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Dear Reader,

Innovation and creativity are two of the key competencies we need to develop to cope with our ever-changing context. In this issue we are sharing with you an article written by our colleague David Gleiser, LIM Associate and Learning Coach in Colombia.

Enjoy the reading!

Isabel Rimanoczy  
Editor

**Quote of the Month**

*"Creativity is more in the questions we ask  
than in the ideas we generate."*

Ricardo Escobar



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## **Innovation: Does the tail wag the dog?**

**by David Gleiser**

A while ago I saw the movie "Wag the dog" in which a president of the US pursues a foreign war to cover up a personal incident. Regardless of whom the filmmakers had in mind, the point is that the larger, more serious issue results from the occurrence of a smaller incident. The dog is wagged by its tail.

Our logical mind finds something like this unfeasible, but the film in question (featuring Philip Seymour Hoffman and Robert De Niro) makes the point that reality translates easily into film. It's tempting to write about how staging situations like this on film is useful for intensifying awareness of political facts and about how events such as these are really effects of political reality rather than

causes. I will just try to try to show that "wagging the dog" can in fact be a way to generate innovation.

It was Finke and his colleagues<sup>[i]</sup> who pioneered the introduction of this kind of thinking when they launched the Geneplore model. Geneplore is a concoction of the words 'Generate' and 'Explore' and the model constitutes an attractive option for understanding the processes of innovative thinking. This model is a crucial one in that its authors suggest turning upside down the classic equation "form follows function". This notion was put forward as a rule of good thinking by the Bauhaus School and, at first blush, it looks as logical as thinking that it is the dog that wags the tail.

In crafting new products or designs, the rule that function follows form dictates that design parameters must be specified to start with (e.g., customer needs must be specified and addressed) and only afterwards should the forms or structures that fulfill these specifications be determined. Nevertheless, if we accept that innovation by definition demands that we change our habitual ways of thinking, often we have to take the path of most resistance in order to overcome what seems logical and natural. Thus, cognitive scientists like Finke, suggest a new way that delineates a strategy for innovation by which one starts off generating "pre-inventive forms" and exploring their potential following the "wrong equation" of having function follow form.

The Geneplore model is compatible with both the idea of the Dog wagging the Tail and the Tail wagging the Dog. However, in this latter way, a Form is generated, and only having explored its use in solving problems, is its Function determined. However odd sounding this may be we find the logic underlying many successful products.

A few examples might help us illustrate the point:

1. Viagra, is currently the preferred product for the treatment of certain kinds of erectile dysfunction. However, the Viagra molecule was originally thought of as a treatment for heart disease. It was only after describing some of its side effects in clinical studies (undesired effects, it is important to stress) was it seen that the medication was useful for something, after determining that its original intended use was not significant.
2. Coca-Cola was the result of adding carbonated water to a syrup intended for stomach problems. This means that an existing product which had a limited customer base found an unexpected function when it suited the taste of children for a drink. From then on what we have is a successful product in the market.
3. Post-it Notes from The 3M Company were the result of adding a kind of glue that was regarded as a failure in the development of glues. This mixture of pieces of paper and glue that would not stick permanently was a solution of Art Fry, the inventor of Post-It, who had the very specific need of marking his hymn book! From this "failure" came the astounding market success.

So in the notion that function follows form we have an option that allows us to think innovatively. After all, innovation stems from thinking in ways that were not available before. By considering making function follow form in a systematic way might allow us to produce innovation in a more predictable fashion. So, much in the same spirit as when Peters and Waterman<sup>[ii]</sup> were in their Search for Excellence, what we need to see is that we have here a means to "prepare, fire, aim". In doing this we will see a world where effects are causes and where many of the realities that surround us allow us to say that the world is not a theatre any more, it is a movie screen!




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<sup>[i]</sup> Finke, R. A., Ward, T., and Smith, S. M. (1992). *Creative Cognition. Theory Research and Applications*. Boston: MIT Press.

<sup>[ii]</sup> Peters, T. H. and Waterman, R. H. (1982). *In Search for Excellence: Lessons from America's Best Run Companies*. New York: Harper and Row.

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If you want more triggers for reflection, visit <http://isabelrimanoczy.blogspot.com>



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