

## INNOVATION – What's New Pussycat?

I once read a book entitled “Innovation in HR”, published by an HR institute. I was moderately excited to receive the book, which was a gift for perceived services of acting as an ‘agent provocateur’ to the profession – by the way that’s ‘irritant’ in English. You can be sure that, once an HR professional starts speaking in French to you, they are about to be inauthentic. Imagine my disappointment when I opened the book to find it empty – ha, ha! ‘Caveat emptor’ I should have replied to keep the foreign language HR intercourse going ...

Yet, perhaps that is a little unfair, and I feel I deserve to have my bare bottom thrashed with hawthorn twigs for even having such thoughts! Nonetheless, I must be brutally truthful, in that this rather long book had very little to say other than ‘be positive’. This in itself is often only half the story in terms of innovation. It may be nice to surround yourself with ‘shiny happy people’, but they don’t always succeed in the innovation game. If Isambard Kingdom Brunel had decided to hold a series of ‘iron horse focus groups’, 360 degree appraisal forums and ‘drop in customer transportation strategy listening sessions’, he would probably have never built the [Great Western Railway](#) and the world would never have discovered Swindon – some good points in this then – oops! If [James Dyson](#) had written a pleasant letter to Hoover explaining his minor concerns with their vacuum cleaner rather than getting fed up and making one that sucked (in the best sense), we would NOT now have “The Dyson” as a new name for “The Hoover”.



In short, innovation in new products and services requires more perspiration than inspiration. Innovation is not over when the flip chart is full in the brainstorming meeting and everyone has imagined 101 ways to use a paper clip as a labour saving device for nail care in HR. Cold sweat, blood and sometimes tears are required.

If you want to innovate, know that perspiration matters more than inspiration, and comes AFTER the brainstorming session. Too many so-called innovation social networks are only concerned with creativity. This is fine as far as it goes. However, there is evidence to suggest that modern social networking websites are a new displacement activity, replacing ironing, daydreaming and focus groups at work. In the words of Andy Warhol and Lou Reed “It’s work” that counts. [Toyota](#) stands out by being excellent at execution as well as inspiration.

Punk Rock People Management offers us three chords on innovation:

- u Perspire more than inspire. A walk on the wild side to discover new ideas is necessary but never sufficient for profitable innovation.
- u Run the numbers alongside the brainstorming and recycle your thinking until the innovations have been tested to destruction to improve the ratio of new ideas : profitability.
- u If your innovation is more ‘product push’ than ‘market need’, know that you need to work much harder and differently to succeed.

