

Something Really New: Three Simple Steps to Creating Truly Innovative Products

Denis J. Hauptly. New York: AMACOM, 2008. 242 + xii pages. US\$21.95.

In *Something Really New: Three Simple Steps to Creating Truly Innovative Products*, Denis J. Hauptly provides his executive management perspective on evaluating the innovation of proposed new product or service projects and on nurturing the organization to support these goals. Hauptly's current employer, Thomson Global Resources, provides integrated information solutions for legal and business professionals.

Something Really New contains numerous anecdotes and opinions. It is a lightweight book that can be examined in a few hours. The examples, termed innovation workouts, are often generic, but the book does contain insights based on decades of personal experience. For example, Hauptly advocates a simple characterization of innovation as either big or small. Big innovations are game-changing ones that add significant value and have historical importance. Small innovations take the form of incremental improvements to routine activities. He asserts that the skills that support small innovation can be taught and that small innovation can be enhanced in the appropriate environment. He describes big innovators as "born, not made – but they can be found, and they can be nurtured" (p. 154). Other suggestions include: innovators should be managed by innovators, innovators inspire other innovators, and innovators can grow stale (pp. 171-173).

Chapter 10 contains the descriptions of three other types of innovators. A faux innovator is a person that gives the appearance of being innovative because it is advantageous to their career goals. A recycler innovator imitates ideas from other successful efforts in the hope that proven popularity will produce future prosperity. For example, in 2008 the concept of "green" (environmentally friendly) has become associated with innovative products and services. Impractical innovators present many new ideas that require sorting

and evaluating by pragmatic managers. (pp. 160-163). A few ideas may lead to successful products but most of them are rejected.

Part 1 (pp. 1-150) of *Something Really New* presents a three-step plan of action to create an innovative new product:

1. Identify the tasks that people wish to accomplish with the product. Separate the functions from the tasks, for example, traveling is one possible function (step) of a vacation task. Directly observe customers using existing products or prototypes of the proposed product to confirm the facts. Look past the existing paradigm to find the task underneath the function.
2. Enumerate the typical steps required to accomplish a given task and explore solutions that eliminate some of these steps.
3. Explore the tasks that a customer will perform after using this product. Investigate opportunities for contiguity, linking, and leverage. For example, a vacation product can include transportation, lodging, meals, and entertainment.

Using these criteria, Hauptly promises "a simple and straightforward process, and one that will enable you to quickly and inexpensively create new product and service innovations that have real value to customers" (p. 7). The guiding thesis is that in "the world of product and service innovation, utility is the driving force" (p. 5). The fundamental task that the intended customer is trying to accomplish defines the utility. In other contexts, the phrase "the problem the customer is trying to solve" is preferred. In contrast, the product functions or specifications describe the product.

Chapter 4 includes a discussion of the concept of net utility, which is defined as the benefits of the new product minus all of the conversion costs incurred by the customer. From an executive management perspective, the concept of net utility can be extended to subreptitious project proposals where the product advocate emphasizes the favorable aspects of a product and conceals potential problems. Hauptly advises validating a product

concept by testing it with “the three most cynical people you know” (p. 67).

Chapter 6 includes insights about implementation. It addresses process and culture. Stated in an oversimplified way, innovation through process implies that brilliant new products can be produced in some formulaic way in a command-and-control organization. According to Hauptly, “The idea that you can take the human factor out and still create innovation seems like the ultimate bureaucratic fantasy to me” (p. 90). Hauptly concludes that a process-driven organization “has a tendency to drive the level of innovation down to a lowest common denominator” (p. 93). Instead of incremental innovation (a pursuit of the status quo characterized by introducing slight modifications such as changes to the product’s color), Hauptly encourages development teams to look past short-term revenue needs and pursue projects of high net utility. He discourages bifurcated approaches – where the business culture tries to embrace both a strategy of product line extensions and “higher-risk/higher-reward options” (p. 98) – that do not maximize the potential of a highly innovative environment.

In Chapter 8, the focus shifts from products to services. A service business provides a means to outsource tasks. Hauptly links concepts such as bundling or joining adjacent services to Step 3 of his action plan. Step 2 supports concepts such as a division of labor.

Chapter 9 contains the declaration “there is no reason to believe that what is good for technology or good for marketing is good for customers” (p. 138). It also contains an enhanced version of the previous three-step plan of action to ensure that the proposed products are customer-focused.

Part 2 of the book explores the context of innovation – the people and the culture of the organization. This section addresses recruiting, rewarding, and managing innovators. Who is responsible for achieving the goals? Is it the technology contributors, marketing representatives, or the manufacturing team? Hauptly insists that someone has to be responsible for system-level results.

Chapter 12, “Straightening Out the Rest of the Company” addresses culture and lists

advice for contributors outside of the product development group. This includes business development, manufacturing, sales, and marketing. Hauptly proffers a strict warning about building on assumptions. He states “There is nothing in the world that is easier than reasoning perfectly from a set of false assumptions. And false assumptions are not always detected.” (p. 180). Methods to test assumptions include: publication, peer review, replication by an outside group, and pilot testing (pp. 49-50). In addition, Hauptly succinctly summarizes his experiences in statements such as “Just as activity does not equal progress, so change does not equal innovation” (p. 54).

Something Really New is not intended to guide designers in their craft. There are no suggestions about how to position a new product. The book avoids academic references, equations, or detailed case studies. It doesn’t contain a glossary of new terms. *Something Really New* does not introduce major new concepts in new product development, but the three-step method can provide guidance to executives as they evaluate proposals that promise innovation in new product or service development.

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