

Submission to Australian National Innovation Enquiry

Email: innovationreview@innovation.gov.au

Organisation: Intrepid Group Pty Ltd
Contact: Dr Glenn Rothberg
Organisation sector: Industry, Enterprise and Regional Improvement
Address: 5 Bronte Avenue, Burwood
State: Victoria 3125 Australia
Email:
Phone contact:
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How Do We Know What is Happening to Ideas?

Innovation Needs Ideas

To create value and sustain national business advantage, innovation has an ongoing need for ideas. However, as the one-shot April 2008 "2020 Summit" demonstrates, ideas are an underutilized national resource. This is also evident in our workplaces[1]. Australia needs a whole-of-economy approach to support idea flow. Typically, ideas challenge convention and are a prime source for gaining advantage. To challenge constructively, improve, and innovate, requires a whole-of-business-approach to the management of ideas. This includes knowledge about the flow of ideas in workplaces, communities, regions, and industries.

Information about Idea Flow

To mobilise activity in ideas, supportive, accessible performance indicators and benchmarks are required. Currently, we do not have reliable information about idea flow or what is happening to ideas in our organisations, communities, regions and across the nation. This is about the attributes of the idea flow. It is not about good or bad ideas: but whether there is activity in ideas. We need to frame and measure activity in ideas.

Idea Activity

There is a problem with ideas in business, organisations, and communities: the role of ideas is fragmented and disconnected. Mainstream management thinking, and its practice, has an ideas gap.

Unlike other indicators of performance and activity, such as cash flow, production, inflation, retail sales, and opinion polls, we generally do not know what is happening to ideas until they are well advanced, or completed. The problem, which is widespread, is a failure to understand and track the signs of a healthy flow of ideas in our organisations. As a result, organisational performance, and national performance is unnecessarily below potential.

This is because idea activity is neither measured nor managed. If ideas are like the genetic material of competitiveness, productivity, and improvement, we can either depend on our heritage, what is in our genes, wait for things to happen, or we can assess what's going on, and then take action based on known strengths and

weaknesses. We seem to depend on measurements and frameworks to understand most aspects of our nation: innovation seems to be an exception.

What is Happening to Ideas?

We know that some ideas help mobilise other ideas: civilization and revolution depend on this accumulative profileⁱⁱ[2]. If we know what is happening with ideasⁱⁱⁱ[3], we can intervene constructively. If we do not know what is happening with ideas, our management of innovation will be uninformed and haphazard. That is, we need better ideas to flow through our organisations, and more of these ideas to be taken up.

What happens to ideas in our organisations, and how do we know? As we do not measure what is happening with ideas, we do not manage what is happening to them very well. In contrast, there is much measurement in the areas of economic activity, heart activity, electrical activity, production activity, and so on, which helps in our management of these areas of our national and personal life.

Innovative Innovation Solution: Frame and Measure Idea Activity

"Idea Activity" is advanced as a metric within a new framework for understanding what is happening to ideas across nations and workplaces^{iv}[4]. It is part of a proposed breakthrough approach to ideas to change our lives^v[5]. A prototype has been developed, tested, and acknowledged internationally. The framework extends and enhances current management practice^{vi}[6], includes a focus on the interaction and progression of ideas, and adapts innovation to preferred management models. Using the new idea metric and framework provides a way to find out, and evaluate, the pulse of idea activity in our nation's workplaces^{vii}[7], cities, industries, and regions, adjusted or unadjusted, and act on that information. Here is a way to permanently lift innovation, create value, and sustain national business advantage across the nation's workplaces, communities, and regions.

Glenn Rothberg (Dr)

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i[1] Rothberg, Glenn (2004), "The Role of Ideas in the Manager's Workplace: Theory and Practice", *Management Decision*, Emerald Publishing, UK, Vol. 42, No. 9, November 2004.

ii[2] Rothberg, Glenn, (2000) "The Passage of Breakthrough Ideas: Organisation Insights from the Darwinian Revolution", *Management Decision*, Emerald Publishing, UK, Vol. 38, No. 3, May 2000

iii[3] Rothberg, Glenn, (2005) "Accessing Ideas to Develop Leadership and Organization", *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, Emerald Publishing, UK, Vol. 26, No. 6, September 2005

iv[4] Rothberg, Glenn (2008) "Idea Activity in our Nations and Workplaces" chapter in Rickards Tudor, Runco Mark, and Moger Susan, *Routledge Companion to Creativity*, London

v[5] This is an idea about ideas. Many who consider that there is no shortage of ideas have a mindset problem. The problem with a perceived over-abundance of ideas is the shortage of additional ideas with which to filter the apparent over abundance.

vi[6] Rothberg, Glenn (2005) "Beyond Mainstream Management: A Breakthrough Passage Construct", *Journal of Management Development*, Emerald Publishing, UK, Vol. 24, No. 10, December 2005.

vii[7] Rothberg, Glenn (2007) "Idea Activity: An Innovation Intervention", *Executive Matters*, American Management Association, New York, January, 2007