



Time for change: Innovation in an era of overtime and budget cuts

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Executive Summary – For most of us, staying busy at our jobs can mean dutifully toiling through to-do lists of required tasks – performing each in the same old sequence, with the same old methods and maybe even without considering how some tasks might be improved or perhaps eliminated. Even when we all agree that creativity in the workplace is important, how can people begin to dedicate time to innovation so that it becomes part of their everyday lives?

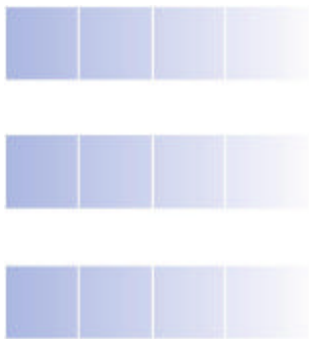
This Executive Technology Report is based on an essay by Peter Andrews, who is a consulting faculty member with the IBM Advanced Business Institute in Armonk, New York.

There may be artists who put creativity above fixing a leaky roof. A science fiction author once told me that she glanced out her window to see her wailing, bleeding son being taken to the doctor by her husband; then she went right back to her manuscript. This is not the world for most of us in business. Client calls are taken, e-mail gets handled and even the most bureaucratic, “brain-dead” paperwork usually gets done. Today, we are even more busy because concerns about the market, chopped budgets, security and organizational shifts have bled into our workdays – our very long and intense workdays.

So, as much as we may want to give time and attention to innovation, it’s probably not happening. Does that matter? In the very short term, probably not. Just as no lasting damage is done by temporarily suspending personal hygiene for a camping trip, a company can get away with neglecting the future briefly. Either behavior becomes problematic, though, if it becomes the norm.

How, then, do you make time for innovation in a busy world? Here are five approaches I use.

1. Set a deadline. If innovation never gets onto the agenda, it might never happen. It can never become a priority in your life. Setting a deadline is one way of making a promise to yourself that innovation will have its proper place. After September 11th, I stopped writing fiction, even though it has been one of the creative parts of my life for thirty years. By the time the shock wore off, I was overwhelmed by first one new assignment, then another. In the midst of a series of 70-hour work weeks, I marked a date on the calendar when the fiction writing would resume. I’m happy to say that, for me, the deadline did





the trick. However, marks on a calendar don't work for everyone. Find your own way to make a promise to yourself. Then keep it.

2. Do something that's bite-sized. It's easier to make time to read an article than it is to write a book. If you scale your ambition to your current circumstances and commitment to innovation, you'll find it harder to make excuses.

After you establish a habit of including innovation, it will be easier to move on to launching initiatives, composing symphonies and filing patents. My pattern for course development is to write articles, give talks and then pull these together into logical sequences for courses. (And recently – to make it even more incremental – I've begun pulling together distance learning seminars before creating the full courses.) I can convince myself with each step that it is doable, even when my calendar is full.

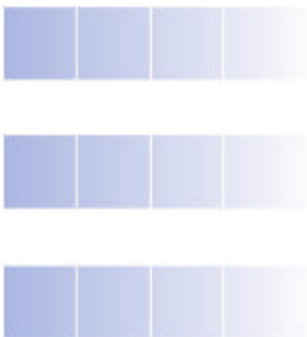
3. Connect and stay connected with innovative people. Happily, we are all social beings. This means we don't have to go it alone when we take on new activities and set goals. I belong to a half dozen different, informal organizations that have an emphasis on innovation.

Some of these are almost exclusively volunteer efforts, so everyone makes time and gets "paid" in ideas, connections and graduation to formal, funded projects. But beyond those specific benefits, such projects compel me to take on innovation outside my job because of the relationships I have with the other team members. There's a lot of social capital in play, and all the favors and friendships force me to carve out time to make things happen. Sometimes, other people can get you to do the right thing when you can't singlehandedly motivate yourself.

4. Make innovation part of something you can't avoid. Take a look at your to-do list. Isn't there something that you have to do anyway that you can do a little differently? Can you change the order of the process? Can you add something experimental? Can you increase the value?

I systematically go through my to-do lists, tweaking everything from how I handle e-mail to my approach to shaving in the morning. I also trim the to-do list, sometimes rather aggressively (which is why my passport photo shows me with a beard). When innovation becomes part of your task list, it becomes part of your job.

5. Spend saved time. If you finish a project, make it more efficient, cross it off the list or find a way to pass it on to someone else, consider using that previously allotted time to innovate. Estimate how much time you've freed up and fill it with something on your list of readings, initiatives or conference calls





that you just couldn't fit on the schedule today. One thing is certain, if you don't find something for yourself to do in that time slot, it's inevitable that someone else will – and it won't necessarily be a task related to practicing innovation.

After you make room for innovation, you still face the challenges of finding ideas, sustaining creativity, creating goals and working effectively with others. Innovation is hard, and most innovations fail. But getting started is probably the toughest hurdle, and that's what these approaches are all about. If none of them works for you, come up with your own. If you're too busy to use these or create your own, maybe you're just *too busy*?

About this publication

Executive Technology Report is a monthly publication intended as a heads-up on emerging technologies and business ideas. All the technological initiatives covered in *Executive Technology Report* have been extensively analyzed using a proprietary IBM methodology. This involves not only rating the technologies based on their functions and maturity, but also doing quantitative analysis of the social, user and business factors that are just as important to its ultimate adoption. From these data, the timing and importance of emerging technologies are determined. Barriers to adoption and hidden value are often revealed, and what is learned is viewed within the context of five technical themes that are driving change:

Knowledge Management: Capturing a company's collective expertise wherever it resides – databases, on paper, in people's minds -- and distributing it to where it can yield big payoffs

Pervasive Computing: Combining communications technologies and an array of computing devices (including PDAs, laptops, pagers and servers) to allow users continual access to the data, communications and information services

Realtime: "A sense of ultracompressed time and foreshortened horizons, [a result of technology] compressing to zero the time it takes to get and use information, to learn, to make decisions, to initiate action, to deploy resources, to innovate" (Regis McKenna, *Real Time*, Harvard Business School Publishing, 1997.)

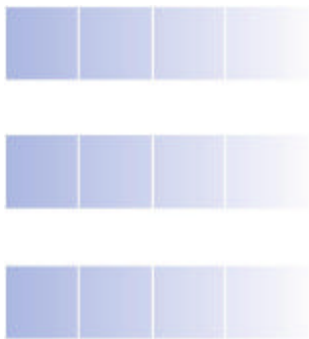
Ease-of-Use: Using user-centric design to make the experience with IT intuitive, less painful and possibly fun

Deep Computing: Using unprecedented processing power, advanced software and sophisticated algorithms to solve problems and derive knowledge from vast amounts of data

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