

Revisiting the Executive Innovation Work Mat

This is a conversation series between **Jeffrey Philipps** and myself, **Paul Hobcraft**, on the Executive Innovation Work Mat.

We initially designed and conceived this nearly ten years ago and remarkably we have waited this long before we wanted to revisit it and validate its value today.

In this series, initially planned for five video conversations, but subsequently turned into six parts was followed up with these posts offered here in this workbook. We wanted to highlight the numerous weak linkages across innovation even today, ten years later.

This frame provides an organizing mechanism to bring critical parts of a necessary innovation into a clear framework based on the work we have completed on the Executive Innovation Work Mat approach.

The structure we will discuss offers individuals, teams and organizations a framework that provides four fundamental points of value:

- It offers you a necessary innovation shape
- The dialoguing mechanism for intervention and exchange
- The framework for clear linkages that need to fit together
- The communication tool and essential building blocks for all to converge upon.

Jeffery and I feel all of us do need to go back to the core, often revisiting all that is central to all innovation activities. We hope to peel away the layers, undo much of the tensions and confusions that so much layering can do.

This workbook breaks it down in a different order than we initially planned. Why?

Firstly, the essential **setting out of the Business case** is necessary to ensure all involved become signed up to the innovation journey and what is needed. This was our last discussion, but I lead here with this.

We started our conversation I entitled “**Getting back to the future about innovation**”

We then in our second conversation, discussed the **linkage gaps between innovation and strategy**.

Governance is so important in organizations, equally we all need a **strong innovation governance**.

Balancing Function, Design, Process and Structure for Creative Tension was up next

Our last focus topic was on the continued difficulties of not having a **common language or context**

I really hope this Workbook gives you many fresh thoughts on managing innovation

The Executive Innovation Work Mat



Building the use of the innovation work mat as a compelling business case



The Executive Innovation Work Mat as a compelling business case

After a series of conversations around the Executive Innovation work mat, Jeffrey Phillips and I decided there was a need to add one more to the series, one that makes the business case for the work mat, one that is more from the leaders perspective.

In this [video conversation of around 13 minutes](#), we explore why the leadership of organizations needs to get deeply involved in the innovation activity.

The reason top leadership needs to be fully involved

How many of our organizations are not looking to search for new ways for organic growth, improve their profit margins and create differentiation? This makes innovation central to this CORE need.

Leaders need to close the gap between aspiration and execution, and it is through building a robust, comprehensive innovation capability that gives them that chance to turn rhetoric into proof.

In many ways, their success requires innovation; it is wrapped up in their destiny. How often are they missing the strategic mark due to their inability to find that innovative pathway?

Leaders are constantly worrying over what is valued in the market, what products and services are essential to defend, those they need to promote and improve. This understanding does not come out of “thin air”. It comes out of having an organization that is market aware and innovative in responding.

One of the most critical aspects for a leadership team is to achieve a greater sense of identification and involvement from all within the organization. Innovation is one of those creative, forward-looking needs to build as central. Central needs to be sustaining and systematic, giving this ability to grow and ensure ongoing involvement and providing a consistency of purpose for all involved.

The work mat provides real value.

Firstly the work mat offers an open design that gives a framework for a comprehensive dialogue of what is central to the make-up of innovation.

Today we are in far more open organizations that need to connect and form new entities with others.

The rise of Ecosystems and platforms requires a more effective innovation mechanism, a more holistic, whole innovation system that can transform.

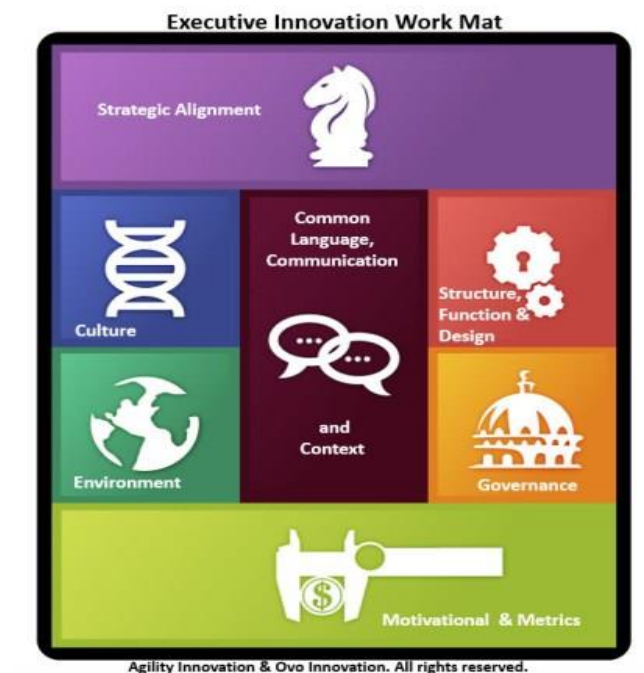
Handled well, the work mat gives focus, engagement and passion. It allows you to compare with others you want to form a deeper relationship with within any ecosystem design.

By pursuing innovation, you constantly have the opportunity to build a fresh dynamic “stock” for innovative ideas to feed off.

You draw out differences to either narrow the gaps between innovation approaches or find new ways to combine, to improve what each, as individual entities currently have.

You require a dialoguing framework to relate, build-out and constantly update and validate. The Executive Innovation work mat needs to be a living, dynamic framing tool to work around and through.

The seven components of the Executive Innovation work mat



I believe there is a real utility of purpose in this open design.

For me, the work mat is more relevant today than when we, Jeffrey and I, worked it through together ten years ago. It addresses the core fundamentals and roots of innovation that are needed, today so much more to understand and bring together.

We need to build innovation capability broader and deeper, in competencies to innovate and find the capacities far more today than previously Why?



Building the innovation work mat

Making contact with us

Both [Jeffrey](#) and myself would be pleased to discuss the value of the Executive Innovation Work Mat with you at any time or stage you are at in your innovation journey.

The five dialogues on selected parts of the Innovation Work Mat

If you wish to view the five elements of the conversations we had recently, here are the links. These have covered

[Convergence & Divergence](#) – The opening outline of our discussion to the series seeking the need for alignment through the Executive Innovation Work Mat.

[Strategy](#) – we discuss the relationship between corporate design and innovation.

[Governance](#) – we examine how to govern an innovation project and why this work requires different governance models from other projects.

[Function/Structure/Design](#) – we examine how innovation should “work” – design and processes – and why it is vital to focus on an innovation capacity.

[Common Language/Communication](#) – we look at the importance of having common definitions, common language and regularly communicating about innovation.

We trust you find the time to listen or equally read each of the posts I have written to support these in the last few weeks. Just put into search “*work mat dialogue.*”

We feel the Executive Innovation Work Mat makes a compelling case to be deployed and widely used.

Getting back to the Future about Innovation



Paul Hobcraft and Jeffrey Phillips in conversations around innovation

I have just finished the first of a planned series with one of my favourite long-term collaborators [Jeffrey Phillips](#).

Here is the [link to the recording](#). In this series, planned to be only of 10 to 15-minute conversations, we are picking up on many of the fundamental building blocks of innovation.

Jeffery and I go back within the innovation space a long way. We have actively collaborated and designed tools and frameworks over the years that we believe had some of our insights “baked” into them to offer valuable reference points to help us all work through connecting innovation in hopefully better ways.

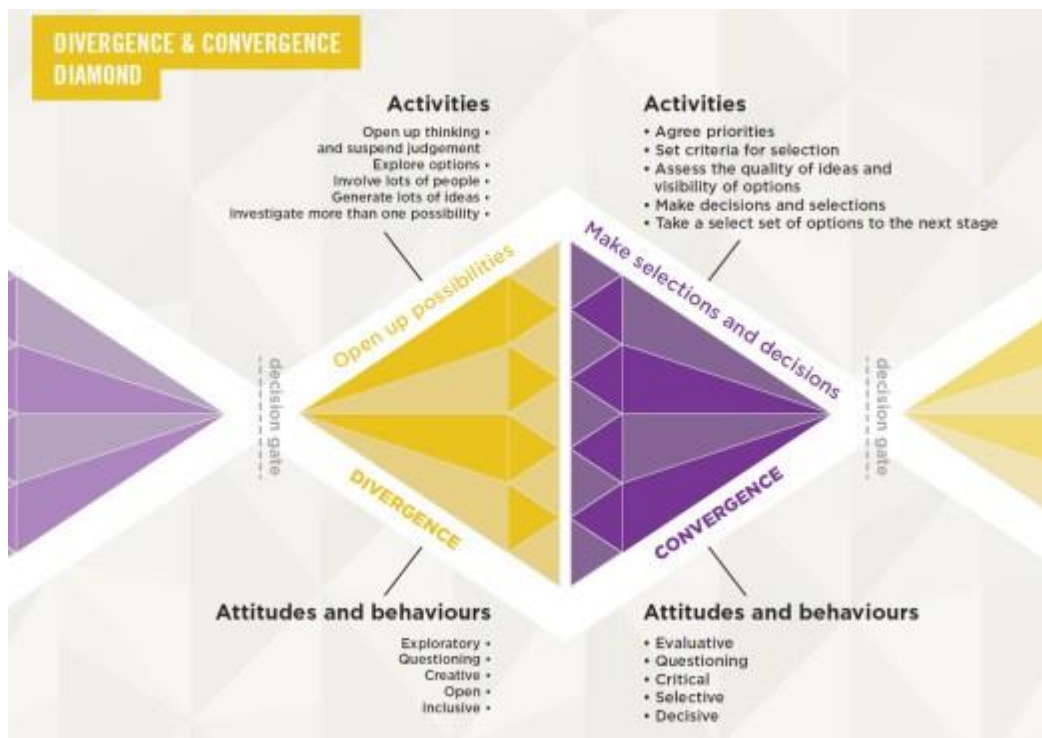
We have often got into frequent discussions between us on the basics for innovation, those that we deem as central or the core. We will attempt to focus on one of these in each short video produced.

We started with Divergence and Convergence as our framing part

We both find **the value of Divergence and Convergence thinking** as not just a practical place for brainstorming but for allowing a conversation to firstly diverge and then converge in different ways to resolve and focus opinions.

I have used it many times in different workshop environments; here [is a post of mine on this](#) to bring opinions together and give a collective focus to build out a more collaborative future.

This approach can bring out the building blocks of an emerging understanding. You become more collective, selective and decisive



Source: Nesta UK

Today diverge/ converge is actually on a continuous loop

We believe diverge/converge is today on a constant loop. As you finish converging to produce a final result, the chances are you are already on the diverging path of discovery for the next one. A new diverge/ converge set of discussions that promise to converge by opening up your thinking.

The importance of gathering all the different opinions, experiences and insights as you explore alternative options and diverse opinions get shaped. The shaping is influenced by insight, exchange of knowledge, not one dominating opinion. Eventually, what emerges becomes visible in new exciting options, where collective decisions on choices can be made on intelligent data to prove a potentially new exciting innovation offering.

Then you go back and start again as nothing stands still; it is constantly evolving and looking for new points of value and growth.

Jeffrey and my opening discussion was outlining the series to come

The conversation series we are planning intends to discuss weak linkages across innovation and provide an organizing mechanism to bring these into a clear framework based on the work we have completed on the Executive Work Mat approach.

We both have written extensively on this and its *enduring value* is planned to be drawn out in these coming discussions.

We touched on different issues and topics that will come up in our future conversations.

We have linkage gaps between innovation and strategy. Often innovation fails to map back into the strategic intent, which can fundamentally weaken the business in its plans for growth and new value.

We believe [C.E.O's and senior executives play a vital role](#) in the success or failure of innovation. Unfortunately, those roles have often not been well-defined, and sometimes they

are rarely well executed. *We call this the engagement- alignment gap.* Only an engaged, committed senior executive team can create the means to build a sustained innovation capability or disciplined approach by defining innovation's role and contribution.

We are always in [pursuit of alignment](#). To achieve alignment for innovation, we need an overarching strategic design to reduce the 'disconnects'. Innovation needs constant alignment. One essential need is to provide a well designed strategic plan that will allow the connections and reconnects needed. We need to seek out alignment through clarification, through talking to each other, to working explicitly from the 'same page,' the need to move from divergence to convergence.

Our second focus topic is where so much of our difficulties can go back to; having a lack of **a common language** for talking, applying and communicating innovation. We plan to discuss finding a common language that flows across an organization and out into its network of collaborators that gives meaning and context to what is being undertaken.

Language can have the power to unite us or potentially divide us. Developing a language to unite us in our innovation efforts goes some way to reduce disagreements and egos, to qualify individual interpretation or bias, often a critical inhibitor that can block a team's success. It lays in a common foundation. It builds confidence and understanding.

Thirdly, Governance is becoming "super important" across organizations, and it is equally necessary to have strong innovation governance. It has become doubly important when we are focused increasingly on building a resilient and sustaining organization. Both resilience and sustainability should drive much within innovation today.

Our fourth topic centres around Structures and Processes. We often strive to improve a given process and sharpen the structures to undertake innovation, but we badly miss the point here. Each innovation activity requires different thinking, process and structure. Working increasingly with other companies in more of an open environment of collaboration, one process imposed simply can constrain.

We do have a reasonable need to understand the basics required in structure and process and their delivery **needs, but this** requires a highly adaptive, fluid and agility in what we wrap around the "idea" or concept to build it out successfully in both efficient and effective ways.

I wrote in a past [post](#), *"The solutions of fluid, agile and adaptive are aiming to develop highly flexible and responsive organizations as an attractive answer to manage in more uncertain times as the way to move forward."*

Each of these four focus areas is essential to building an effective innovation capability. The frame itself offers seven dimensions in it

Our conversations aim to recognize how a reasonable organization frame gives you those vital basic building blocks for innovation

The structure we will discuss offers individuals, teams and organizations a framework that provides four fundamental points of value:

- It offers you a necessary innovation shape
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- The communication tool and essential building blocks for all to converge upon.

Jeffery and I feel all of us do need to go back to the core, often revisiting all that is central to all innovation activities. We hope to peel away the layers, undo much of the tensions and confusions that so much layering can do.

We need to grow and scale innovation, but the foundations of any innovation work need to be on rock solid foundations that give confidence to the individual, team and organization, of what innovation truly offers- the pathway to the future.

Jeffery and I hope you find a really good value out of these short exchanges and all the material you can explore that support this part of our thinking.

Here is the [link to the recording](#). In this series, planned to be only of 10 to 15-minute conversations, we pick up on many of the fundamental building blocks of innovation.

Watch out for future episodes; we hope these provide you value.

Innovations linkages to Strategy is vitally important



I have just finished the second of a planned series with one of my favourite long-term collaborators [Jeffrey Phillips](#).

The [link to this conversation is here](#), it is just over 15 minutes long, as a conversation between us, where we emphasise the important linkage between innovation and strategy. You might believe this is a no-brainer but you would be really surprised that this ‘tight’ linkage is often lacking.

Our first conversation called the Fundamental building blocks for innovation success (13 minutes), [links here](#), introduces the series and the areas of our focus. I wrote a post supporting this “[Getting back to the future about innovation](#)”

All of these short conversations are drawing out the value of having an integrated approach through the **Executive Innovation Work Mat**, our central theme of the series and solution to integrating innovation.

In this latest conversation, Jeffrey and I argue most problems or disappointment with many innovation efforts within a business can be attributed to a lack of alignment to the organization’s strategy, resulting in poor growth and impact from innovations contribution.

We need to resolve that issue within any innovation activity, it needs a “tight” linkage to strategy.

Achieving innovation alignment always needs clear framing.

You do need a clear framework for innovation and Jeffrey and I believe this can be achieved through the [work mat approach](#). This series is all about the different components of this work mat approach.

Alignment of an organizations strategy and innovation approach is essential and this needs to flow and connect from the top, but I have often felt there has not been a suitable engagement

platform to gather around and work through to build a robust, well-connected innovation capability.

It is through this work that we regard as our solution aimed at filling that gap.

In the video conversation with the [link to this conversation here](#), Jeffrey and I discuss a number of helpful points of strategy and innovation linkage.



We argue many organizations seem to have alignment problems

A majority of people within the organization seem to struggle to connect innovation with their own place and contribution and this often both ‘contains and constrains’ innovation, they lack a mindset for it.

Having a distinct framework mechanism linking strategy and innovation becomes the innovation strategic foundation document that articulates innovation and provides the guiding aspects of innovation for others to work through.

Making that real alignment of strategy and innovation provides a good base

- Greater cohesion and consistency of purpose in your innovation activities
- A framework that raises the visibility of innovation as well as reduces risk and misalignment.
- Provide the mechanism for improving the workflow making innovation more dynamic and interconnected throughout the organization
- Deliver a greater connection & confidence that builds for lasting identification
- The use of frames becomes the organizing point for alignment of activities, measurement, compensation and recognition
- From this, you can derive inspiration, clarity and connecting and becomes a real sustaining source of impact and motivation.

The establishing of innovation within any Strategic thinking is becoming even more important today than ever.

Innovation drives the momentum towards 1) goals and visions, 2) it is the major catalyst in providing the growth and impact needed and 3) it builds the creation and potential towards new business models that can sustain and build your business.

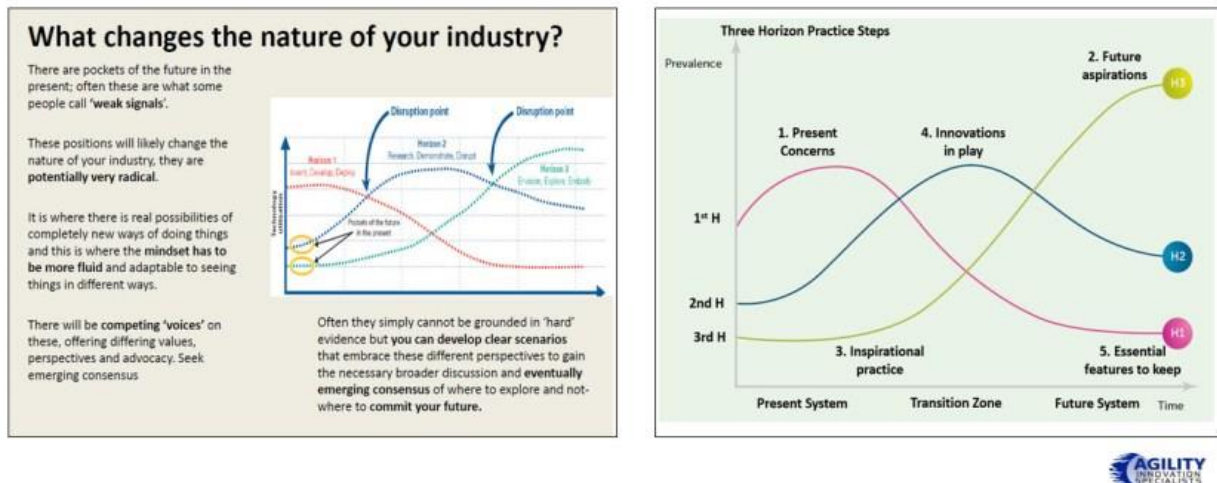
To achieve the right innovation it does need framing and we speak of two framing activities specifically we see value to recognize.

Any construct of a Strategically designed innovation plan needs to work through different concepts and tools.

Two we mention in this conversation are the **Three Horizon Model** and the investment **Portfolio structure** over different times.

We use a specific image of the three horizons within the conversation but by simply typing **“three horizons”** into the **search bar** on this site you do get to an extended resource around the 3H.

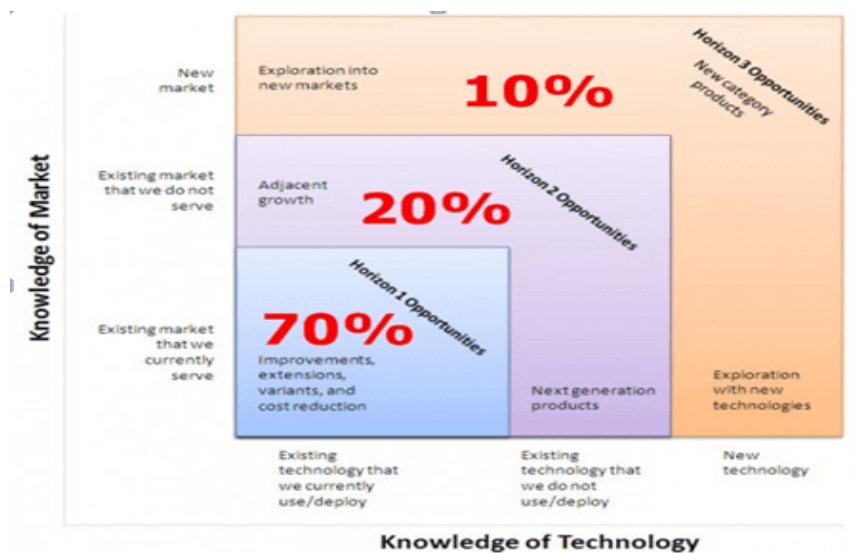
The importance of the Three Horizon methodology



The importance of the three horizon methodology has for me been a central aspect of how I focus on innovation building for years and you will find plenty of resources and references on this posting site. This includes White Papers and Series papers in the [“Insights and Thinking”](#) resource on this site as well

The other one we cover is establishing a Portfolio need across the three-time horizon points of your business; today, tomorrow (midterm) and the future (the 3H thinking framework)

Possible Three Horizon Investment Portfolio Allocation.



Possible Three Horizon Investment Portfolio Allocation

This is one example of allocating appropriate resources

In this example above, as the knowledge of the market grows and the emerging understanding of the technology you have different horizons to invest in, to allocate your

funds and resources but I feel this is a very “slow burn” allocation and the market might be changing faster than your response.

In many cases today the active portfolio is more pointed towards the future so allocation of funds, resources and time could be 20:40:40.

If you are in a highly dynamic, changing market it might look like 10:30:60

Keeping a very active portfolio in where to place funds and measure their impact is critical. Portfolio management should never stay still or static, it needs to adjust to the latest understanding and outcomes to reallocate funds and resources it is a fluid undertaking.

Taking action in designing your innovation alignment

“Strategy informs”- it has to be explicit in its goals and intent. Knowing where to place your innovation thinking becomes critical; it is knowing where the leadership places its importance, its turning bets into likely wins’.

We have to keep asking those essential questions that link strategy and innovation in understanding.

- It becomes important to know if the growth is going to come through the acquisition of capabilities and competencies that fill critical gaps.
- What are those ‘perceived’ gaps? Can they be filled by shifting the innovation competencies, capabilities or capacities?
- If you are not ‘informed’ by strategy, you are simply ‘second guessing’ and here is where alignment breaks down by not having this understanding.
- Often the designers of strategy omit the essential details of “*how we believe we will get there*” and what are the primary resource levers to commit to this.
- This might be in having the need for a richer user engagement experience, a more robust futurist product portfolio to test, learn and explore potential options.
- It can be where it plans to invest its technology options to leverage knowledge.
- The strategy/ innovation dialogue is a constant probe; to clarify and adjust, to reshape and refocus.
- Strategy, like innovation, is dynamic, it is influenced by market conditions, internal needs and ambition.

Today we have even bigger, pressing issues that require this tight linkage between innovation and strategy. 1) We are faced with some very uncertain times, 2) there is a greater push in shaping new disruptive solutions, 3) we are facing increased time pressures to scale, speed and solve challenges and finally, 4) technology is becoming a dominating part of any solutions and innovation needs to link into this.

Today, we also need to consider a more sustainable future and preserve critical resources and this requires this tight linkage within organizations that innovation and strategy are working towards these goals.

Achieving innovation alignment always needs clear framing and the tighter the linkages to strategy gives a greater potential that innovation in outcomes is related to business, and more importantly, to market needs from the evaluations that have been undertaken.

Our next discussions will cover Governance, then Common Language and Communication and then one covering Structure, Function and Design, all drawing out the value of having an integrated approach through the Executive Innovation Work Mat, our central theme of the series.

Why we should focus on Innovation Governance



I am working with [Jeffrey Phillips](#), a long-term collaborator on “all things concerning innovation.” We have just had our third short conversation of a five-part series on Innovation Governance.

This specific conversation is all about the fit of innovation governance within our Executive Innovation Work Mat. This is [the link on Innovation Governance](#) to the conversation, just under 14 minutes to listen to. Hope it gives a different set of insights to this area of innovation alignment.

If you would like to listen to the two previous conversations then these are here in the links that take you to youtube.com The first was setting the scene for these conversations on the “fundamental building blocks for innovation success” ([LINK](#)) and then the second into “the essential alignment of innovation to strategy” ([LINK](#)).

I have written supporting posts to these conversations, more to flesh out a number of different pointers to add more value and awareness of the importance of having a clear integrated solution for innovation in the solution we offer, **the Executive Innovation Work Mat**.

Link to the first post “[Getting back to the future about innovation](#)”

Link to the second post “[Innovation linkages to Strategy is vitally important](#)”

This builds out conversations Jeffrey and I are having on a series of discussions around the value and necessary alignment through the **Executive Innovation Work Mat** that we feel offers a good solution as the dialoguing and assessing framework for innovation to have a more comprehensive approach.



Listening in to the conversation on Governance

The link to this third conversation is [here](#), it is about 14 minutes and looks at one of the most important aspects of why innovation governance



Often innovation governance gets caught up in the (life-threatening) aspects of governance's need to have reporting, metrics, reporting and accountability dominating. For me, that often the heavier structure and process needs can, over time, take over and dominate. That can so often drain energy and life out of the creative needs of innovation, it becomes more "rote and uninspiring". Innovation should never be dull or lack fuel for the inquiring mind.

Jeffrey and I believe we need to get the "lighter touches" into Governance that reflect what innovation needs to be. A Governance environment is not heavily regulated but encouraged and given the freedom to explore but aligned in achieving innovation that relates to the organization's needs and vision.

I want to attempt to answer three critical questions here to add more value to the need for Innovation Governance

1. Why we should focus on Innovation Governance?
2. What can a good Governance model resolve?
3. What should a Governance frame (?) deal with?

Why should we focus on Innovation Governance?

The conversation Jeffrey and I had was basically around this first question and most of our discussion covers this. I encourage you to go and spend that valuable 14 minutes listening to this. Here I am adding to our thoughts and exchanges.

Governance for innovation needs to recognize its unique positioning.

-Innovation is about risk– if it is not dealing in riskier ideas or concepts then you are unlikely to be undertaking innovation, that builds and drives towards new growth and impact potential or reinvigorating the business.

-You always face **many unknowns and uncertainties** within innovation as it is about discovery, exploration and figuring out something that is different and exciting as it builds on what we have got or know.

-Often our **innovation activity is hard to defend**, as it is often entering uncharted territory or we lack “hard” quantifiable data to **seek more money, additional resources and justify** it. In any prototyping or learning stage we can move knowledge understanding along but to keep believing and pushing is simply hard. Having those rules of the road or guiding principles really helps.

-Any governance design needs to be **clean, robust, open and transparent**, not opaque and closed to a selected few as this opens up to criticism, cynicism or favouritism. Good governance is seen and valued.

-Governance always has guidelines and measurements, I would argue these **need to be sensible and adaptive**, not just restrictive and prescriptive. **Having flexible, realistic measurements** might sometimes “open the door” for different interpretations but pushing the “famous envelope” brings out the greater potential for compelling innovation.

-Lastly here, organizations have “**given mindsets**” for quantifying returns and you can’t avoid two aspects that need a deeper clarification of what they mean to innovation. **ROI dominates, Time dictates**. Innovation spans different time and returns horizons and these need clarification and being fluid within any Innovation Governance and how these will be handled. Look for fewer justified exceptions, build more common approaches into approaching innovation across different horizons, through emerging, evolving practice and growing acceptance.

What can a good Governance Model resolve?

Let me provide a list here to trigger what it needs to recognize and attempt to resolve

- Resolves conflicts that constantly come upon innovation
- Allocation clarification of resources
- Be the warning point of change- be that in scope, markets, delays or changes.
- The meeting point for ambition- the organizations understanding “flows” through this Governance function
- The central place that alerts and informs a focal point and required passing through point for everything around innovation
- Has and provides a clear line of sight
- Being the point that constantly positions innovation- bringing it to ALL stakeholders and parties for awareness, status and knowledge.

What should a good Governance function deal with?

For brevity sake let me keep to a list. It is not a definitive one but provides the important aspects of its function

- It is at the centre of funding and managing the risk portfolio
- It shapes the scope and success, it fills out vision and ambition
- It establishes targets and priorities
- It clarifies the time frame approaches needed or recognized
- It offers flexible, realistic measurement settings to give clear coordination, and clarity to innovation activities often over a diverse environment of different innovation needs
- It encourages agility, adapting, being fluid and dynamic in the way to undergo innovation
- It provides good reporting that conveys innovations importance and impact
- Constantly establishes a set of evaluation metrics that reflect different challenges, stages and maturity of what innovation is providing
- A resource centre that can call upon, build and enhance capabilities, capacity and competencies that can be deployed or identified as needed.
- A primary role is to stimulate, not dictate and take or encourage action, it needs to orchestrate and lead.
- It offers project empowerment, leveraging and steering ideas, concepts and ambition.

Being bold, ambitious and determined to build the best Innovation Governance is worth the effort.



Having a comprehensive framework to help top management develop the overarching values, policies and initiatives needed for a corporate innovation need, so as to always build out innovation governance. It is a place that reflects, defends and pushes the innovation activity.

I do recommend a really excellent book, brought out in 2014 that provides a really detailed look at Innovation Governance. It is called [“Innovation Governance: How Top Management Organizes and Mobilizes for Innovation”](#) written by Jean-Philippe Deschamps & Beebe Nelson. Jean-Philippe Deschamps is emeritus Professor of Technology and Innovation Management at IMD in Lausanne (Switzerland) and a large part of his work focuses his research, teaching and consulting activities on the management and governance of innovation.

I wrote a post some time back on [“The role of Governance needed in Innovation”](#) I feel it adds to this post here.

Governance of innovation in a comprehensive manner, that is well-designed is essential for innovation today. This functions as the nerve centre for innovation to thrive, contribute and have its rightful place within the core of any organization.

We are in a more complex and demanding world being faced in our organizations and the ability to have a clear, dynamic innovation governance reflects where innovation sits within the business on managing their innovation activities.

Balancing Function, Design, Process and Structure for Creative Tension



In the fourth conversation between Jeffrey Phillips and myself, around parts of the Executive Innovation Work Mat, we took on several different issues around the design, function, structure and process needs for innovation.

The conversation lasted nineteen minutes, and for some reason, I lost sound briefly at my end a few times, which was a pity. So I hope I can help fill those gaps and explore the what, why and how of having a dynamic functioning design and structured process to meet today's demanding and highly energetic world of constant change.

This specific conversation ([LINK here](#)) is about 19 minutes. It is all about the fit of innovation and the tensions between the design, function, structure, and process needs to manage innovation management. We relate this specifically within our Executive Innovation Work Mat.

It is always our intention to offer some different thròughts about the balancing of function, design, process, and structure and giving it equally the creative dynamic attention it needs

If you would like to listen to the three previous conversations, these are here in the links that take you to youtube.com. The first was setting the scene for these conversations on the “fundamental building blocks for innovation success” ([LINK](#)) and then the second into “the essential alignment of innovation to strategy” ([LINK](#)). The third ([LINK](#)) was on “managing governance within innovation”.

I have written supporting posts to these conversations, more to flesh out many different pointers to add more value and awareness of the importance of having a clear, integrated solution for innovation in the solution we offer, **the Executive Innovation Work Mat.**



I would start by saying innovation should always be in “creative tension”, and as we operate and manage innovation, this tension should also apply within any design. It should have a specific “bedrock” or foundation of needed stages or steps. Still, its need is to be far more fluid, adaptive and agile in what it processes and manages, especially in today’s challenging world, adapting to today’s challenges and working towards the future.

The ability to manage innovation design, function, structure and process

Starting with a simple definition of D, F, S & P. what you do needs to cover the entire “end to end” process of innovation, its workflows and all the associated roles required to achieve successful outcomes

As a word of caution, it does not start at the idea. The idea needs to “form, from observation, listening, engaging and data insights. This not just comes from the research and development lab but far more to listening and observing customers, the market shifts and trends, to having customer conversations, gaining insights into potential gaps or opportunities in the marketplace or through those that have this market-facing role inside the organization.

We gain from building the inside-out perspective and drawing in the outside-in one.

Today working in more open, highly collaborative environments, we are building ecosystems, networks and a rich diversity of partners who all can bring ideas, knowledge, diversity of opinion, different expertise and insights.

We need to remain “open” to what and how we process this. Having rigid structure or processes and many good observations or concepts can be screened out far too quickly due to “imposed” metrics or a defined idea of how “anything” gets captured and evaluated.

By having some basic building blocks, you can accommodate.

By having some level of operating mechanisms, you can establish a business process. Yet, it is how flexible its design and function can allow a more prosperous environment to draw in, work through and evolve into final proposals that can make a huge (competitive) difference.

The importance of a “dual” perspective of thinking

- ☐ There is a need to ‘reflect’ both *“informal and formal”* mechanisms for innovation.
- ☐ There is a need to offer a dual perspective- the *“internal and external”* design for innovation
- ☐ Innovation demands both *“intrinsic and extrinsic”* consideration within any design
- ☐ Innovation is both *“emergent and deliberate”* and the creative tension between these needs clarity

We need both informal mechanisms and formal ones. For instance, some opening prompts.

Seeking both formal and informal connection through the Work Mat

Formal Mechanisms

- Establish innovation as a corporate function
- Determines how you lead and manage innovation
- Identify the constraints, gaps to be addressed.
- Optimizing the process and structures
- Determining the allocation of funds
- Innovation portfolio management
- Type of openness to innovation flows
- Embedding technology and capacity for rapid work

Informal Mechanism's

- Uncovering good practices in innovation
- The value of good leadership & distinct culture
- Targets and partner identification
- Skill of working together effectively
- Integrating external parties to leverage.
- Framing ambitions and plans of strategic targets
- Engaging the outer peripheries to capture insights and needs
- Exchanging expertise and seeking synergy

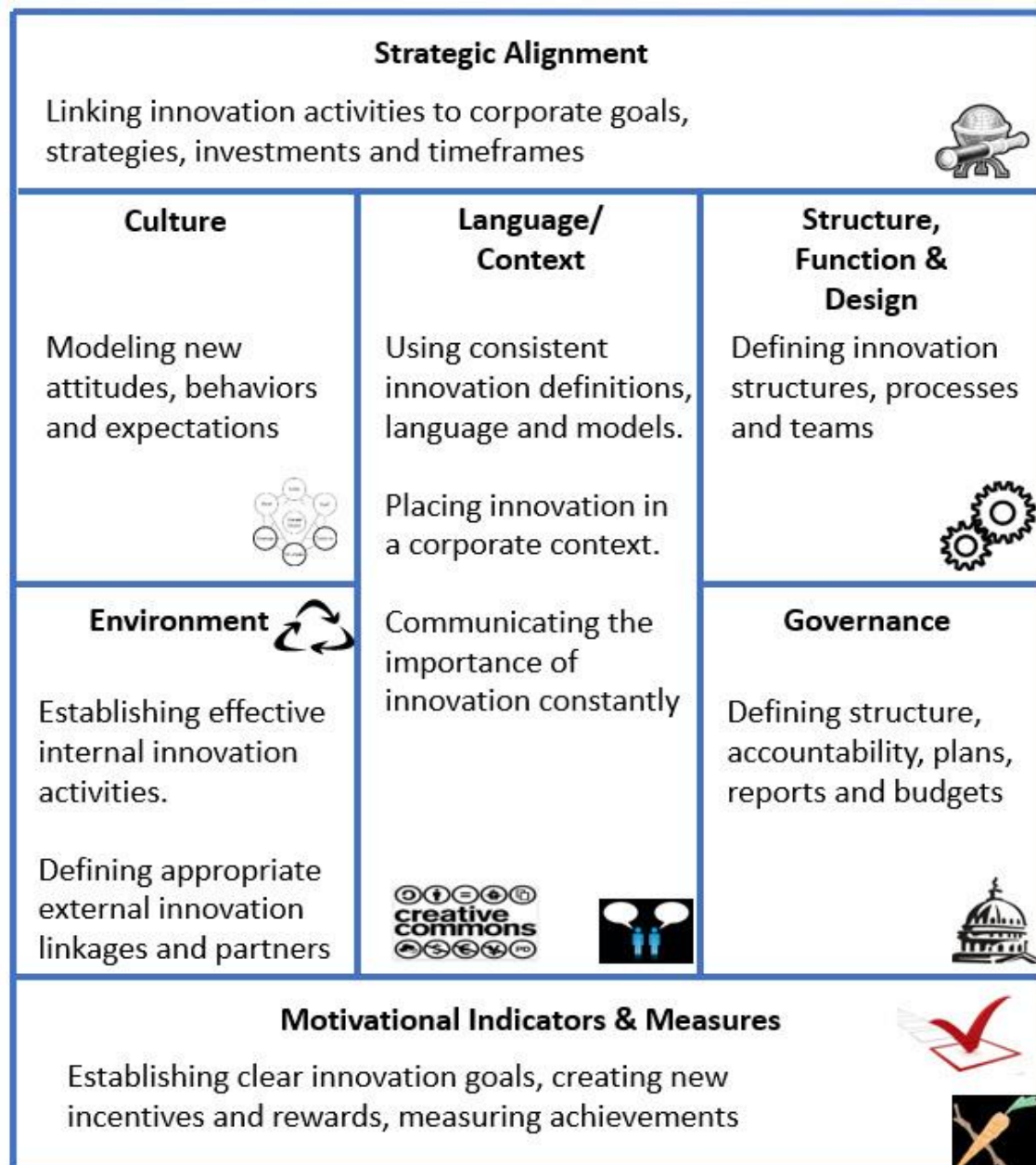
What we know today

There is an increasing and radical redesign call of the function, process and structures. Innovators are being more challenged with the rising demands for more innovation. The dynamics are coping with the pressures coming from the top, demanding more growth and impact, controlling the risk, ROI's and resources in ways that often seem at odds with the needs to grow a business.

This pressure from the top often conflicts with the bottom-up, who struggle in pushing for recognition of ideas, concepts, resources or support. The importance of good governance and the proper functioning structure and the process can help absorb and translate these tensions.

Often you see or hear the lingering fears of wanting more radical innovation but the worries of the upheaval this brings. The “*we want predictable innovation but radical enough to make sure we grow*”. Often to accommodate conflicting issues needs this strong innovation practice, one that is connected, well defined and worked through.

The Executive Innovation Work Mat can contribute to that.



Achieving a well-designed design, function, structure, and process is utterly dependent on the organization to translate the innovation needs and aims, define the workflow that ‘this will follow and how and where this will occur. Then it needs full support and resourcing.

Today we need to think about innovation outcomes differently.



Image credit: mi2.org thinking-differently

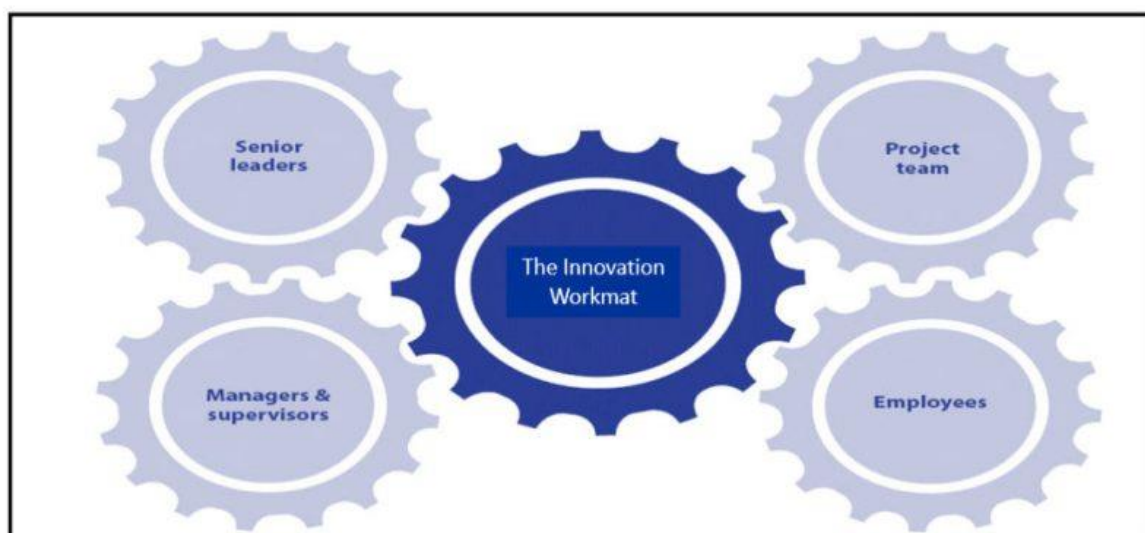
The higher demand from innovation requires the system to respond quickly to breaking opportunities.

Innovation needs to have a system that is constantly adaptive and flexible. Most of the rigidity needs to be designed out.

Organizations require structures and processes that are far more agile and nimble, constantly recognizing speed as the essence of today's competitive world.

The challenge to address is replacing a linear system with a spiral one. You constantly loop back to refit your innovation understanding into the idea-to-launch system from the new knowledge you are gaining. The design needs resetting around shorter bursts of high-intensity activity that factor in risk-based contingency, are encouraged to keep exploring and adapting.

The linkage of the Innovation Workmat need to mesh and engage across the organization



To have the capabilities of resetting needs a core design to meet different challenges and demands. Different innovation activity that can range from incremental to distinctive to radical through to entirely new business models needs adapting and adjusting, yet ALL innovation flows through basic designs and flows across the organization.

Innovation should NEVER and ONLY come from ONE originating source; it emerges everywhere. This emergence from everywhere is why innovation needs to be core. It is all within an organization aware, having innovation as part of their job. ready to recognize innovation potential, pursue it and know where to go for help, finding those who can help them work through the idea into a concept into an outcome.

The balance and creative tension

In a world where agile, adaptive and accelerated innovation is “demanded, we get frustrated that our process and structure are too linear, too rigid and far too planned and managed. Finding the balance in evolving the function, design, process consistently, and structure will always have this Creative Tension.

It is not easy to design a suitable model, but it is wrong to apply one alone, rigid and tightly controlled as one. Sustaining innovation, having repeatable elements does require a defined structure and the broader connecting into the whole innovation function.

Try the work mat; it enables and brings a greater cohesion to innovation in needs and design.

Further resources can be found here in this posting site, in the [insights-thinking pages](#), where you will find the original White Papers, Booklets of previous posts and articles. Equally, you can contact Jeffrey or me directly.

Providing the glue in the common language, communications, and context needed for successful innovation



DEA / G. DAGLI ORTI / Getty Images

The Tower Of Babel by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1563)

Central to any organizational innovation building, the enormous value of having a consistent common language is paramount; it is essential to gain identification and understanding that all can relate to; it provides the backbone to a clear, united “sense of purpose”.

Building upon this common language gives a greater chance of effective communication to place the innovation activities into their appropriate context.

In the fifth of a series, I am working with [Jeffrey Phillips](#), a long-term collaborator on “all things concerning innovation” we have been discussing the different domains of the Executive Innovation Work Mat we propose as a framework to provide a great chance to bring all the various aspects of innovation together.

We explore why each factor is essential to innovation in the videos we’ve created. These have covered

Convergence & Divergence– The opening outline of our discussion to the series seeking the need for alignment through the Executive Innovation Work Mat.

Strategy – we discuss the relationship between corporate strategy and innovation.

Governance – we examine how to govern an innovation project and why this work requires different governance models from other projects.

Function/Structure/Design – we examine how innovation should “work” – design and processes – and why it is vital to focus on an innovation capacity.

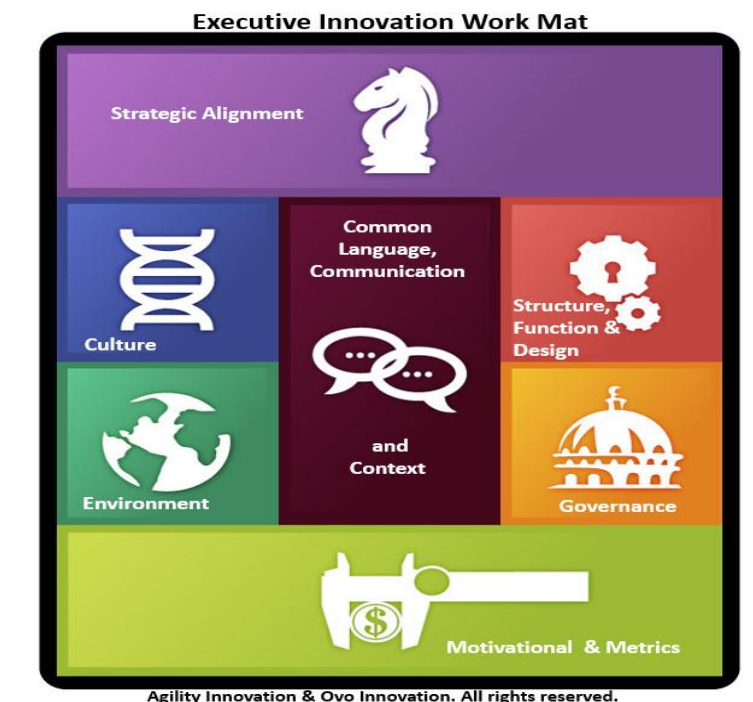
Common Language/Communication – we look at the importance of having common definitions, common language and regularly communicating about innovation. This post discusses and builds on this.

I think the videos allow us to explore each of these. I think you'll find them helpful if you are starting to build an innovation capacity or improve your innovation activities or outcomes. (Jeffrey Phillips [Innovate on Purpose](#) posting site)

Common Language, Communications and Context- the focus here.

So we have just had the fifth conversation, [found here](#) and below. It is about 16 minutes long, discussing [Common Language, Communications and Context](#).

Within our Work Mat, you can see where this fits, as it is the glue that hangs the activities together in the middle of the mat.



The strength of the middle holds all the parts together

I firmly believe placing common language, communications, and the context in the centre of the Work Mat provides the glue and enables flow.

The flow here means as we talk, communicate and set objectives, this needs to “cascade” across to the other domains and up and down the organization.

A comprehensive, coherent and consistent innovation message resonates and connects all the others involved.

The various stakeholders can determine their role and contribution if it is well understood (common language), communicated well and placed in the context of what is being attempted to be achieved. In my view, it aligns the parts and forms the whole.

Why is Common Language, Communication and Context important?

Innovation is grossly inefficient if it has to start again and again, and new designs, processes, and cultures must be built, hopefully on some established practices or approaches. The ideal

is we should create a common, repeatable, scalable approach to innovation. Management wants this.

Equally, those involved in innovation wish to have clear guidelines, rails and frames that allow consistent measuring. We need to reduce the variables that help provide consistency and pull in knowledge gained to be put to regular use.

Today we talk of ecosystems, platforms, network effects, openness, transparency and sustainability.

Having this work mat in place and central to it the common language, communication and context, you achieve a more robust platform; you avoid many fragmented pieces.

You can also gain those network multiplication effects by establishing the common ground and project spanning criteria.

This builds connectivity and connections, giving greater scope for partners, as they can see and relate to your language, communicating style and context clarification.

This can also determine a simple “in or out” and determination of what additional value can they bring. It opens up for greater transformation built on a more transparent understanding.

Having an excellent communicating set of mechanisms raises confidence, offers certain reliability and the exchanges of comparability.

If the environment for a group of dynamic, ongoing exchanges can be achieved, you feel that “hands-on”, interactive and immersing sense where good ideas can emerge, build and flow.

Innovation is a role where you need to raise confidence constantly, encourage reliability, encourage an ongoing shift from vested interests into advocacy, identification and not self-protection but shared purpose.

We all recognize that the nature of innovation is messy and how we organize it is critical. The more we engage with others, across borders or departments, gaining consensus takes a long time.

We need to avoid mental traps or fixed mindsets that confuse, frustrate and provide misunderstanding.

Achieving a good common language, strong, regular communication, and a constant reinforcing of the context you can operate and work within helps bring these tensions down.

How we can reduce individual interpretations and variances in definition needs a common place to come too. Again the work mat can be that very place to resolve those consistent issues.

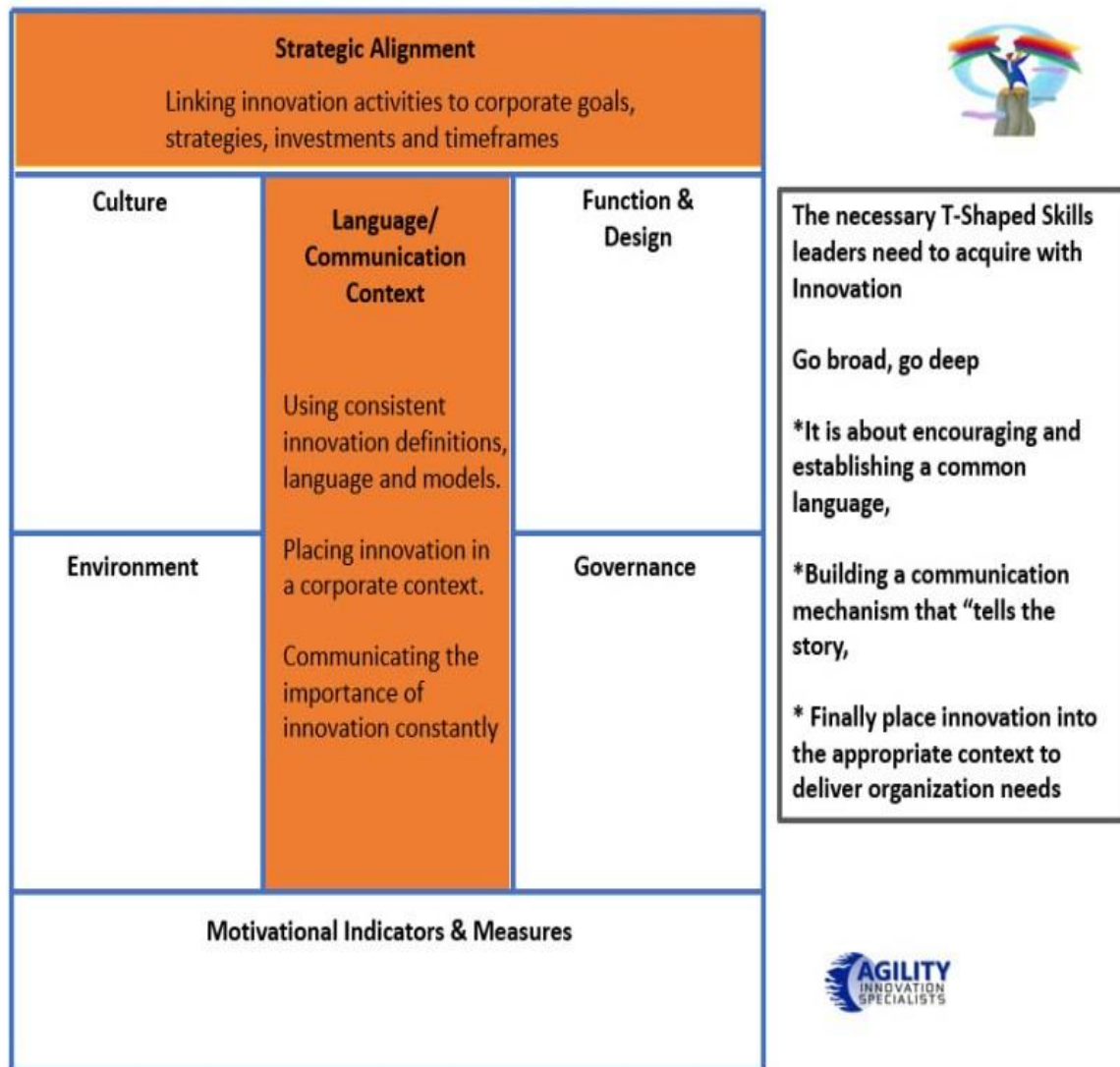
It is called a work mat for a reason, as you can wrestle issues, debate, discuss, push up and down the organization in a way that frames differences and the mechanism to find the solutions to them- that wrestle to the mat.

Why we see Common Language, Communication and Context as important

It aims to do away with pockets of confusion and inefficiencies; It attempts to reduce that fragmented energy in differences and understanding.

A work mat approach strives to minimize unproductive capital and resources allocation. Also, it can tackle and reduce down the need for different standards and narrow variabilities within innovation management. The aim is to attempt to stop the inordinate reinventing and duplication, if not set up well.

The T-Skill thinking in the design



Leaders need to take the lead in this part of the worn mat driving their vision and needs into the organization to react and respond, most through a new activity, including innovation. The leader in this communicating work needs to frame, communicate, and build the corporate innovation identity and provide the belief in innovation into its context and needs.

For me, this is a necessary T-Shaped Skill Senior Executives need to develop for innovation. Executives should be good communicators.

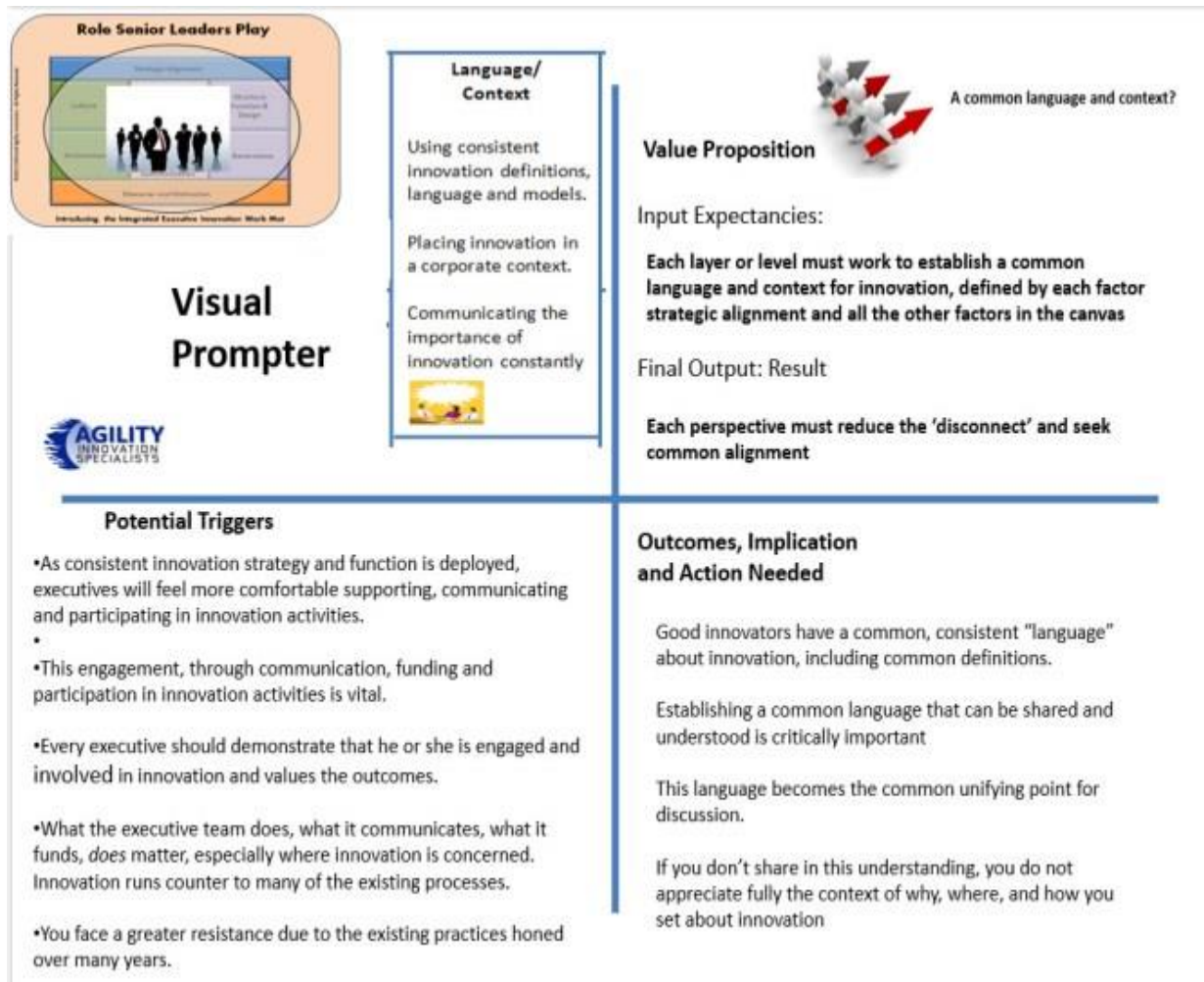
Executives have the big picture in mind and the intent and vision of where they want the organization to go. Executives are responsible for explaining this so this understanding can be put to good innovation use by driving their commitment down and throughout the organization.

There is no better segment of the work mat for the Senior Executive to engage with than in shaping and focusing on the need to build a common identity. Gaining identification across the company comes from communications and building that shared language for common purpose. An innovative common language needs to emerge and the communicating of ambitions for others to identify with.

In this communication, a level of clarity needs conveying. Putting ambitions into the context of what, where, why and often how they see innovation making a contribution gives it

The work mat is a powerful framing mechanism to make that happen sustainably, dynamic and never static.

Finally, here I provide a prompter for placing language, communication and context into the value, potential triggers and outcomes.



Concluding the series

So we have concluded the five-part series, and those can be viewed independently or in association with these posts All videos and written follow ups have been provided on this posting site. These have been written over the past few weeks, so they are easy to find.

One separate discussion video session will discuss the leadership role and why they should be the owners of the work mat.

Together these videos and posts give richness to the Executive Innovation Work Mat concept- it has a great value to explore.

You are welcome to get in touch if you want to take this framework into our organization, more than happy to help.

For more information or material on the Work Mat.

On my posting site the resource of insights and thinking covers this Work Mat extensively as well as a range of other tools, frameworks or methodologies I deeply believe in for innovation.

<https://paul4innovating.com/insights-thinking/>

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