



1 Your world

Matilda said, "Never do anything by halves if you want to get away with it. Be outrageous. Go the whole hog. Make sure everything you do is so completely crazy it's unbelievable ..."

Roald Dahl, *Matilda*

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Let me begin with an important comment, namely a comment as to what this book does not intend to be: this is not a book on innovation, how to innovate, or even remotely an attempt to tell the reader how he or she may become an innovator. Apart from my belief that these are topics that can be discussed, but cannot be taught, there are probably many books out that cover such topics.

This book wants to be all about practical hints, personal stories how you may be better prepared to win the end game of how to succeed with one's innovative ideas, one's inventions and creations in the consumer space with regards to products and services. The book will mainly draw upon personal stories, good ones as well as bad ones, based on my personal experience. I shall attempt to add stories from other innovators, not only in the area of food, but shall approach some more "unusual suspects," trying to find out about their success stories and the recurring elements necessary to become a successful innovator. Again the emphasis is not on "innovator" but "successful innovator."

However, I should say right in the beginning that I have no intention to write about a number of elements necessary to become a successful innovator, but rather have the ambition, or hope, that the reader will draw his or her own conclusions from the stories I am going to tell throughout the entire book. I should also say that all stories, good or bad, success or failure, positive or negative, boring or exciting, inconclusive or conclusive, indifferent or moving, are all lived, be it lived by myself or by other people who I plan to introduce throughout the book. Their names may have changed, the location may have changed, but the situations will be for real and will hopefully inspire you, the reader, and help you, with guidance of this book, to find your way through to a successful and meaningful conclusion of your own innovation journey. It's not going to be an easy journey, because there are so many elements involved, but I can promise that it will be a worthwhile journey. In the end, it should be an eye opener for you and hopefully help you to better manage and ultimately tell your own success stories.



4 The food industry innovation school

Does your company have a complex? Or is it just complex?

I have been thinking quite hard and trying to define what I mean by a “complex organization” but finally came to the conclusion that it is almost self-explanatory and is not necessarily only defined by the size and structure of an organization or a company, but by the complexity of the interactions between the different players.

So, in my eyes, every organization that has more than one member is by definition already “complex” as its functioning depends on many more factors, such as definition of roles, mutual respect and understanding, expected outcomes (what and when), dealing with obstacles and drawbacks, enjoying successes, recompensating everyone’s efforts, and probably many more. In other words, when I refer to complex organizations, I do not only refer to large ones, but every company that deals with and through human beings, small or large. So, it is extremely likely that the company you work in, whatever its size, is complex and has issues linked to this. In this book I shall attempt to tell stories that are relevant as well as entertaining so that you can profit from these and get a better answer to the question of how best to navigate through this complexity and come out successfully like a phoenix from the ashes, or, to use a less destructive metaphor, like the winner of the intra-company iron man.

I personally hate lengthy introductions. I feel that oftentimes they are almost an excuse for not getting started yet. So, let’s cut it short here and get right into the topics that this book will discuss in detail.

1.2 THE WORKSPACE: HEAVEN OR HELL?

What’s this all about? Why all the fuss? Why do we put so much emphasis on our workspaces? Some companies even install playgrounds and try to lead us back to pre-school or even kindergarten. There are many who say that the workspace should be as playful and inspirational as possible and then there are many others, probably the majority, who, in the name of efficiency increase and cost saving would pretend that the workspace should not even be defined, but a shared and open environment, almost the stand-up desk of the accountant in Scrooge’s Christmas story. What is true and what holds the test of time and long-term success? It probably depends on your industry and your company and how the time that you spend there is officially organized. I say “officially” as the “unofficial” time management is the really interesting topic, and we will discuss this in more detail at a later point.

For now, let’s look in more detail into your workspace and especially what it has to do with becoming a better, a more successful, innovator. I put emphasis on this topic, as very often the kind of workspace in which you will find yourself at work is often quoted as a “turn-down” for innovation, one cannot be creative in “such an environment” and “I would really be successful, had I only a better and more conducive work space and work environment.”

The ideal work space should be fun

It is important to realize that your work space has a lot to do with your ultimate innovation success, but, at the same time, from personal experience, I have to say that, at the end of the day it has very little, sometimes even nothing to do with your success. Why is that so



and why can I come up with these two totally opposing points of view? Well, it is really lived experience: some people are workspace sensitive, whilst others are not. It's like some are allergic to peanuts and others are not, if you allow me this comparison. So what's the ideal workspace? From my own experience I can say that for me the notion of the ideal workspace has evolved during all my years in the industry, and, to be honest, this ideal is still evolving. When I started in industry as a research scientist working in a lab, I believed that it was best to have my work desk very close to the lab space where all the action was, ideally even in the lab itself.

When I found this setup in my first personal work space in my company, I really was happy and believed that it couldn't get any better, or let me rather say, any more efficient. You should note that as a young research scientist one is still very much conditioned by the university or college years, when it was the rule – at least in my university – to have a desk to write ones thesis in the lab in which one made the discoveries. This was practical, as this allowed us the space and time to discover card games with other students as well as drinking beer or coffee and discuss the very serious matters that were laid out in front of us. It almost sounds like the ideal workspace has to include some coziness, some homely familiarity, and some cave-like security that guides us along the difficult problem solving tour de force during the learning, discovering, and applying times in our professional lives.

Can I auction off my space?

Now, when I say “cave-like” then this obviously is totally the opposite of the “open space” workspace/office/lab approach. I am personally still wondering, why the open space was invented; it could not just have been for the reason to save a few bucks for having to put fewer walls and doors, or could it?

My suspicion is that companies rather wanted to give their employees the spacious coziness of a fraternity (or sorority) house where everyone can see everybody else and is in constant communication and contact with their neighbors. My further suspicion is – and I am far from being a conspiracy theorist – that open workspaces are perfect for exerting peer control: it's very difficult for me to play Solitaire on my latest office computer without being found out by my neighbor “next desk” and thereby becoming the next chat topic around the watering hole called the coffee machine. So, does that improve efficiency? I am not so sure. Depending on your line of work, playing games may actually be very inspiring. As this book is all about innovation, about innovative and creative people and how they can become truthfully successful, I would like to focus on workspaces that are typically found in such environments.

So, we are back to the wish for playful workspaces, or are we not? The short answer is: there is no one solution and really good companies should realize this. It could be a nice and possibly ground-breaking move to allow people a very large portion of freedom in designing their own workspace, perhaps in collaboration with experts in the field, and to do this within the required safety and possibly regulatory confines that need to be applied for the workspace in question. If I can have a say in the design of my personal workspace, I am typically much more motivated to go to work every day, to go to my “other home” and feel a very strong and stimulating connection with the place that I am working in at least several days a week. The reader may argue that this costs money and, even more importantly, what happens if the employee leaves or is transferred somewhere else and the new person has a different taste? Good questions, and I have no real answer other than the following assumption: the extra investment for creating such a highly personalized workspace in the first place



6 The food industry innovation school

and having to re-design it every so often is by far outweighed by the greatly improved and increased efficiency and the increased frequency of successful innovation created by the innovator who has the chance to work and thrive in such an exciting workspace.

My brother-in-law can sleep just about anywhere, I need a good bed

I stated above that some people are sensitive to their environment, whilst some are less so or not at all. This may make for a good statement, but based on my own practical experience I can say that a large majority of innovative and creative people in the industry that I know, which is the food industry, belong to the workspace-sensitive group: they want to have a well-organized, well-designed, functional, yet to some degree personalized, work environment. Companies would be well advised to take this into consideration, certainly much more than some already do. I do not pretend that every company should become LEGOLAND®, Disneyland®, or Universal Studios® or any other theme park that is out there. However, if you look at the situation of today's corporate work environments, some of them do show a certain resemblance to a theme park, with attraction corners (coffee machines, company restaurants), featured entertainments (meetings), and even controls on entering the premises. Why not go the whole way and accept the "theme park" atmosphere and play on its strengths, especially the fact that it can be extremely stimulating and inspirational. I will let you judge how you see the situation in your own company and how you would create your "xxxxx-Land." It could be an exciting exercise, with surprising and sometimes counterintuitive results.

1.3 THE OUTSIDE WORLD: IS THERE SOMEONE?

In the previous paragraph I have exclusively discussed the inside world of the work environment, which is a truly important aspect to look at. However, if the inside world is important, the outside world, what happens outside your workspace, be it within your company or outside your company, is equally important, ultimately probably much more important than anything that happens in your own space. This shall, by no means take anything away from the importance of having the best possible environment to become innovative, especially realizing and acknowledging that without your innovation your company has nothing to offer to the outside world. On the other hand, without your company's success in this outside world, the innovator has no reason to be! Tough? Yes, but it's a simple reality and it has no ultimate answer, for instance "42," but rather reflects the question to which there is no answer: what came first, the chicken or the egg?

Your space: ground control to major Tom

The simple, the "ultimate," answer to the question: what is the outside world?, is: everything else, everything beyond your immediate workspace. It actually starts at the office coffee machine, the restrooms, the company cafeteria, and obviously goes beyond. However, the real question should be: how can we define the outside world that is relevant and useful to my own actions and activities, especially with regards to innovation success? As we will see, the list is still pretty long and I shall attempt to draw it up in a meaningful way. Let me start by trying to depict it in a simple way in Figure 1.1.

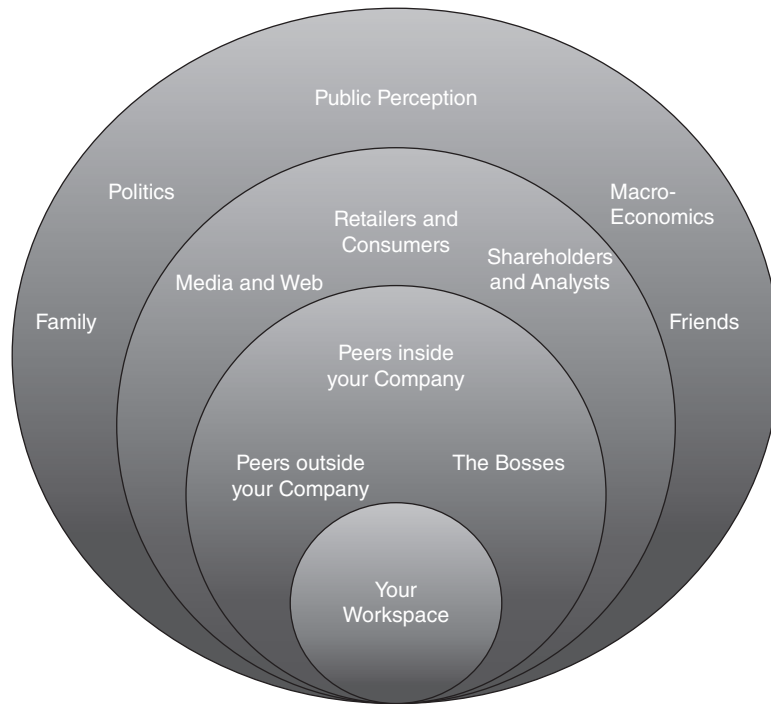


Figure 1.1 Your world – inside and outside.

In the previous paragraph I discussed in some detail the importance of your own workspace. Your own workspace is literally the basis of this view as to how the outside world revolves around your workspace and what typical interactions, for good as well as bad, you can typically expect. In this “world view” your workspace is the “center of the universe” or maybe better, the inner core of an onion that has layer after layer surrounding it.

1.3.1 Peers inside your company

Although I shall discuss the individual interactions in the following chapters, especially in Chapter 3 (What makes them tick?), it is important that we dive into this topic right at the beginning. So, let me start with your peers inside the company, typically your colleagues, your associates, your office neighbor, your project team member, in general people who are more or less at the same level as you in hierarchical terms. In my many years in my company I have seen all of them act in the most unexpected ways, some of them rationally, many of them irrationally, very many – if not most – did not act at all, at least not in the way I would have expected.

Dare to go to the end!

Let me give you an example that actually dates back to my university time, but is very illustrative of the non-action behavior that many people show. During my thesis in organic



8 The food industry innovation school

chemistry I worked in the area of creating new molecules by step-wise synthesis from precursors. One of my lab colleagues was completely focused on doing a very similar type of work and coming to his last step, step number 7, the only activity left to do was to “re-crystallize” the end-product from its liquid, more precisely dissolved, state. I saw the flask that contained his end product, perfectly well labeled and dated in our lab fridge for many days that even turned into weeks whilst he was always in the lab busy doing other things. I finally became so curious to know what was going on and why he would not finish the very last and very easy, rather routine, step of a very complex succession of highly skilled steps. I won’t let you guess what his answer was, although some of you may have guessed the irrational truth already: he was afraid that by doing this final crystallization step, it would turn out that nothing was left in the flask that contained the final product that he had so tediously synthesized. He did not want to confront a possibly uncertain, negative outcome, so he decided to push it aside and do it later, another day, another week.

Encouraged by me and also other colleagues, he finally dared to go for it and it turned out that he found his product, purified as it should have been, and in the expected yield; so, all was well, but he almost developed an ulcer from fear of failure, at least that’s how I saw it.

It’s neither a very important nor a big story, but it shows you a simple example of inactivity and non-decisiveness, at least temporarily, thus losing time, nerves, efficiency, and, ultimately, confidence in one’s own actions.

Fast is better, most of the time

I always remember a Latin proverb in this context which goes like this: “*Bis dat qui cito dat*” or: “He gives twice, who gives promptly.” Apart from the fact that this is valid also for “She gives twice ...” it is an important lesson: be fast in your decisions and actions and they will become so much more efficient and successful. Yes, there is always the risk that quick actions can lead to sloppy outcomes or not well thought-through results. But then, as the other well-known proverb goes: “Just do it and ask for forgiveness later,” it’s almost always better and more rewarding to action quickly and in time than to wait longer and longer, for whatever reason, knowing that the reason, most of the time, is fear. Fear of screwing up, fear of taking a decision that you feel you are not entitled to take, or fear of antagonizing your peers, and especially bosses. This obviously links directly to your immediate environment, the closest layer of the world around you, which I would compare to the first 500 feet of atmosphere around planet Earth.

How can you overcome this fear? In a nutshell, the answer is: by lived experience with regards to the type of consequences you encountered with past decisions and actions linked to fast or slow speeds. From my personal experience I can say that I have lived situations of decision-making and subsequent actions so many times that I have no clearly focused image of subsequent consequences any more, other than to say: whatever action I undertook based on “high-speed decision-making,” left a vastly positive memory with me, a memory closely correlated to the other, very important element that I have not yet mentioned and discussed, namely success and the success stories that come with it. I have to give a short warning right here at the beginning: when anyone, including myself, tells you success stories of any kind, take them with a pinch of salt. Storytellers are not quite like people who go fishing and tell you about their latest catch in glorious terms of excessive size and weight, and the difficulties involved, but they might come close. In my experience, there is always this element of exaggeration, in even the most honest and truthful story that is told. It wouldn’t make for a good story if it were not enhanced! And there is a fine line between enhancement, and exaggeration or even distortion. All the stories that I use in this book are either based



on my own experience or on the experience of others in the industry, and I take the freedom to enhance and adapt them as it fits the overall story. I never distort them, or worse, make them up; they are truly based on lived experience.

After this short, yet important, excursion into storytelling, of which I shall do a lot more throughout this book, let us get back to the elements of the “world around you” that are of crucial importance when it comes to successfully driving your innovation through a complex organization like your company, with all the hurdles, chicanes, obstacles, and closed doors along the difficult way. And yes, this journey is not an easy one. I started off with the peers around you. Oftentimes you see them as competition and yet, you should not. They seem to be competition - and in reality they are - but it’s best to make them your allies. How can you do this without appearing to be too hypocritical? Too much “kissing up?” Yes, you can appear to be kissing up, not only to your bosses, but also your direct colleagues and co-workers, so do it right, with the right mix between defending your opinion and giving in to the opinion of the other. This can sometimes be done in a very extreme manner, one example of which I would like to tell you here.

It’s all about trust

Quite a few years ago, when I was still working as a fairly young scientist (not young in years, but young as a scientist in the industry), I was collaborating with another scientist in the same company, who had worked in a different, yet complementary, discipline. We were on to something and, because it was not patentable, we were heavily geared towards publishing this in a highly reputable, peer-reviewed journal. One day, when we were still at the beginning of the work, the said colleague came to my lab and put a piece of paper in front of me. I looked at it, and it said at the very top “Contract.” What was this all about? Well, he had drafted a contract for us to sign that, in case we ended up publishing the outcome of our joint work, we would not only jointly publish them (which was rather obvious anyway), but also publish in the journal of his – our – choice and, most importantly to him, with his name as the first author.

So, what was I supposed to do? Having still been in the early days of my career as an industrial scientist and thus wanting to make a name for myself, but at the same time being intent on making the best out of it, I gave in and signed the contract without much discussion, second thoughts, or regrets.

Actually, there was nothing to regret, because we ultimately did not come up with good enough results and did not publish. The colleague, by the way, left the company soon after this episode and became a wine-maker. I did not follow his career as a wine-maker, but concluded that he was probably much happier with wine than with publications and contracts to secure his leadership.

This was a pretty unique episode and nothing similar ever happened to me again during the many years that I had since then spent with my company, but it taught me an important lesson: pick your fights! You have certainly heard this many times before and maybe you already apply this principle; however, I have realized time and again that one gets easily carried away with pursuing your own, all so important opinion and forgets about the strategic importance of giving in from time to time, especially on positions that were artificially enhanced before entering into a discussion on them. At the end it all boils down on the art of negotiation, which you can try at many levels, inside as well as outside your work environment. You can try to improve your negotiation style, as well as efficiency, with friends, with your partner, with colleagues at work in a playful manner, but best of all with kids, your own, your grandkids, or your nieces or nephews, or whoever would be an appropriate “victim.”



10 The food industry innovation school

Train with kids, spend a day at home

Kids are ideal for two main reasons: first, they will almost always be totally honest, and second, because they are by definition smaller and younger than you, you have to be even more respectful than you would be with someone your age or size. Another tip is to discuss and negotiate with persons of the opposite sex only, so as to learn about discussion and negotiation patterns of many different kinds. I am by no means suggesting a gender demarcation line but, again from many years of personal experience in the workplace as well as at home, I have learned a tremendous amount through this approach, especially.

Fight irrationality with irrationality

Finally, let me add one very important point, which has nothing to do with either kids or opposite gender, but is a very general one: you will often run into discussions that contain very irrational arguments and points of view. The worst and most difficult to discover irrational arguments are those that are perfectly disguised in a seemingly factual package and therefore look rational. Don't let yourself be fooled by these, but try to recognize these for what they are, namely irrational points of view, mainly brought forward because the arguments would not stand a real fact check or reality check.

I have been in many meetings and discussions in which I was exposed to such situations, for instance in budget and spending – or cost cutting – debates, when people proposed a new, very exciting project, for which they needed so much money, I have heard the most outlandishly irrational arguments such as: the window of opportunity is only now, the price of the machine that needs to be acquired to run the project successfully is likely to go up in the next couple of weeks, the colleagues who are supposed to work on this project together with me will no longer be available unless we can start right away, we have retro-engineered the project timing, and the Gantt chart attached to my proposal clearly shows the need to start now and commit the necessary investment ideally yesterday, etc. etc. You must have heard these and others many, many times, and sometimes they might even be justified. However, from long years of personal experience, I can say with a clear conscience that most of the time, you can debunk these arguments pretty easily.

My point here is that the best way to respond to irrational, often emotional, arguments is by applying the same standards: use irrational and emotional counter-arguments. You will not win a fight against irrationality by being totally rational; I can say with conviction that almost always you will lose the argument, although you seem to have all your facts together and everything in your line of argument appears to be logical.

Go back to your “sparring partners” that I mentioned above and rehearse the “irrational debate.” You will see that this will work wonders in your next serious, work-related discussion meeting when you have discovered the irrationality and emotionality in the line of argumentation of your colleagues. You have to, however, be very careful not to become chastised for being the irrational guy. You will realize that you walk a fine line in such situations yourself. Rehearse, rehearse, and rehearse again!

Become savvy in recognizing BS

Another important point, which is related, is discovering – please pardon my French – “bullshit” (BS from now on), when you hear it and/or see it. I have seen this so often: people get away with BS because they have a wonderful and successful way of packaging it in nice words and sometimes made-up facts. BS is not always easy



to detect because it sounds so good, and looks right and the perfect way forward. BS can be debunked by asking the right questions, especially when the presenter wants to quickly gloss over certain aspects and pretends that all is clear and understood, and there is no need to discuss this in more depth. This is a clear sign that there might be something to uncover by asking questions, especially questions with the aim of getting to the bottom of it and, more often than not, find out that there is no basis, but a lot of hot air.

Detecting BS early on is a very important skill that you should have or gain on your long journey towards successful innovation.

Again, rehearsing is the best way forward. You can rehearse in real meetings, provided that by questioning certain positions you do not antagonize too much, so be careful, at least in the beginning when your BS detecting skills are not yet fully developed. In my personal experience it is advisable that you team up with an experienced and trustworthy colleague, someone who has become a friend and ideally has a complementary way of thinking and arguing.

I had such a friend at work; let's call him Max. Max was not only an excellent thinker, but was great at asking the critical, the crucial questions in order to debunk real BS. Over time, Max became our expert and we used him as a BS-meter. When his needle went into the red, we knew that Max had clearly discovered BS and we would not pursue any related proposals. I am discussing this here because successfully sold BS is not only a money destroyer, but moreover it kills confidence in each other, and the confidence of your bosses that you dearly need. Finally it also loses you enormous amounts of time in unsuccessful projects that typically end nowhere or, worse, in more BS-based projects with more loss of money, confidence, and time. Try to have your own Max in your organization, your own personal BS-meter who is tremendously helpful in becoming much more efficient in your work.

1.3.2 Peers outside your company

Whilst peers inside your company can be productive as well as counterproductive, as we have just discussed at the example of BS, my personal experience has taught me that peers outside your own company can be more of a blessing than a curse, provided that you play it right. Let me explain what I mean by that. Whilst inside your company everyone at approximately your level is a potential competitor in climbing the hierarchical ladder and therefore not always friendly with you, although it may appear so, colleagues from other companies can often become allies for your and their own good. From personal experience, the colleagues in other, competing or non-competing companies are almost by definition always right.

Act like a consultant

Ideally and whenever possible – almost exclusively, of course, in non-competing situations – let your peer from the other company adopt your idea and indirectly sell it back to your company. It's an old trick, so well played by consultancy companies: tell me what you need or would like to have or would like to change and I'll repackage it and sell it back to you. If the consultants can do it, you can do it too. Try it out; meet with a colleague from a supplier company, explain exactly what you would like to do, what your project is supposed to achieve, and what resources you would need, and then invite her to a meeting in which she (could be a he for that matter) presents exactly this point of view (in a pun fashion it is "a point of you") to your management. You might be berated for not coming up with this



12 The food industry innovation school

brilliant idea in the first place but, more likely than not, you will be congratulated that you found such a brilliant outside partner who will bring the desired solution to the company in such a short period of time.

I admit that it's a tricky deck of cards to play and it may not always work, but it's definitely worth a try, or several tries. Again, rehearsing is everything, starting with less critical themes, lower hierarchies to convince, and less risky outcomes, positive or negative, to be expected. Just go for it and become an expert in making allies through this very efficient approach. Additionally, such external allies can often become very important entry points into other companies, which are useful in two ways: supporting you in your innovation journey as well as getting a better insight into another organization.

It is, however, important to add a word of caution here: when you deal with peers outside your own company, your own comfort zone, just make sure that you control any ongoing exchange. Make sure that what you discuss is either public knowledge or, alternatively, well protected by secrecy or non-disclosure agreements so that you are perfectly covered and you can be very open when discussing with external colleagues and making them a valuable asset as a strong ally. It might also be wise to inform your boss in general terms that you are meeting and discussing with a representative from company x, y, or z, that everything is under control, and that the expected outcome is of extreme importance for the wellbeing of your project etc.

Don't ask, just inform, but inform you must. Otherwise you may run into all kinds of trust and confidence issues with your boss, which, on the long run will make your work life more complicated, if not miserable. As we are already on the topic of your boss, let's discuss and analyze the role of the bosses in your company when it comes to successfully navigating through the complex organization called your company.

1.3.3 The bosses

This is a tricky topic, as I want to remain factual, without giving the impression to you, the reader, that I am too respectful of the bosses and would take their side and not yours. Anyhow, I am not taking sides but am telling stories about situations and events during which bosses play a crucial role in your journey towards successful innovation.

So, whichever way this discussion goes, take it for what it is intended to be: an account of personal experience and anecdotes with relevance to the question of how you can make your boss work for you, or more in your favor so that you make it through with your innovation project, all the way to the successful end.

Without any doubt, from long years of personal experience, bosses are most often referred to being the biggest hurdles for your project work. At best they are seen as "not bothering", at worst as "outright hindering my project." I do hope that many bosses will read this book, so the following discussion, observations, and analysis should be valuable to them as well.

The boss has needs too

Let's begin by trying to understand how bosses at any level, be it your direct boss or the "big boss," operate, and the pressures they are exposed to and the fears that accompany them. It sounds like I am describing an endangered species, and in a way that's what they are. For the last few years many companies, especially in the food industry, are on a path towards fewer hierarchical levels, i.e. reducing the number of opportunities for those who are not yet a boss to eventually become one. The air gets thinner, the chances slimmer, and



success in grasping such a position becomes even rarer. It is understandable that once you have the position, you want to hold on to it as long and successfully as possible.

One of my recent bosses, who was pretty high up in the hierarchy and who shall remain unnamed, once told me the following story: “When I was a student and did summer internships, it was the first time that I had really grasped the feeling of being the last one in the chain of command and I didn’t like it at all. For me it became very clear that, as soon as there was an opportunity, I would strive to become a boss myself, and not “just a boss” but a really big one so that I would be at the top of the chain of command and be able to tell others what I expect them to do and how they should execute strategies that I was involved in developing and defining.”

I am not sure whether this motivation can be generalized and is valid for all those who have become a boss but I think it’s a very valuable insight into one possible motivation for wanting to become a boss.

There may be other reasons why people have become bosses, some of them, and probably some of the worse ones, would be having been at the right place at the right time, or having been the third choice for nomination. The latter actually reflects my own very personal situation when it comes to the first job that I had with my first company.

A rough start

During the time when I was still doing some post-doc work at university, I found out by chance that Nestlé had a research department in a place that was, to say the least, very attractive to work, right on the shore of Lake Geneva. As I was looking for a job and had received many letters starting with, “Unfortunately, we have to inform you ...” (Note: at least companies still wrote you a letter telling you that they could not give you the job you had applied for, today they don’t even do this. Shame on them!) I thought I may as well write to them. Surprisingly, I received a very exciting letter back, asking me to pay them a visit “at the occasion of any future personal travel that would allow me to see them” (clearly, they wanted to see me, but didn’t want to pay for my trip ...).

So, two weeks or so later, I saw them and had very promising first discussions. I eventually got the job as a group leader for a research group and very quickly found out why (in addition to hopefully having been a valuable candidate with important contributions to make): there were two other internal candidates in the group already and the head of the department could not decide on any one of them without antagonizing the other. So, he hired me instead. You can imagine that my beginnings were rather ugly and difficult with people not talking to me – today you would call it mobbing – but I survived and actually did better than surviving: I thrived and grew through this difficult situation and probably have learned more about group dynamics and people interactions in large organizations than at any other moment during my many years with the company.

This is, by the way, an important learning for the reader in situations of mobbing: there are “*mobbers*” (those who mob) and there are “*mobbees*” (those who get mobbed). Don’t play either role. If you are the *mobbee*, do not enter the game and do not let yourself be pulled down by the *mobbers*! In the long run they will not survive, that’s the good news, even if you suffer during such times. Go and talk to your boss and/or HR immediately!

Bosses come and go

Let’s get back to the bosses. I always like to say that bosses are like warts, they come and go; while, most of the time, you are still there, they have disappeared into other areas, other



14 The food industry innovation school

roles, other places, or other companies. It is therefore important for you to cooperate with your boss and make proper use of him or her whilst they are in the hierarchy above you. Here are some good rules, or rather suggestions, as to how you should deal with your boss, irrespective of his or her personality. Personally I have found out that you can basically say everything, bring every argument forward, or be in disagreement, as long as your argument has substance and is delivered in a respectful manner. Substance and respect are really the two keywords here. If your boss likes drama or controversy, play the game. I once had a boss who liked shouting games whilst he was smoking a fat cigar. So be it, enter the game (not necessarily the cigar, unless you like to smoke, which is basically banned from any workplace these days), but do not forget substance and respect. It's not always easy to shout with respect, but it is something that you can learn by rehearsing with colleagues, friends, or at home. I am convinced that next to a solid education in whatever area your work is, you should, during college time, go to drama school and learn some basics in the art of acting; this would help you a lot in your career, especially in dealing with your boss and bringing him or her to support you in your innovation journey.

In addition to substance and respect, I suggest one more very important element, namely a good sense of humor. There are probably a few more other important elements at play when dealing with your boss, but a sense of humor, being able to laugh, especially about oneself, is one of the three top elements.

From many years of experience when dealing with colleagues in both directions, those who report to you or those who are above you, substance, respect, and a good sense of humor are the most important ones, and are universally successful in making your boss your ally.

1.3.4 Media and the web, retailers and consumers, shareholders and analysts

The next layer or group of elements that compose the world around you is a little bit more detached, yet no less important. For reasons of simplicity I combine these under one heading and shall discuss them together. It is rather likely that most of the time you will not be exposed to any of these, at least not directly, but they can become important allies in your quest to succeed with your innovation project.

Let me tell you a little story that helped me to create a new ally inside the company by being interviewed by a radio journalist. He wanted to know about a nutrition science-related topic, which I would have the chance to explain in three long minutes. The company communication officer responsible was very anxious that I not make any mistakes and that the company would not get any bad press from this interview.

Luckily, I had done some media training in the past, during which a nasty former tabloid journalist from Britain who, if that were possible, had given us the "fourth degree" during the training sessions.

Learn how to sell

I then had an idea: I offered a bet to the company communications person that for every time dropped the name "Nestlé" into the interview, I got a bottle of wine. He fell for it and so I waited for the early morning call from the journalist to be interviewed live in the early morning radio show. I was a little bit doubtful that commuters in their cars would really be interested in my story, but then, if the journalist thought that it would be the right topic to



discuss, who was I to challenge that? The interview actually went really well and I ended up with five bottles of wine. Not bad for three minutes of work; at the average value of the bottles, I had earned a lot more than I could have ever earned through my salary, unless I was a top manager in the company.

The good part was that everyone was happy, the journalist, my communications colleague, other people in the company who had a chance to listen in too, and through this interview I was able to make new allies in my complex organization, especially with people who could make or break my projects.

You can do this too; it does not necessarily have to be a journalist, although it is a rather pleasant approach as I was able to find out in many more interviews that I had during the years with my company. Retailers like to visit food companies and meet with their representatives, especially with those who work in product and packaging development. My strong suggestion to you is to jump on such occasions and be part of such meetings and presentations. I found out that many of my colleagues very often saw this as wasted time, but I had the exact opposite experience: it was always great to meet representatives from retailers or customers because I could gather a tremendous amount of information that was new to me, but also got to know new people who had direct access to our ultimate target, the consumers.

Don't forget that retailers can help too

Making allies with retailers' representatives gives you a very strong additional justification inside your own company for determinedly driving your innovation project forward and takes away much of the usual criticism that you might get without having made such important allies. The same goes, by the way, for shareholders or analysts, although most of the time during your work life you will not have a chance to see much of them, unless you have some important contributions that are of prime interest to, for instance, analysts. You may be called in to meetings with analysts because your bosses, who cannot know everything, want you to give detailed and relevant information to a group of financial analysts or shareholders. My suggestion is to take such a challenge head on and be well prepared; what was valid when dealing with your bosses is equally valid here: be factual and be respectful. Personally, I would leave the humor aside, as you do not know the people who you will talk to, but, if in the course of your presentation you can read them well, be ready to add some. However, if in doubt, don't do it; remain factual and respectful, and show them that it is you who can give them all the answers to the questions they may have regarding the topic that you are speaking about.

This is, by the way, a very general remark and observation that I would like to share with you: when presenting your "stuff" to any group of people, be it inside or outside your company, always make yourself aware that, by definition, you are the one person in the room that knows best about the topic that you're speaking about. Don't come over as arrogant, but show them that you have mastered the topic and that you are in charge. This is not always easy to follow because people in the audience have a tendency to unsettle you by asking all kinds of fancy and smart-sounding questions. Don't let yourself be destabilized by this; it happens all the time and you probably asked such questions at occasions when you were part of the receiving audience. It's just the nature of the game: oftentimes, people who ask the questions want to show their boss, who happens to be in the same meeting, that they are smart and have captured the topic at hand so well. Most of the time they want to show off. I do not pretend that this is always the case and there are certainly many occasions when



16 The food industry innovation school

great and stimulating questions are asked. You have to learn to detect these and weed the pseudo-smart ones out properly. This is again a case for listening, learning, and rehearsing when you are in meetings and follow the questions posed by others in the room. You will see that little by little you get a good sense of distinction, which you can then apply when you are in the role of the presenter and have to answer questions from the audience.

Let me finalize this section by saying a few words about the use of the web to help advance your journey towards successful innovation. From personal experience I can say that it is extremely tricky and there is no single or simple answer to the question as to how make it work for you. It strongly depends on the nature of your industry. The food industry is typically more conservative in these things and it took my company an awfully long time to acknowledge that there is value in playing the web right, let alone encouraging its employees to become part of the game. This is understandable, as food is typically un-fancy and does not pretend to be at the forefront of technological development, nor does it want to give the impression of experimenting with consumers, all elements which the web, internet, and IT at large stand for.

More recently I have seen that food companies make increasing use of electronic platforms, mostly for commercial and public perception reasons, and it is still very difficult for an individual to be an active part of it, and to make any substantial and important allies that may help you in your work. I am sure that there is increasing awareness of the importance of the electronic platforms inside the more traditional industries, and I do look forward to hearing relevant stories from you, the reader.

1.3.5 The “outer shell”: family, friends, politics, public perception, macroeconomics

Again, in order to simplify the discussion and analysis, I have grouped the elements of this “outer shell” together. You may ask the question: how can family and friends, and how can even politics, public perception, and the macroeconomic situation influence my chances of being successful with my innovation project? Well, the answer is not a simple one and I shall try to give you a few, short examples.

I strongly believe that you find both strength and challenges in your inner circle of family and friends, and that they do play a tremendously important role in your personal as well as your professional wellbeing. There is nothing wrong with discussing your work with them and getting their opinion in areas that are clearly not their direct expertise. I can assure you that after some initial comments like don't you have anything else to discuss with me?, you will get the most astonishing feedback from such discussions and simple exchanges. They reflect a much more representative view and response to your topic of discussion, which is based on common sense and consumer behavior, both of which might not necessarily be found in your work environment.

Train with friends and family

Friends and family are also great sparring partners when it comes to rehearsing presentations or even simulating important discussions. I do realize that you are asking a lot from your family or your friends, but it is all worth it.

The other elements that I have grouped into this paragraph are really outside; they are definitely outside your direct sphere of influence, although you may have some, limited influence on the political direction of your city, region, or country. However, it is extremely important to follow these elements such as politics, public perception and economic factors



as they are important indicators and will help you to decide, whether your innovative idea is actually well grounded in the present and future public mood, as well as public desires and realities. Use these elements as a kind of thermometer, or better even a barometer as to what is and what will be.

1.4 THE MAIN PLAYERS IN YOUR ORGANIZATION: HIERARCHIES, ATTITUDES, AND PLATITUDES

It is of critical importance for every activity, be it personal, or even more so professional, to clearly see the people that act around you, in your favor, but also potentially against you. The list of these players might seem pretty obvious to you, but it is always good to just check that you have not forgotten anyone who is less obvious. The other aspect is the level of hierarchy that is still of importance and relevance to your innovation project; oftentimes one could believe that the higher and highest levels are too far detached from you, so they may not be important. However, based on many personal examples, I can tell you that this is far from the truth: they seem to be far away, but they still are important players that you can use for your success, as much as they use you, through your important and successful work, for their success.

These are people you should probably know

Let me just list the relevant players, and briefly discuss and analyze their individual roles and contributions:

- your direct boss;
- your co-workers;
- those who work for you (assistants, technicians, or any other fitting role);
- internal service employees (IT specialists, restaurant and cafeteria employees, mail delivery, movers, copy center, etc.);
- receptionists;
- cleaning personnel (most often outsourced yet still relevant);
- drivers (in case your company employs them and you use them);
- the boss;
- colleagues from other, not necessarily related departments and functions, e.g. the patent attorney;
- others: please add and define them accordingly.

I have terminated the list with others, telling you that I ran out of potential players that might be of relevance to you in your specific professional environment and that therefore need to be considered as relevant players.

Figure 1.2 illustrates the crowded work space around you. Many of these players will, one time or another, have direct or indirect influence on your success.

The main goal of this short discussion and analysis is to discover those players from the above list that are really important to you and identify the best ways to approach them, beyond the odd professional encounter, and make them into allies in your journey towards successful innovation. It seems obvious that your direct boss should be supportive of you and should be your strongest ally in all your professional endeavors and yet, this is not always the case. Sometimes, you might even have the feeling that your boss, openly or



18 The food industry innovation school

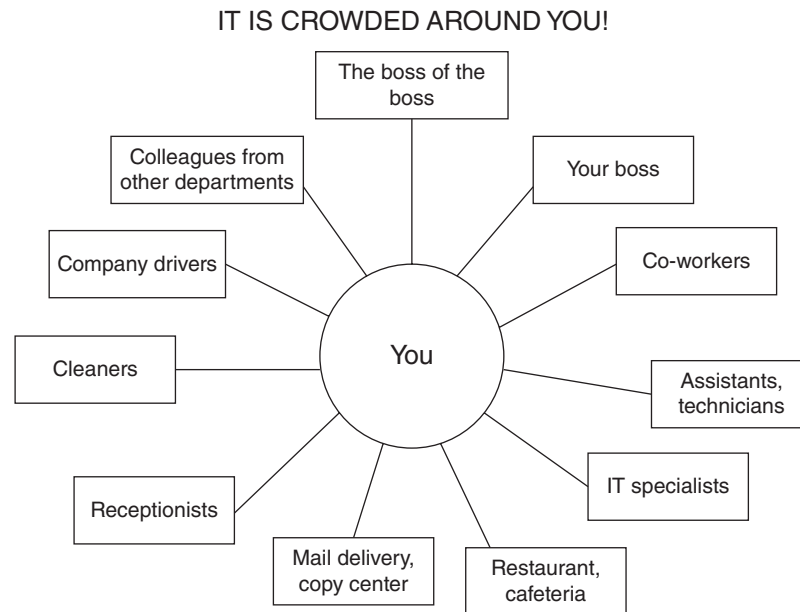


Figure 1.2 It is crowded around you.

behind your back is agitating against you. This agitation could have several reasons that are less obvious: one, your boss sees you as a threat because you may be really competent and super active (principally a good thing, but maybe not in the eyes of your boss), the boss may be jealous of you because you seem to have better connections of relevance inside (or outside) the company, you were not the boss' first choice for the job, but she had to take you on board, you are not following the boss' orders and ideas strongly enough, and maybe a set of other reasons, which may be totally irrational, yet do exist in the mind of your boss.

Speak up, don't suffer silently

You have to be very sensitive in picking up the right vibes and try to correct the situation; this is not always easy, but it is crucial to do so. Most importantly, do not deplore the situation and become a silent sufferer (or worse: an outspoken sufferer), but become adaptive, find out with your boss, either by simple trial and error or, if possible, by talking to him or her, what you should change and how you should change, always keeping in mind not to give up your personality or your ambitions. Mold these into the environment that your boss has created and in which he expects you to operate.

By the way, talking to your boss about this is not always the most successful approach because she would never really admit that she has something against you, unless you had performed badly or had committed a clear error. It is very difficult to rationally discuss underlying, potentially negative vibes because the other party would probably not even realize that they exist.

Let me tell you a little story that happened to me many years ago; a true story, nothing invented or added. When I was a fairly young research scientist and expert in the field of food lipids and lipid nutrition in the company research center in Switzerland, I was not



only active in patenting and publishing exciting findings, but, because of these activities also became co-editor of a scientific journal in the USA, which held its annual meetings in different cities across the country. My boss, who was the head of the department (I was a group leader), without any discussion was, however, the one who went to these meetings and never allowed me to participate, except for once, when the meeting was going to be held in Honolulu. I was so excited, feeling the Aloha already, and prepared really well for this occasion. Not only was I going to give a keynote lecture, but I also sent in a poster presentation. So, it seemed, all was well under way. I should have smelled a rat but the Aloha was so overwhelming. A few weeks prior to the event we were called in by the research director, the boss of my boss, and sat in front of him listening to a very dry, puritan talk, letting me know that the destination Honolulu was not only too far away, but sounded too much like a vacation, and therefore I was not to go, actually no one would go. My boss was really sad for me (yes, you bet!) and was so fully understanding, and gave me the usual BS that you are expected to hear in such situations.

Luckily I had a very good colleague of mine who in those days had worked at the PORIM (Palm Oil Research Institute of Malaysia) who was definitely going to the conference, and who agreed to read my keynote lecture and also stand next to the poster, not an easy job given that he was not the author.

To terminate my story I let you guess, who went to the annual conference the year after? You guessed right: my boss. He was totally aware that his boss would not allow him to go to Honolulu, so, in order to spare him losing face, he presented the opportunity to me, presenting himself as a caring boss, having really tried hard to give me this unique opportunity, unfortunately in vain, because the big boss ultimately refused it.

What can we learn from that? Well, if the opportunity that is offered to you by your boss looks too good, it probably is and will not come to fruition. Be careful with such opportunities. However, it's a fine line that you walk, a line between being picky and being rejected because you have been too picky. I have seen many of my colleagues throughout the years who had refused apparently really good opportunities for promotion because the time did not seem right or the job offer did not seem perfect or the place of transfer was suboptimal or because the family was not ready or, or, or ... There is a rule of thumb that is probably valid in most companies, which I would call "three strikes out." You may find excuses for not accepting a new job offer once, maybe twice, but certainly not a third time. If you do this, you may be put into a dead-end situation with not too many options for you other than to change company entirely. The latter often seems to be a big gamble and, depending on age and family situation, can be a prohibitive step, but never lose sight of that option in case the situation and relationship with your boss becomes too cumbersome and full of negativity.

Don't create your enemy

I had several important learning elements from my story above. The first, very important one was: do not create an image of an enemy, never see your boss as an enemy, nor anyone else around you, even if the facts seemingly look that way. It is too easy to blame your boss, his attitude, his Machiavellian ways, his personality, or any other not so positive attributes and find excuses for your own downfall.

The theme of "picking yourself up" is continuous, very much in the sense of never looking backwards except for learning, never blaming others, except for correcting, never blaming anyone else but you, except when it is clear that it wasn't your fault. However, it's



20 The food industry innovation school

easier and on the long run more successful if you take any failure, self-inflicted or caused externally, as a great stepping stone to future successes. I know that this sounds easy, maybe even an easy way out, but from many years of experience and with hindsight – hindsight, by the way being the only exact science – it is definitely the best way forward. Of course, it would be better not to run into any trouble when you deal with your professional environment, especially with your boss, but then, this really never happens and Murphy's law, which shall remain unquoted here, takes over whenever you least expect it.

The list of relevant players by whom you are surrounded was rather lengthy and I do not want to emphasize each and every one, but let me pick a few, the more unusual suspects, who can be very useful, or alternatively can become indirect, almost invisible, obstacles. One of the more obvious ones is the IT specialist in your area who, unfortunately or fortunately, depending on your point of view, can help or hinder you in your journey towards the successful conclusion of your innovation journey. I am not talking about whether your work computer works or breaks down or anything of that nature, but the type of situation that requires specific, unique, and possibly very expensive software or other application that is crucial for your work. You may have the experience that it's a piece of cake to get what you need. Not so fast, I say from my personal experience. It is never easy to obtain something that costs money, especially when it costs a lot of money. So, it is totally appropriate and in line with your work needs to build a good and friendly rapport with the IT people around you and see them as a friendly ally rather than a pain in the proverbial butt or just a troubleshooter.

Look beyond the fence

As I have always worked during my entire career in technical environments, even if I always considered myself a very good amateur marketer, it was extremely important to have excellent contacts with people who could help speed up the process of patenting, which especially includes being very open and cooperative in sharing all relevant, and often even seemingly irrelevant, information with the company patent attorney, and being very understanding when it comes to the whole process of patenting, as cumbersome and lengthy as it often appears. The patent is not over for you once you have passed on all the information, it actually only starts and you should make yourself part and partner in the entire process, including office actions, oppositions, and other elements, such as finding new examples and claims or deciding which ones can go.

Another potentially important group of people that you may want to have as allies are cafeteria employees, if they are employed by your company, because they can be a rich source of information; not so much gossip, but important bits and pieces of information that they may have snapped up in passing and can be of potentially crucial importance for your own work. It sounds far fetched, like having a good rapport with cleaning personnel. But in reality it is not. All these people are part of your organization and can, in one way or another, contribute to your success; it is up to you to find out!

1.5 HOW TO GENERATE ATTENTION FOR YOUR WORK, FOR YOUR PROJECT

One of the crucial elements for success in your innovation journey is to create enough attention for your project, for your work, potentially in the person or group that performs this work. There are many ways to achieve this, but never forget the over-riding factor



here: always remain humble, even if you have the greatest possible success just around the corner. This is really crucial, as arrogance will eventually always be punished. I have been surrounded by smooth talkers, plenty talkers, promise talkers, know-it-all talkers, and many more talkers during my work years and yes, they seem to have short-term successes, but more often than not, they will eventually disappear and true quality, humbly yet determinedly and competently presented, and based on substance, will always prevail. There are a few exceptions where the smooth talkers will win, but that must not discourage you or seduce you into becoming like them!

Showing passion is the right attitude

So, how do you create interest? Unfortunately, there is not just one answer to this question because it depends on many factors, not least on your company culture. My personal experience is such that personal approach and personal connection is always the best way forward with almost guaranteed success. Try to “sell” your idea by contacting the right people, by presenting your idea to a group of peers, as well as your boss, in simple and understandable ways. Involve your family by presenting to them; if they get it, chances are that anyone else in your work environment will get it too. There are a few ground rules though:

- Be honest with assumptions, yet be daring
- Have the proverbial “shine in the eye”, show passion for what you do and present
- Have your numbers right, or at least undefeatable
- Be constructively stubborn, yet listen well to comments
- Deal with questions respectfully
- Give clear answers when it comes to estimate chances of your project to succeed, no BS!
- Bring in allies as needed and let them talk too
- Always be grounded and keep eye contact
- In conclusion: be really well prepared, calm and on top of your game

Always avoid “interesting”

You may argue that these ground rules are nothing really new and you are right: they are not. However, one tends to forget them and not apply them, not just one or the other of these rules, but all of them, all the time. It’s the persistence that you show, the passion that you project, the competence that you transpire, but overall the content of what you present, that will ultimately lead you to the desired result of creating interest and, more importantly, support for your work and your project. Interest alone is nothing! Never forget that when you hear the words “... this is interesting,” they mean nothing. They are a polite way of saying “... I am bored.” “This is interesting” is like “the kiss of death” to a project; “this is interesting” or the “i-word” is probably the most often heard expression in the work place, more often than “let’s have a coffee” or “are you ready for the commute home?”

Be very wary when you hear the i-word, it might even mean that you blew it because your project is just interesting (boring), but nothing more. This means that you have to work harder and make your project a rock solid one that no one can look past and ignore.

Show what you have

Let me terminate this chapter with a short personal story that tremendously helped to generate passion and support for the projects of an entire department. Quite a few years ago



22 The food industry innovation school

I was in charge of a department that covered food science and food technology, and there was a great mix of engineering and science thinking with all its ups and downs, as you can imagine, like when “Gantt chart meets hypothesis.” Our goal was to present the work of each group in the department in the most colorful, playful, fun, and understandable way to the outside, this being defined as outside the department yet inside the company; a first step towards opening up though. Very quickly we chose the format of an open marketplace with stands and booths, posters and samples, people and machines, demonstrations and interactions, surprising technical twists, products to taste, and ultimately a lot of pride that everyone involved felt, and the overall fun that this event had created. We had called this event, using the Arabic word for bazaar (Persian origin) or simply marketplace with a lot of different goods to see and, here we come to the ultimate goal, to purchase. Purchase meant that we got the buy-in from so many people inside the company, as the visitors, all professionals in their own right, came with their families and this made the buy-in so much stronger because kids would pester their fathers or mothers about when they could buy the products that they had seen in the concept stage at the occasion of The Souk. It was a real success and has recently been repeated in a similar environment, again with great success.

1.6 SUMMARY

In this chapter I have introduced the following important starting elements to recognize and utilize in your journey towards successful innovation:

- A complex organization is simply defined by building blocks such as size, structure, complexity of interactions, length of communication pathways, and how people in such an organization deal with each other.
- Complex organizations can be very small; it’s all about the people within as well as without.
- I discussed and analyzed the workspace and the importance of how this workspace is constructed and filled with elements conducive to motivating people.
- The way your workspace is made strongly influences your successful innovation journey.
- I discussed “open workspace” versus individual workspace and suggested that there is not one solution that is better than another, but that it depends on individuals, the type of work you are performing, and the company you work for. However, a little bit of playfulness would be a great driver for success.
- I then introduced the concept of the “outside world,” which really begins outside your immediate workspace and not just outside your company. In Figure 1.1 I depicted a number of elements or peers inside your own company, as well as outside. Again, I discussed the importance of recognizing that they all are right outside the doorstep of your own workspace.
- I discussed and analyzed other players in this world of work, such as bosses, media, web, retailers, consumers, shareholders, analysts, but also family, friends, politics, public perception, and, last but not least, the economic situation.
- I then discussed and analyzed the main players in your own organization, the importance and influence of hierarchies, their attitudes, and sometimes platitudes. I emphasized a number of unusual suspects, such as service personnel that can play a very important and helpful role in your quest for successful innovation.



- I also discussed the importance of creating a large number of allies and avoiding finger-pointing and enemy image-building to cover up for your own failures and shortcomings.
- I ended this chapter with a few thoughts as to how best to generate interest in, but more importantly support for, your work and specific projects, and discussed a number of basic behavioral elements that, appropriately lived and applied, will lead you to driving your innovative project towards a successful conclusion.
- I emphasized the destructive importance of the “i-word” (interesting) and that the goal has to be to obtain total support from players around you and not just the comment: “this is really interesting”!

1.7 TOPICS FOR FURTHER IN-DEPTH DISCUSSION; ADD YOUR OWN EXPERIENCE

It is obvious that this, or any of the following, chapter cannot discuss and analyze all topics of relevance. Throughout this book, I shall introduce a last section to every chapter under the above heading.

This gives us the chance to add a few “blue sky” ideas with more or less clear relevance, but also leaves space for you, the reader, to add your own personal observations, ideas, and, most importantly, personal stories that I will share with all other readers on the website specifically created for this book:

www.innovationschool.co. It is intended that this is a learning site that shall grow as you, the readers, add more information and at the same time can profit from the mutual learning. So, let me concoct a first list of topics that we could discuss further and in more depth, and that are of potential relevance to this chapter, Your World.

Here we go:

- What if your world had to be re-defined due to dramatic changes, e.g. reduced availability of raw materials due to droughts or other events? How would you go about this? How would this change your world work-wise and your place in it?
- If you could re-arrange your world around you – and I am always referring to your work world – what would you change, would you propose a new set-up and what would this look like?
- I am a big believer in collaborating with the “unusual suspects,” i.e. people who are not usually in your network. Who are your unusual suspects? And why?
- Have you ever thought which role the wife (or husband) of your boss plays in the work environment? If you think none, think twice! What is your experience?
- If you could change the attitude of one important player in your work environment, who would that player be and which attitude would you change?
- If the i-word in your eyes is not the worst (the double dare), what in your experience is your double dare?
- What is your recipe for generating support for your work? Please tell your personal story and share it with us.

