Think Bigger

How to Innovate

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Sheena Iyengar is a Professor in the Management department of Columbia Business School. She is an expert in Innovation, choice, leadership and consults with a wide set of organizations. She is blind. This book took a decade to complete.

Growing up blind, I faced the bigger problems of will I learn to cook, will I be able to travel the world etc.

The knowledge from my personal struggles helped solve complex problems.

Many of he entrepreneurship courses in business schools tell a student how to implement an idea, not to get one.

My definition of innovation is “a novel, useful combination of old ideas that comes together to solve a complex problem”

Schumpeter defined it as “ to produce means to combine the things and forces within our reach”

The structure of innovation process starts with defining the problem in a specific and concrete way.

When Ford launched the Model T, he defined 3 innovation problems..

1. How do I reduce the cost of labor?
2. How do I reduce production time?
3. How do I reduce the cost of materials?

Ford learnt from the meat packing industry where the animal moved in an overhead line to workers. Using this idea, Ford reduced car production time from 750 minutes to 90 minutes!!

He used a new type of paint – nitro cellulose black lacquer , and hence the famous ‘you can have a car as long as its black’.

Ford sold 6389 units at $ 850 in 1908.

Ford sold 2 million units in 1925 at $ 250/car

Too often people think that innovation equals new and more complicated technology.

The Think Bigger Road map

1. Choose the problem
2. Break it down
3. Compare wants
4. Search in and out of the box
5. Choice map
6. The third eye

Brainstorming started in 1938 with Alex Osborn who was asked to save BBDO from total collapse. Alex assembled all his team members to come up with the best ideas for ad campaigns. He labelled it “ thinking up” over time it became brainstorming.

The 5 rules of brainstorming

1. The more oysters you crack open, the greater your chance of finding a pearl, so its about number of ideas
2. And rules 3 serve the first rule

4. Is it promising?

5. Be sure you are solving the right problem.

Today brainstorming is called design thinking.

A lot of people think that creative or funky offices lead to innovation, all evidence says NO

for creative spaces to work we say - no distractions and you need a way to run into others in a casual way.

Decades of research shows that we are more creative when we start the ideation process by ourselves and then enter a meeting room to ideate.

The rule of thumb is that we get one good idea for every 10,000 ideas.

In Think Bigger, you learn not to take your problems as self evident.

Paul Nutt a professor at Ohio state university studied decisions of 358 companies over twenty years. He found that half the decisions failed because they were solving the wrong problem and another common mistake was to impose a solution

The method of assuming that everyone understands the problem applies to simple problems or personal ones.

A source of error in problem definition is “ knowledge illusion effect” where we overestimate our expertise and underestimate the complexity.

That’s why its important to understand our biases before identifying a problem.

Step analysis is stepping up so that you widen your problem, not narrow it.

When solving a problem ask yourself :

1. Can I feasibly solve this problem?
2. Am I motivated to solve the problem?

It is impossible to predict the twists and turns in your life, so its difficult to know for sure what you will be passionate about in the future.

Consumer insight is useful for understanding the problem, not for generating solutions.

Experts and users are inside the problem, others are outside. People without direct experience of the problem are always more open to ideas.

The question you ask determines the quality of your answers.

The best way to think out of the box is to literally get into other boxes.

Studies show that bi cultural and biracial individuals are more likely to perform better at creative problem solving tasks.

Most people are naturally social. In the modern age, social media has turned this natural desire into an industry.

Asking someone , ‘ do you like it” produces superficial reactions at best. At worst, they reflect biases of the moment.