How do you implement the change that no one is asking for?
Follow Nigel Paine's four-stage plan for...

# INNOVATIONS THAT
# BLAST YOU OUT OF
# THE WATER

Peter Drucker, the business guru (probably the first person in the world to be given that accolade) gave the shortest and sweetest definition of innovation that I know. He nailed it in eight words, saying innovation is... *'Change which creates a new dimension of performance'.*

Hold on to that. Not incremental improvement; not great ideas or wacky propositions – but *new dimensions of performance*. For Drucker, innovation had to be step change in the organisation – or nothing.

We live in a world, however, of efficiency increases. Doing more with less; saving budget; paring, trimming and shaping to be less of a cost burden and more of a benefit to the organisation. This article attempts to draw the Drucker logic of step change towards the current business climate and tie the two together. The real issue is: How do you make that step change when no one is asking for it? There are four key messages that need to be embraced:

**KEY MESSAGE 1: EXPERIMENT**

I remember one fascinating discussion with a large company's head of L&D. He had devolved the vast majority of his budget, as well as most of his staff, into the business of bringing L&D closer to his organisation's pain points. His message was simple: Always retain a small amount of budget that you have complete control over. This is your experimental fund. This is how you test your ideas and trial new software build products of the future. This is how you can afford a 'take-no-prisoners' initiative. This is really good advice.

Exactly how much money should be in the fund depends on the nature of the organisation. I would argue that you could do quite a lot with £1,000. It might be a combination of time and money. It doesn't matter. The key is to assume that this fund will launch as many experiments as possible – and that failure is the key to success.



"What if we don't change at all ...
and something magical just happens?"

This fund is below the waterline. Those ideas that transform the day-to-day operation will emerge from it. There are no hard and fast rules. However, you need one really good, viable idea per year – at the very least – to make others understand the value of this process and back the fund in subsequent years. Call it your 'Innovation Fund' if you like.

Make it inclusive not exclusive. Not just your team, people across the business can access it too. Make it an excuse to begin with blank sheets, to generate ideas…think the unthinkable. This is not a daily part of the routine but it should be a regular component of the L&D role. People involved in rolling-out standard programmes week after week will do their job with a skip in their step at the thought of being able to develop totally new ideas into potential game changers.

These ideas will have massively more credibility if you can commit a small amount of funding to test whether they work or not. You are incubating the next generation of learning in your organisation. You are sharing the minimum viable model. You are consulting your target group and their managers. All the while you do this, you're also establishing credibility and traction inside the business.

### KEY MESSAGE 2:
### BUILD A HEAD OF STEAM

You need some weight behind these developments. Once you have something to show, parade it rather than reveal it surreptitiously. Most people will accept the fact that it is a minimum low-cost viable model and will therefore give you the benefit of the doubt as they imagine it scaled-up, finished-off and rolled-out.

This stage allows you to iterate the idea, modify the model and slowly but steadily gain credibility. It also allows you to minimise the risk of failure when you do scale. Importantly, it allows you to withdraw an idea at this prototype stage before it wreaks havoc. It stops ideas being protected beyond their useful life and it brings objectivity to the development process. This whole dynamic has massive spin-off benefits for you and the team in terms of motivation, communication and credibility.

### KEY MESSAGE 3:
### ONLY GO FOR THINGS THAT MATTER

It is easy to generate a list of wonderful ideas. All of these can be energising and exciting. Distilling the list to those ideas worthy of further funding needs some rigorous process. It should never be based on who shouts the loudest, or who is the most important person in the room.

One extremely effective way of refinement is to imagine the project fully implemented and scaled. Ask yourself what will be the impact on the organisation as a whole. If it is not tumultuous, you should probably retire that idea in favour of something that is. What matters most to the organisation, should matter most to you.

Your step change should be the organisation's step change first and foremost. That you find it interesting, doesn't mean it will be interesting to everyone. Put aside your own pet projects, and then ruthlessly edit those that wont get noticed, alongside those that will make only a marginal difference.

The idea is to sustain this process, not to have it truncated after the initial iteration.

### KEY MESSAGE 4:
### BLOW 'EM AWAY, DON'T JUST MAKE THEM HAPPY

Learning is always capable of delivering transformational change or massive improvement. It also has a 'business as usual' role, i.e., keeping the organisation running effectively, and smoothing the transition of new staff, new processes and people changing roles.

Your experimental funds should focus at the transformational end. If you are not already in the business of transformation, this is a good place to start. If you are, this is a good place to build.

You have lots of people to impress. This starts, obviously, with the learner and extends right the way through to the senior executives. If you are really trying to innovate, everybody has to *notice* the difference. If you have to explain it, you are not innovating!

This requires that you move from idea into prototype and model and into delivery in a thoughtful and calculated way. Every detail matters. Many great ideas and successful experiments have failed on a larger scale due to a lack of attention to detail.

This is where you take the idea that's, perhaps, been generated by a very small number of people and extend it to a much wider community – a community that can think through the logic of implementation and help overcome some of the difficulties. You want to blow people away by the

significance of its success, rather than the magnitude of its failure!

Innovation should be part of the mindset of every L&D team. Not to the exclusion of everything else, and not to the point where it undermines the satisfactory running of the day-to-day operation. It should be a significant part of the outlook nevertheless.

If you ensure that everybody spends part of their time thinking beyond the limitations of their current role or current deliverables, those incremental improvements will occur more rapidly and the energy levels in the team will increase dramatically.

This is not something for the few but something for everyone. Even if your idea is not taken forward, the fact that you are beginning to think in terms of potential new directions and step change, will tend to rub off on everything else you do.

Have watchwords and phrases: curiosity, sharing ideas, and feeding in initiatives, developments, and case studies sourced from outside. This creates the critical churn of insight necessary for the development of innovation and the launching of experimentation. One L&D team I've worked with, has quarterly meetings that simply focus on 'what's out there?'

Individual team members take responsibility to find out more in areas everyone agrees are potentially useful. They report back, not formally, but by pushing out articles, comments videos etc, that are relevant and expand or clarify what is interesting. So, when it comes to decision-making, everyone is up to speed and understands the significance of the potential experiment.

The key is getting started. Use this article to help build your own unique framework and decide what will work in your own unique context. Put it on the agenda at the next team meeting, and make sure everyone is ready for Blast Off.

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