help give practitioners novel insights into innovation and creativity. This book holds very little academic value and does not empirically test or evaluate the main tenets of the book.

The premise of the book is that innovation and creativity need ten different personas in order to prosper in an organisation. These ten roles are the Anthropologist, the Experimenter, the Cross-Pollinator, the Hurdler, the Collaborator, the Director, the Experience Architect, the Set Designer, the Caregiver and, finally, the Storyteller. The ten personas or talents can then be employed to build a multidisciplinary team as the author tells us that ‘innovation is ultimately a team sport’ (p. 262).

The real value of this book does not lie in the ten personas as outlined by Kelley but in the practical advice and examples that he gives from

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his company, IDEO. IDEO is the highly successful design and innovation consultancy firm to which Kelley belongs. Some of the insightful examples and techniques that he details include the unfocus group, collaboration spaces (virtual rooms, etc.), Knowhow speakers, Kate's seven kid secrets, lunchtime brainstorming sessions (every payday), mid-afternoon naps and mapping customer value. These examples of stimulating organisational innovation can be employed in any organisation and it is in this aspect that the book excels.

Each of the ten personas (the first three relate to learning, the next three relate to organising and the final four relate to building) merit a chapter of the book and as such this review will detail each of the ten roles separately, beginning with the Anthropologist.

### THE ANTHROPOLOGIST

The first persona detailed by Kelley is that of the Anthropologist. This role, as the name suggests, entails watching and observing people in order to investigate innovative solutions. He cites some of the more famous anthropologists, such as Charles Darwin, Jane Goodall and Margaret Mead, highlighting some of their methods with regard to the immersion in and observation of participants. One of the more interesting techniques highlighted by the book is 'Kate's Seven Kid Secrets', which relies on the ingenuity and unique perspectives that children offer. As children have not been tainted by years of norms, rules and routines they see things in a radically different way to adults. Kate's seven kid secrets involve seven questions to relate to children and gain their trust in order to garner learning from children. As Kelley tells us, 'Why do we watch and learn from kids and teens? They just soak up novel ideas, whereas grown-ups often spend a lot of time pushing back, telling you why it won't work' (p. 38). Many innovation writers have talked about the innovative potential of children (Clegg, 1999; von Hippel, 2005; Von Oech, 1983) but Kelley gives some practical steps on how to reach out and develop a rapport with younger people in a business context.

### THE EXPERIMENTER

The Experimenter is the second persona and relates to the traditional role of the Innovator. The author begins this chapter by citing the associated failures that Experimenters usually undergo before they

perfect their innovation, using examples from the Wright Brothers, Dyson and WD-40. Prototyping is key to the Experimenter and he or she can be identified as ‘someone who makes ideas tangible – dashing off sketches, cobbling together creations of duct tape and foam core, shooting quick videos to give personality and shape to a new service concept’ (p. 43). Kelley underscores the importance of a physical prototype to sell your idea to prospective interested parties. He also offers ‘video prototyping’ as a unique and easily achievable method to give your idea or service an enhanced credence. Another interesting method to develop creative ideas is that of ‘play’ and harnessing the previously cited example of children, allowing them to play to generate new ideas.

#### THE CROSS-POLLINATOR

The final and third role pertaining to *learning* is that of the Cross-Pollinator. Innovation rarely uses solely one technology or method and to break innovation down and put each functional aspect in a silo can often be detrimental to the innovation process. Kelley details this ‘unexpected juxtaposition’ in some great examples, including typewriters, reinforced concrete, the Frisbee, Wilbur Wright and Crest Whitestrips. The book explores the benefit of having as many ‘T-shaped people’ as possible around for cross fertilisation; a T-shaped person being someone with a broad knowledge in a variety of disciplines and an intense knowledge of one area. It also gives an interesting perspective into reverse mentoring, i.e. older executives being helped to keep technologically apace by having a younger employee assigned to them. This is particularly interesting because many older executives would freely admit that they are not ‘in tune’ with younger generations.

#### THE HURDLER

The Hurdler is the first of the three chapters pertaining to *organising*. According to the book, ‘Hurdlers do more with less. They get a charge out of trying to do something that’s never been done before’ (p. 92). Thus a Hurdler, according to Kelley, is someone who will make the most with little or no resources; someone who likes a challenge and will not be persuaded to desist with a project he or she believes in. One gets the sense from this chapter that the author has

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moved on from the idea generation stage of innovation to a more commercial outlook. This is seen in many traits of the Hurdler, which can be synonymous with the typical entrepreneur.

### THE COLLABORATOR

The Collaborator is the fifth role or face of innovation and consists of a person who facilitates and initiates interaction outside of traditional boundaries. This person helps dismantle silos and bring about a multidisciplinary effort. Kelley shares some interesting insights from IDEO on how to facilitate collaboration, such as ‘unfocus groups’ and ‘collaboration through cohabitation’. He also details how triathlons are the new golf when it comes to a shared experience for collaborating individuals. Kelley often becomes muddled with regard to the process of collaboration and the person, i.e. the difference between the Collaborator and the collaboration. The person is often neglected as many examples detail collaboration between major firms and overlook the people responsible for the collaboration.

### THE DIRECTOR

The Director, according to Kelley, is the third and final *organising* role. It is very much associated with leadership and management functions. Kelley tells that a Director’s job is to inspire and direct other people and he highlights Steven Spielberg and Steve Jobs as exemplars of Directors from their respective fields. This role seems to lack coherency as set out by Kelley. He begins by detailing the importance of Directors and thereafter neglects to describe them or offer any ideas as to how to cultivate them, instead preferring to write tangentially on the importance of brainstorming and the importance of a mid-afternoon power nap. If one reads between the lines one can see a clear link between what Kelley calls a Director and what traditional leadership theory would call a transformational leader.

### THE EXPERIENCE ARCHITECT

The Experience Architect is the first of four *building* personas outlined by Kelley. These are people who strive endlessly to make ‘remarkable customer experiences’. These people are differentiators,

helping to create unique environs for both staff and customers. Kelley emphasises that these Experience Architects seek to make the ordinary into the extraordinary and constantly question every customer and employee experience. He tells that the taken for granted, normalised experience can be improved upon by citing examples such as the twist wine opener, the vitaminised water bottle and improvements on the traditional tin paint can.

### THE SET DESIGNER

The Set Designer is the eighth persona and refers to the physical workspace of a company. These are the people who are constantly tweaking the design and layout of their workspaces. As Kelley tells us, 'giving employees more latitude in the shape and character of their workspace helps reinforce a company persona that is fun, welcoming and stimulating' (p. 194). The Set Designer is portrayed as a person but in essence is the environment around which you work. Kelley offers several examples of interesting workspaces and extols the value of open innovative spaces as a conduit to a company performing better. Of course, much has been written (see Amabile et al. (1996) as a good starting point) in academia regarding the importance of work environments as a determinant of innovative activity.

### THE CAREGIVER

The Caregiver is the penultimate of Kelley's roles and represents the dedicated and inspired nurses and doctors of your business. 'Caregivers take extra pains to understand each individual customer' (p. 217), according to Kelley. This Caregiver element is about being customer-centred and focused on aiding the customer experience. The service element is key to this persona and a Caregiver should constantly be striving to fulfil and exceed the expectations of the customer. Kelley offers several example of the length some companies have gone to to help achieve the perception of caregiver, from IDEO's customer remote control for jet aircrafts to a little shoe store in Mill Valley called Archrival. This element resonates with much of the marketing literature and especially the services marketing field in helping to bring superior service to customers as a value-added technique.

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## THE STORYTELLER

The final of Kelley's ten personas is the Storyteller. This is one of the more original of the ten faces and Kelley tells us that 'stories persuade in a way that facts, reports, and market trends seldom do, because stories make an emotional connection. The Storyteller brings a team together' (p. 242). He cites the power of a good story to break down barriers in people and argues that 'authentic' stories can be used to express your values as a company and the general ethos your company advocates. The inclusion of this element is questionable as it does not seem to overly contribute to innovation in an organisation but it does seem to be a fun and accessible way to break down inhibitions and barriers.

Kelley emphasises the problems associated with people saying 'let me play devil's advocate for a minute' when someone has a good idea or suggestion. This review will, however, have to play devil's advocate for a minute! To critique this book is relatively easy and the same can be said of many books regarding innovation. They all seem to offer the reader a panacea for creating an innovative organisation. Firstly, the title is misleading (*The Ten Faces of Innovation: Strategies for Heightening Creativity*) as nowhere in the text does Kelley tell you how to build a strategy that will help you create an ideal mixture of the ten personas. Kelley talks a couple of times about 'his friend Tom Peters' and sure enough a Tom Peters quote appears on the cover page detailing that it is 'a thoroughly original and thoroughly tested approach to creating a "culture of innovation"'. I would have to disagree. There is much talk of roles, people and the importance of the human element but in reality it is the same innovation literature repackaged in the guise of ten elements.

The book also lacks any empirical investigation into the central thesis of the ten faces and comes about from the author's experiences in IDEO. The book could have been improved upon greatly by making explicit links between each of the ten faces and their relation to other innovation literature such as the innovation process, sources of innovation (von Hippel, 1988), open innovation (Chesbrough, 2003) and the six thinking hats (De Bono, 1985). Much of what Kelley writes about is repetitive of many of these theories and

even within the context of the book many of the chapters overlap without a clear delineation of the mutuality of some of the faces.

The book is not essential reading material on the topic of innovation but it does, like many other innovation books, offer interesting and insightful examples. The real value of the book for managers and practitioners comes from the detailed examples of how IDEO practices innovation consultancy. This topic is detailed more explicitly in Kelley's previous book, entitled *The Art of Innovation: Lessons in Creativity from IDEO, America's Leading Design Firm* (Kelley and Littman, 2001). Perhaps the author should have remained within this topic area.

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