

naked**innovation**

*uncovering a shared approach
for creating value*

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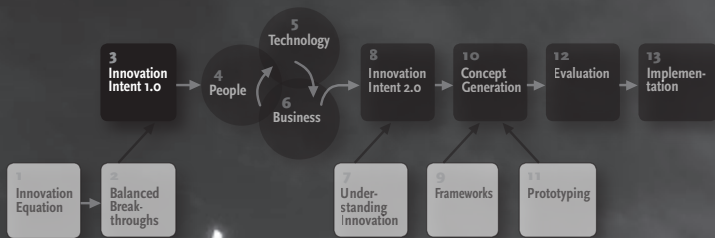
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This is a chapter from *Naked Innovation: Uncovering a Shared Approach for Creating Value*, version 0.9.1. It's a public beta, so you should expect to find things that need improving. With your help, the forthcoming second edition of the book will be even better. Permission is granted to download and share this chapter for the purposes of review and collaborative critique. Any redistribution must credit the authors and NakedInnovation.com. This chapter and the book are both ©2007 Zachary Jean Paradis and David McGaw.

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3 Innovation Intent 1.0

Getting Started

Las Vegas, 2007—The Winter Consumer Electronics Show is where most new gadgets make their splashy debuts. But on January 9, 2007, in the midst of the conference, the buzz vanished. Company representatives, journalists, and attendees were focused 600 miles away to the West in San Francisco. Their laptops, Treos, and attention were on one person: Steve Jobs. Jobs was about to reveal the new Apple iPhone—a product so hotly anticipated, so endowed by expectant fans with magical powers, that it had been dubbed “the Jesus Phone.”¹

How would you have liked to have been a product manager, engineer, or designer for Motorola, Samsung, LG, SonyEricsson, or Nokia that day? Imagine how deflated you’d feel to see your latest and greatest mobile phone concepts rendered irrelevant, with a few words from Steve Jobs. And what would be your next move? What do you tell your CEO about your plans for something that will compete? *Where would you start?*

Framing the Problem

A lot of things are hard to get started—homework, writing books on innovation, telling someone “I think we should see

¹ Brian Lam, editor of the technology blog Gizmodo.com.

other people.” But you have to start somewhere, and we’re big advocates for just jumping in wherever you can. A great place to start is with a question: **“What seems to be the problem?”** In other words, what isn’t working? What is the piece that is missing? Why is an innovation needed? Don’t worry about getting this right—in fact, you’ll probably start with the wrong answer and very well the wrong question. (Our phone company executives, back at the Consumer Electronics Show, thought their problem was how to beat Apple’s new iPhone. They only got part of it right.) We’ll be revisiting this challenge later.

Even your first, shoot-from-the-hip response can then lead you to other questions:¹

- › Why is the problem a problem?
- › Whose problem is it?
- › Why does that matter—both for us as a company, and for the people whose problem it is?
- › How has the problem been addressed before? What was insufficient about those attempts to solve the problem? Why is it still a problem?
- › What are we going to do differently?

Whoops—these questions get progressively harder to answer, and the last one is impossible to respond to, at least at the beginning. But that’s OK—we’re just trying set down our initial thoughts, and if the answer you put down is “I don’t know,” then at least you know what you *don’t* know. (Socrates would be proud.) There’s plenty of time to come back and revisit these questions once we’ve done more research. We’ll be able

to rework them and connect the pieces together to make something coherent.

Naked Innovation is **iterative**—that is, it involves cycling back and forth, trying something out, seeing how it works out, and then using what you learned to try something again. There will be only a very few occasions when the Perfect Answer will emerge from your head fully-formed. Look at Thomas Edison—he thought up the incandescent light bulb, sure, but then had to try more than a thousand different filaments before finding the right one. Working iteratively requires some mental flexibility, because it means being willing to question both

What If You Don’t Seem to Have a Problem?

Sometimes innovation challenges start out without a real issue. Management comes along and says, “Find something to do with this new technology.” In one sense, your problem is just that—what can we do with this? But you also aren’t starting out with any market gap. No worries—your task, viewed through the three circles of the Balanced Breakthroughs model, will be to see what is possible and desirable, rather than what is problematic, and build from there.

Other places to start include the capabilities your company has currently mastered—what else could they be applied to? What neighboring capabilities could easily be added to open up an entirely new customer base? How could we leverage our knowledge of (and relationships with) our customers, to serve them in new ways?

Even a vague definition of a problem (or opportunity) is better than nothing at all. The purpose of research is to refine that framing; the purpose of framing is to know where to begin.

¹ These questions are based on the “User-Centered Case” developed by Professor John Grimes, IIT Institute of Design.

assumptions and conclusions. Every time you look at something from a new point of view, you may be able to (and indeed you may *have to*) revise your thinking. Over time, you get closer and closer until you have a solution that works well enough to implement. And from there, you can continue to revise, and improve even after it's considered “done.”

So, back to our series of questions: we've made some provisional answers, even if some of those answers include the words “don't know” or “need to find out more.” Keeping track of how the answers evolve, as we go through an iterative process, will require some good information management. Some people use shared online knowledge tools, but a simple piece of foam-core board (or a bulletin board or whiteboard) can work as well. Start by posting the key questions and answers. Keeping the current issues visible, right in front of you and your team, makes it easier to re-engage with them as you work.

Your initial statement of the challenge becomes a signpost to your solution. Take out a sheet of paper, title it ***Innovation Intent, Version 1.0***, and include the following:

Innovation Intent | Version 1.0

The problem we are trying to solve

For whom

Why it matters

How other solution attempts have failed

What will make our solution different

Each line should be completed with your best guess; it doesn't have to be your final answer. Over the course of your research, the Innovation Intent will evolve—if it doesn't, you're either remarkably prescient, or you aren't looking deeply enough at the problem. After you've gone through several steps of research and analysis, we'll guide you to a formal revision of the Innovation Intent in Chapter 8.

Involve the Right People

On a small project you may be able to answer all of the questions in the Innovation Intent yourself. But you will always be better off sharing the burden with others. When you work alone, it's easy to fall in love with your own ideas, and completely fail to see their shortcomings. Collaboration brings new perspectives, as well as specialized knowledge and experience, to help strengthen and balance good concepts, and eliminate the bad ones.

One way to involve other people is by having them periodically review your progress and give their feedback. Deeper involvement and commitment comes when you invite others to work on the project with you, as a team. Businesses take this approach all the time, and have learned which kinds of people to have on a team: someone from engineering, someone from design, someone from marketing, someone from production, and so on. In recent years, teams are even beginning to include customers (the people who may buy the product or service) or users (the people who actually use the product or service, who may be different from customers) in at least some phases of their work. A good way to figure out who the stakeholders are in a project is to look at the proposed Innovation Intent: for whom are you solving the problem—can you involve them? How about the people who would be involved in building the solution?

Of course, there may be some constraints in the amount of information that can be revealed to people outside the company, or simply in their availability, but their insights are tremendously important. We found this out while working on a project for a large restaurant chain. Our in-house team developed some great new ideas for restaurant services, but the customers we brought in to evaluate them showed us both additional opportunities and risks that we hadn't considered. Without their input, we might have recommended some of our favorite, clever ideas, only to see them fail miserably in a real-life restaurant.

Collaboration weaves itself throughout the innovation cycle. “We” is always more powerful than “Me,” because it forces me to push beyond my preconceptions, to defend my assumptions, and to embrace a different point of view. Most teams will give you better results than working alone; excellent teams include people with different training, job roles, and cultural backgrounds whenever possible, to make sure that at every point there are multiple opportunities for the best ideas to emerge.

Collaboration is often compared to jazz, and the way each musician is not so much playing a defined role as being a constant improviser—listening to and responding to the musical themes and motifs in play. Since jazz may not appeal to everyone, you could also think of it simply as a conversation. It may start out like the interactions you have at a cocktail party—the give-and-take of interactions between people interested in getting to know each other better. We've all been in cocktail conversations (and on teams) from which we wanted to escape. Great conversations, and great innovation projects, are the ones where you find ways of building on each other's statements, watching how topics and agreements (or alternative viewpoints) emerge. Sometimes they even lead to friendships—or real, live products and services that everybody loves.

One of the first conversations to have with your team should be about the proposed Innovation Intent we looked at above: *What seems to be the problem?* You may find that even at this early stage, there are new perspectives that help you see the problem anew. You may also discover more questions that you'll need to answer. You're likely to come away from the first few team

Effective Innovation Teamwork

We at the IIT Institute of Design have found the following concepts helpful when teams work together:

1. **Seek alignment.** Differences of opinion don't always have to be forced into 100% agreement. We use the word “alignment” to signal a willingness to move forward toward the goal, on the same path, even if we may individually retain uncertainty about that approach.
2. **Build each other up.** A multi-disciplinary team means experts in one domain area (like engineering) may not fully understand those in another (like marketing). When a colleague struggles to understand something that is home territory for you, avoid the temptation to lecture or criticize. Instead, offer suggestions, respectfully, that help build up someone else's ability to work with you—and be receptive to their suggestions to you. And never go behind a team member's back with criticism.
3. **Commit to the team.** Members of innovation teams often juggle ongoing work responsibilities—and sometimes work promised to the team doesn't always get priority. Treat team work assignments as binding if you commit to them, and if you can't commit, decline up front, so that the team can adjust.

interactions with less clarity than you thought you had at the beginning. That is perfectly normal—don't panic! Although we think Naked Innovation offers some sound approaches for a rational approach to innovation, it's also not a formula. We, along with our colleagues, frequently find ourselves feeling clueless as a project begins. When a team member asks, "Why is that?" or "What don't we know?" it's an opportunity to dig deeper to find either the answers, or at least the space where the questions remain. As you seek answers to those questions—and to the other questions that are provoked in turn—you'll start to see patterns form, and end up with a clearer vision of the whole. Learn to enjoy the sense of not quite knowing what will come next. In innovation, as in conversation, the familiar ground is often boring.

Fair warning, though: teams don't always work together perfectly. Yes, you will have conflict, and it will take longer than working by yourself. You also won't be able to take sole credit for the results. But the results are better—we've seen it time and again.

Before You Move Forward

- › Formulate an initial Innovation Intent.
- › Recruit a team of collaborators.
- › Capture questions as they emerge.
- › If it seems that you're ending up with too many questions, assign a simple score (use a scale of 1 to 5) to evaluate which ones have the greatest degree of *uncertainty* and *importance* for your project. Prioritize those with the highest total score (uncertainty + importance) to research.