

Seven Invisible Barriers To Innovation

With Seven Soft skill Solutions From Possibility Management

by Clinton Callahan

Innovation can provide astonishing value, but practical attempts to increase innovativity reveal a know-how deficit. We fail to unleash the full innovation-craft of our organizations. This is because seven invisible barriers block our ability to innovate. What if there were non-ordinary soft skills that allowed us to sidestep these barriers? Then implementing a new soft skill could multiply a manager's ability to innovate.

INNOVATION IS A SOFT SKILL

It is common for managers to start their day with the assumption, "I am the manager so I should already know how to solve these problems." It could be beneficial to realize that today's problems have never been seen before. We all do our best with what our experience has shown us to be reliable. But a manager's singular intelligence proves to be insufficient in breadth and diversity to create solutions for today's complex challenges. Standardized procedures become less and less applicable as ever-new market conditions arise.

Modern managers may be ready to broaden their talents from the heroic lone-wolf approach. What about empowering and coordinating the innovativity of every individual on the team? Abilities to manage rapid innovation are crucial for leadership into unknown business territory. But how much has our innovation ability improved in the last years? What are we willing to do for that? Wide-spectrum intelligence is a team's richest innovation resource – but unleashing that resource can be chaotic. The shift from managing through control to managing through "innovative disorder" clearly involves learning new "soft skills."

Many organizations stake their success on innovating new products, methods, processes and procedures. More and more org charts include a position for "Innovation Manager." Yet when a person or a group actually attempts to invent the next success strategy the process is rarely smooth. Innovation is discovered to be personal and delicate, subject to mental, emotional, social and psychological factors that are not well understood. We do not yet provide MBA classes that teach "Innovation Soft Skills." And still the first thing required of a new manager is to take responsibility for innovating the company's future in a rapidly evolving environment. How are they to succeed?

"Hard skills" are skills that produce an immediately visible result. If someone teaches you how to load paper into the fax machine then it is easy to confirm that you have acquired the skill. The results of learning a hard skill are visible, well defined, immediately obvious, and usually involve a human being manipulating inanimate objects.

"Soft skills," in contrast, usually involve interactions with other human beings. Suddenly the equation takes on a very wiggly character. Human beings are not

inanimate objects. These are human beings who have a will of their own, who suffer from short attention spans, who are prone to reacting irrationally with strong emotions, and who possess agendas not always obvious even to themselves. In short, soft skills are difficult! Hard skills are easy in comparison.

Learning a hard skill is usually a matter of figuring out how things work and then doing it that way. Not so with soft skills. The first step in acquiring a new soft skill is painfully realizing that a habitual behavior could be improved. This is a wake-up from “unconscious incompetence” to “conscious incompetence.” When we see our lack of ability we may feel embarrassed. The shock is only bearable by realizing how much difficulty we would cause *without* learning the new soft skill now.

This uncomfortable first step creates the well-known soft skills learning paradox: *soft skills cannot be taught; they can only be learned*. That is, you cannot force someone to learn a new soft skill. Even sending a smart manager to the best training program will not guarantee that he or she adopts and implements new behaviors. Learning new soft skills is a personal choice and is accomplished through personal efforts. Personal efforts means ongoing training supported by plenty of feedback and coaching in a safe environment where mistakes do not cost anything.

By improving innovation soft skills managers can unfold their team’s vast group intelligence and direct it towards creating the required outcome. *Soft skills make hard results*. A manager no longer needs to already have the answers. Today’s manager needs abilities to navigate his or her team towards innovating the answers.

SEVEN INVISIBLE INNOVATION BARRIERS

Focusing on innovation is not necessarily the best way to innovate. For example, there are two ways to get warmer water when taking a shower. One way is turning up the hot water. The other way is turning down the cold water. Just as hot and cold water come as a pair in contrast to each other, innovation comes as a pair with stuckness. We cannot know innovation without also knowing stuckness – the existence of one reveals the existence of the other on the opposite end of its spectrum. By including the consideration of stuckness in our innovation efforts we see that there are also two ways to get more innovation. One way is inspiring creative imagination. The other way is removing innovation barriers. The surprising discovery is that innovation barriers can be removed through changing behaviors that on the surface appear to have nothing at all to do with innovation. Freeing ourselves from barriers that were not previously recognized as barriers can add productive new dimensions to our innovation abilities.

Please keep in mind that innovating new products or services is not necessarily how to get the best innovation payoff. Today new product designs are reverse-engineered almost instantly. Manufacturing-process breakthroughs are copied before new products even hit the marketplace. Why not make better use of resources that are already paid for through managerial innovation? With upgraded soft skills managers can unleash and apply already present intellectual capital that was never noticed before. By providing your managers with soft skills you differentiate your company in ways that cannot be duplicated until other companies’ managers learn the new soft skills themselves.

At first we cannot see innovation barriers any better than a goldfish sees water. This is because innovation barriers are inherent in our cultural design. The same barriers affect everyone equally so no one normally notices. There may be many unrecognized innovation blocks. In this article we will examine seven: fear, reasons, competition, linearity, words, identity, and sanity. These barriers are not philosophical; they are mechanical. These are barriers to innovation in the same way that poor wing design or insufficient engine thrust are barriers to flight. We are talking physics, and in this case, the physics of managing creative intelligence.

These seven barriers not only block innovation itself, they also block practical efforts to advocate and implement innovation without which a company will never actually benefit from new ideas. Let us look at how the barriers work, their symptoms, and some possible ways over, under, around and through them. Because learning new soft skills is a personal choice, the seven soft skill solutions presented below are written specifically for your experimentation and use.

BARRIER 1: THE FEAR BARRIER

We are not effectively trained in how to use feelings. This cultural oversight is astonishing because we all have human bodies and bodies automatically have feelings. Our culture tells us that it is not okay to feel, so when we do have feelings we can only assume that something must be wrong! Even if we recognize that we have feelings we are trained that there are three negative feelings: anger, sadness and fear, and only one positive feeling: joy. Neither is it acceptable to have more than a modicum of joy. If you are being too happy people will not take you seriously. They think you do not have enough work!

We are trained to regard fear as the worst of all feelings. If we feel fear we automatically associate it with other times we felt fear when something dangerous or bad was happening. We try to avoid fear like a swimmer tries to avoid sharks. This creates an almost impermeable barrier against innovation. Here is why. A manager's present ideas are contained in what they already know. If a manager wants to think of a new idea, the already known is not much help. New ideas come from the unknown. But as soon as a manager approaches the unknown they experience fear of the unknown. Since fear is equivalent in their mind to "bad" or "dangerous" they reflexively jerk back towards the known. By avoiding fear untold numbers of new ideas are never even considered.

Fear and innovation are also tied together with regards to failure and success. If we try innovating we may be afraid that our innovation will fail. We may have spent lots of company money, wasted time, or damaged the company reputation. The consequences could severely affect our career. On the other hand we may try innovating and succeed. Our innovation could simplify operations, create efficiencies and as a consequence eliminate our position. We fear successfully innovating ourselves out of a job. Due to fearing both failure and success we risk nothing at all. **OUR INNOVATING IS BLOCKED BY OUR FEAR OF EXPERIENCING FEAR.** What can we do about it?

SYMPTOMS OF BARRIER 1: THE FEAR BARRIER

What you get from a manager stuck behind the fear barrier is silence. You get no risky proposals, no interesting actions, only non-confrontation, delay, hesitation, and

hidden procrastination. Such a manager's strategy for survival is invisibility. You will not see them volunteering for new projects or rocking the boat. They do not ask dangerous questions. At first such a manager seems like a "good" team player. Only after some time do you realize the cost of carrying their risk load. Neither their creativity nor their intellectual capital are available for moving the company forward.

SOFT SKILL 1: DISCOVER THE USE OF FEAR

Our present education about feelings is terribly inadequate and disempowers us immensely, especially with regards to managing innovation. Fully addressing the subject of professional feelings is beyond the scope of this article. If we were to make a new map of feelings like Galileo made a new map of the solar system, our new map would indicate that there are four feelings, anger, sadness, joy and fear, and that the four feelings are neither good nor bad, neither positive nor negative. The four feelings are as neutral as the four directions on a compass.

Like all four feelings, fear contains a vast wealth of energy and information that can serve us professionally. For example, we can use the energy and information of fear to warn us to take care of things, to make appropriate plans for the future, to make specific agreements with people, to make needed changes at the right time.

In order to make use of fears a manager could consider *rewiring* what fear is connected to in their thinking. Present wiring makes a manager afraid of fear, but a *manager does not have to be afraid of fear*. Rewiring is a simple process of disconnecting the sensation of fear from its present implications.

For our whole lives before now, fear has been cross-wired in our thinking as "fear equals danger" or "fear equals being hurt." We can rewire fear to be a neutral experience. When we are finished rewiring then having the experience of fear only means that we are having the experience of fear. Our thoughts go like this: "I am having the experience of fear. Fear is fear." Then we know where we are on the map of four feelings: in the territory of fear. The energy and wisdom of fear is available to support and inform us.

Innovation comes from the unknown. If you do not go into the unknown and innovate then you will only do what you have already done before. Here is your guideline to fear and innovation: if you are not feeling afraid, you are not innovating.

BARRIER 2: THE REASON BARRIER

Our culture trains us to weld every decision we make to justifiable reasons. We call this cultural trait "being reasonable," and we require everyone who does business with us to act according to our righteous pillar of civilization: "reason." We make extended personal efforts to formulate reasons for even our tiniest actions because we fear the consequences of being caught taking an action for which we do not have a well-defended and acceptable reason. What we fail to realize is that limiting our decisions to options for which we can create reasons severely limits our ability to innovate.

We sacrifice innovation to the altar of reason due to a thinking blunder. We think that reasons can take responsibility. We have been trained to think this way. Whenever we performed an action that was not acceptable to an authority figure, the authority

would inevitably ask why we did such a thing. They wanted to know our reasons. If the reason was good enough, then even if the action or project failed, we were not to blame. The reasons were blamed. We ourselves were not responsible. The reasons took the responsibility and thus we were protected. This is the mechanics of reasonableness.

If we start to examine the order of things we would find that in many cases reasons come after decisions. First we make a decision, then later we come up with reasons to support the decision. With innovations it is opposite. Truly original innovations come *before* decisions. Innovating creates the field of options out of which we decide. By insisting that our innovations make sense and be reasonable we eliminate the wide variety of innovations for which we at first have no reason. Unrelenting critical analysis kills innovation before it is born. OUR INNOVATING IS STRANGLED BY OUR ADDICTION TO REASONS. What can we do about it?

SYMPTOMS OF BARRIER 2: THE REASON BARRIER

Managers stuck behind the reason barrier protect themselves in a fortress of arguments and justifications. They will produce excuses rather than innovations because they regard both as having equivalent worth. Conversations with a reason-focused manager can be confusing or non-productive as this manager uses reasons to avoid taking responsibility. Trying to pin them down is like grabbing after a lizard and ending up only with its discarded tail wriggling in your hands. This manager sprouts reasons quicker than you can ask, "Why?"

SOFT SKILL 2: CREATE A GAP BETWEEN DECISIONS AND REASONS

We can reclaim our ability to innovate even when the innovation is beyond reason. Think about this. If we have to have reasons first before we can innovate then what we innovate will be quite limited. But if we can take responsibility and innovate for no reason then we gain access to far greater domains of innovation. Later on (perhaps only a few seconds) we can get reasonable. How do we achieve this separation?

One of the more interesting innovation soft skills is to create a gap between decisions and reasons. A gap as thin as a sheet of paper establishes freedom of movement between a decision and a reason. With such a gap in place we can generate a wide variety of possible innovations without first worrying about having to come up with a reason. When choices and reasons can slide with respect to each other we make a quantum leap in our ability to innovate.

When our decisions are dependent on reasons then *the reasons* have the power in the decision. *Not us*. Innovation requires *us* to take uncompromising responsibility for our decisions so that when we do decide we can receive accurate feedback about our decisions. Innovating without feedback is like driving without road signs. We probably will not get to where we want to go.

For successful innovation we need full responsibility for innovating without already having a ready decision, and then deciding without using reasons as a defensive shield. When reasons do not buffer us from environmental feedback we can more quickly learn from our mistakes. Then later, after we have taken full responsibility for our decisions, we can create reasons to explain to others about what innovations we have chosen to implement and why. The innovation soft skill is to innovate without a

decision and then to decide without a reason. This is actually what we do anyway, without realizing it: decide first; create reasons later. The gap between decisions and reasons gives our innovation complete freedom of movement.

BARRIER 3: THE COMPETITION BARRIER

Long regarded as the “holy cow” of free market enterprise, competition cannot be questioned without eyebrows being raised. It is therefore surprising to consider that competition itself could be an obstruction to innovation.

Competition is a game strategy based on the assumption of scarcity. Scarcity is the conclusion that resources such as oil, steel, money, land, food, market space, power, promotions, etc., are insufficient to meet the demand. Since the resources are limited our strategy assumes that either they will get the resources or we will get the resources. If they get the resources then we “die.” For this reason we automatically regard “them” as our “mortal” enemy. We position ourselves so as to fight them “to the death” to get those resources. If we get the resources, whatever happens to them is not our problem.

Scarcity based competition is the most common game in the marketplace. What we do not realize is how severely competition thinking restricts our possibilities for innovation. The game of “I win, you lose” forces us to view our options within artificial restrictions. For example, we are driven to possess objects when the ownership of objects does not produce satisfaction. The “Us vs. them” competition mentality prevents us from innovatively managing resources in ways that more effectively fulfill bigger common goals. **OUR INNOVATION IS BLOCKED BY THE HABIT OF COMPETITIVE THINKING.** What can we do about it?

SYMPTOMS OF BARRIER 3: THE COMPETITION BARRIER

Managers stuck behind the competition barrier regard other managers and even fellow team members as “the enemy.” Struggling to win promotions, acquire bigger budget share, or be assigned power projects can become more important than company success. Competition oriented managers live in tension and feel frustrated unless they are clearly ahead in the game. You cannot really be in contact with such a manager; rather the best you can be is a sparring partner. Competitive managers could well be implementing several hidden back-up strategies to assure they do not lose, regardless of the time or energy cost of those strategies.

SOFT SKILL 3: CREATE WINNING HAPPENING

We can contrast the “I win, you lose” of competition with the game strategy of “I win, you win” called cooperation. However, when practically implementing cooperation the “I win, you win” often degrades into “I lose, you lose” through compromises. Or, we think, “It is okay with me if you win as long as I win just a little bit more,” and this takes us back to ordinary competition.

Fortunately there is “Winning Happening,” a third game strategy to implement. This creative collaborative is the “I win when you win” of the teacher winning when the student learns, or the doctor winning when the patient heals. Notice that in “Winning Happening” there is no “I” and no “you.” This is because Winning Happening itself is a Principle. Winning Happening is at first difficult to grasp because we have few examples and the assumption of scarcity seems so obviously provable. For example,

there is *obviously* not enough food, because people in Africa are starving. By assuming that resources are limited and that competition is mandatory we forget that farmers in France, Germany and America, are *paid by their governments not to grow food*. Finding new ways to make business by fighting hunger would be Winning Happening.

How do we get to the Winning Happening perspective? Think about DVD's. Agreeing on a worldwide DVD coding standard was Winning Happening. Resources become abundant when we take responsibility for sourcing the resources. If there are not enough resources we innovate whatever is needed. Then innovation becomes abundant too.

BARRIER 4: THE LINEARITY BARRIER

Massive implementation of Linear Thinking began some 150 years ago in the Industrial Revolution with production lines and standard business practices. Linear thinking has come to its peak in the Information Age where everything from childcare to chickens is computerized and mass-produced. We are trained to believe and can prove it mathematically that the shortest distance between two points – and thus the most efficient and effective solution to the problem of getting from Point A to Point B – is a straight line. Once we have found a linear solution to a problem we conclude that we have found the *best* solution to the problem *and then we stop thinking!* Orderly, rational, logical, consistent, predictable, and linear, this is how our culture trains us to think. OUR INNOVATING IS STUCK WITHIN THE LIMITS OF LINEAR THINKING. What can we do about it?

SYMPTOMS OF BARRIER 4: THE LINEARITY BARRIER

Managers trapped behind the Linear Thinking barrier tend to follow commonly accepted rules and are quite committed to doing things according to traditional logic. Their mind tends to simplify situations into a black-or-white view. Many innuendos, subtleties and insinuations are lost. Suggestions for expanded possibilities are experienced as threatening and cannot be understood. Humor is noticeably lacking.

SOFT SKILL 4: PRACTICE NONLINEAR THINKING

About thirty years ago small teams in tiny companies began experimenting with other ways of thinking besides Linear Thinking. Sixt, Aldi, Hennes & Mauritz, Starbucks, Swatch, Ikea, Nike, Apple, Microsoft, Dell, Wal-Mart, they seemed to come out of nowhere. They discovered pathways from Point A to Point B that were far quicker, saved more resources, and were more effective than standard linear solutions. These companies have stolen the marketplace. Nonlinear Thinking's time has come.

Ask yourself how many Linear Thinking solutions a problem has? The answer is: one. How many Nonlinear Thinking solutions does a problem have? Infinite. Unlimited. Nobody knows. And nobody can predict the next paradigm-shattering Nonlinear Thinking invention, approach, technology or solution. Change is rampant. Evolution in sciences, financial systems, governments, and technologies is so quick that Linear Thinking organizations are dieing off like dinosaurs. The future belongs to the Nonlinear Thinkers.

To practice Nonlinear Thinking it is helpful to realize that we have been trained to think by recognizing patterns. Nonlinear Thinking is a totally different skill from

pattern recognition. For example, Linear Thinking is: A, B, C, D... Nonlinear Thinking is: A, dust balls, Beethoven's 7th, chemical solvents... Nonlinear Thinking takes off perpendicular to predictable assumptions. For example, when designing roof tiles most managers would not think to examine dolphin skin for structural ideas – but a dolphin's skin never gets dirty. When linear thinking tells you to expand product awareness through advertising, nonlinear thinking tells you to market the product by giving it away, like www.google.com. When linear thinking tells you to protect your software by copyright, nonlinear thinking tells you to make it “open code,” like Linux. Rather than fulfilling expectations Nonlinear Thinking goes orthogonal (at right angles) to expectations, and makes rapid-fire leaps into the unpredictable.

Nonlinear Thinking is an innovation soft skill that produces results previously not conceived as possible. You should be warned that our present meeting methods suppress rather than encourage Nonlinear Thinking. To facilitate Nonlinear Thinking in your meetings the first step would be to implement Nonlinear Meeting Technologies (the explanation of which is the subject of a different article).

BARRIER 5: THE WORD BARRIER

Since childhood we are hammered into Verbal Reality. We do not realize what has happened. Everyone thinks they are doing us a favor. Reading and writing are universally recognized as good, a foundation stone of intelligence and civilization. But there is a downside to our wordiness: No matter what language we learn to speak, languaging itself limits our innovating and can make us completely stuck.

In Verbal Reality words lead experience. Our experience is limited to what we have names for. If we cannot name it, we cannot experience it. The instant we name an experience, the experience vanishes from our awareness because we are trained to mentally manipulate dead labels rather than living experiences.

For example, when things do not work as we planned we often take the unexpected result and call it a “problem.” As soon as we have named a situation a problem we immediately try to get rid of it or to change it. If we avoid categorizing the present conditions as a “problem” and instead simply continue to experience the conditions neutrally they might begin to appear to us in a different light. The conditions could easily transform from what we might first have labeled a problem into what we could now label a solution. The story of the invention of “post-it notes” is world famous: a glue that failed to stick permanently created for 3M company an entire product line. Conflicts, or what we would commonly regard as negative feedback, are often valuable as specific instructions for what to innovate to create better results. We would miss the benefit if we believed only the words. When Verbal Reality controls our possible options then OUR INNOVATING IS LIMITED TO OUR VOCABULARY. What can we do about it?

SYMPTOMS OF BARRIER 5: THE WORD BARRIER

Managers trapped behind the word barrier tend to involve themselves in heady intellect-centered discussions, arguing endlessly about logical points and criticizing various positions. For such a manager talking about something is the equivalent of doing something. Conversation itself is both battleground and entertainment. Days can go by in brilliant highly animated conversation without documentation or follow-up. Nothing actually changes.

SOFT SKILL 5: INCLUDE EXPERIENTIAL REALITY

There are many other kinds of realities besides Verbal Reality. Answer this question: What is bigger, the world of experiences, or the world of our vocabulary? Can you have an experience for which we have no name? A sale often depends on that. For example, the automotive industry, depends on customers who choose a car for the experience it gives them. Press the pedal to the floor in a 400 horsepower Mercedes S-Class and accelerate from 100 to 250 kilometers per hour on an open autobahn. Touch and smell the leather. Listen to the door close WUMMMMMPFFFF! There are no names for the subtleties of these experiences. But such subtleties make or break a company. Clothing, food, perfume, computers, hotels, airlines, banks... the marketplace is experiential reality.

Creating and shifting Experiential Reality is one of the main tasks of an innovation manager. Such creating cannot be done from within Verbal Reality. Shifting from Verbal Reality to Experiential Reality is an innovation soft skill. To practice being in Experiential Reality do this experiment: set aside a few moments each day to have an experience without using words to name the experience. For example, go stand in your client's office for no reason. Wait there. Give no excuse. Breathe. Look around and feel what it is like there without naming anything. You will start to see what is really going on. Do the same in your boss' office. Or visit a mobile phone shop. Take the phone you like best into your hands. How does it feel to press the buttons? How does it sound? What sensation does the surface of the phone give you? What else could it do for you? This is Experiential Reality.

In Experiential Reality the experience leads. If it is not okay for us to be without words our innovating will be limited to word manipulations. The creative act of innovation happens previous to words. Entering Experiential Reality permits us to notice and utilize the wide spectrum of qualities of an experience before putting that experience into words. Our vast experiential richness opens useful opportunities for innovating that were previously blocked by the limitations of Verbal Reality.

BARRIER 6: THE IDENTITY BARRIER

What distinguishes managerial performance is the "identity" a manager constructs for themselves out of beliefs, assumptions, attitudes, opinions, expectations, interpretations of experiences, and so on. Managers like all people formulate an identity in childhood for the purposes of survival. Possibility Management refers to our identity as "the Box." The Box is a 360-degree editor that filters and controls everything we can perceive and everything we can express in order to defend the hard-earned known.

Outside of our Box is the marketplace. The marketplace is endlessly rich in opportunities. There is no limit to what one person can create in the marketplace. Yet most of us do not take action with the vast awesome possibilities available directly in front of us. The central question is this: When two managers have the same job to do, what makes them produce different results? An unlimited innovation potential is available to every individual, everywhere, all of the time. What stands between each of us and accessing that potential? The answer is, our Box.

When we dedicate our identity Box to protecting itself from change we devastate our capacity for innovation. We can observe this phenomenon in colleagues. Someone says, "I can't do this," "I don't know how," "This is impossible," "It is too much for me," when from our perspective we have a completely different assessment of their capacity. We shrug our shoulders and give up because we already know there is no arguing about such things with them. What we do not realize is that the same is true of us. We too are surrounded in every moment with innovative options to choose from that we do not see because our Box is committed to defending its limits rather than expanding its limits.

Here we are: this evolution-loving salt-water bio-computer protected by a hard-as-nails identity that is righteously dedicated to defending itself from any kind of change. Out there is the marketplace waiting for us to come out and innovate. OUR INNOVATING IS STUCK BEHIND THE DEFENSIVE SURVIVAL STRATEGY OF OUR IDENTITY. What can we do about it?

SYMPTOMS OF BARRIER 6: THE IDENTITY BARRIER

Managers with their innovation blocked by identity are like rocks in the organization stream that the organization has to flow around. They tend to crystallize into well-defended positions with regards to what is possible, what is not possible, and how things should be done. Their actions are more directed towards maintaining the status quo rather than adapting to or establishing new market trends. Identity blocked managers tend to surround themselves with followers who simply agree, and then organize camps against other managers who promote different ideas.

SOFT SKILL 6: SHIFT IDENTITY FROM DEFENSIVE TO EXPANSIVE

We commonly think that we have just one identity. But watch a person answer the telephone when the caller is their boss, their mate, or an irate customer. Instantly they shift identity to a character we may never have seen before, with a new tone of voice, new speech patterns, new vocabulary, and new posture. When they hang up the phone they swiftly shift back to the identity they normally show to us. The remarkable thing is that they never knew they shifted!

We all have the ability to shift identity. We may shift identity several times every day. Originally our skill of shifting identity is unconscious and out of our awareness. With a little practice we can start shifting identity as a conscious soft skill. The value of shifting identity is that different identities have different capacities. For example, with the new soft skill "Hank Smith, manager" who is facing a production conflict could shift identity to "Hank Smith, samurai" who can avoid attacks, or "Sir Hank Smith, knight" with clarity and dedication to serving the company's principles, or "Saint Hank Smith" who has the ability to listen open heartedly to all sides of the story, or "Possibility Manager Hank Smith" who uses the wisdom of the conflict itself as design criteria for the next generation production control system. Without remembering to choose our identity we tend to stick to the protective identity that we created for ourselves in childhood when our highest priority was survival. What once protected us has now become our prison.

A simple test determines whether a particular identity has the purpose to defend or expand itself. Identity defends itself through blaming, resenting, complaining, positionality, proving oneself right, making others wrong, or feeling like a victim of

circumstances. *If problems seem threatening then identity is defending itself.* Identity expands itself with a completely different set of behaviors: listening, asking for help, widening contacts, exploring new options, trying new behaviors, breaking patterns, and convening diverse perspectives. *If problems feel like an invitation to learn then identity is expanding itself.*

Innovation grows as you continue to shift the purpose of your Box from defensive to expansive. For example, you might start taking different kinds of vacations involving more adventurous explorations. You might start having “cross departmental” lunches, or create an “innovation lunch club” for expanding the comfort zone and sharing about successes and mistakes. You might start watching more unusual movies, reading different books, or spending your free time in less ordinary ways. Expanding identity has a beginning but it has no end.

BARRIER 7: THE SANITY BARRIER

Our culture gives us a strong preference towards acting as if we are mentally sane. If we appear insane we might be abandoned or rejected by our culture and then our existence is in peril. Appearing sane insures our survival. The motivation to appear sane runs deep within our daily actions and rules the way we dress, our speech patterns, how we behave, what we do in our spare time, and so on. We would be naïve to ignore the fact that we all have a shadow side that tends to play out our less responsible behaviors. But on the surface, in public, we have largely exchanged our freedom to be crazy for being accepted by our peers. The result is that OUR INNOVATING IS STUCK BECAUSE WE HAVE NO PERMISSION TO GO CRAZY. We focus so much attention on fabricating the appearance of our own sanity that we disconnect from our free imagination. What can we do about it?

SYMPTOMS OF BARRIER 7: THE SANITY BARRIER

The manager stuck behind the sanity barrier habitually chooses “vanilla ice cream.” Seriousness is the highest priority. Playing around with ideas, concepts or strategies is forbidden. Such managers reject options that even begin to depart from standard procedure, and are therefore very adaptive to authority figures. Faced with an opportunity that might make them look a bit nutty they will instead choose to give up, isolate, or get depressed. General or acute nervousness erupts when invited to try new ways. They are unable to explain their resistance to innovation.

SOFT SKILL 7: RECLAIM YOUR IMAGINATION

In our culture, mind is at war with imagination. Mind has won. Imagination has been banished, since early childhood, into an unknown place where it remains to this day. Your imagination is not broken or dead; it is simply hibernating. Depression can come from hibernating imagination. Remember, we ourselves lulled our imagination to sleep. (Students who refuse to put their imagination to sleep often do not finish school.) Because we are the ones who put our imagination away, we can get it back again. To initiate the imagination retrieval process a manager starts by finding a criticism-free haven where he or she is encouraged to have ideas, take actions and speak words that make no sense at all. Step by step the imagination timidly but joyously returns.

A manager works under unspoken rules of standard behavior that diminish their true innovative potential in order to fit within the local description of normal. Enlivening

the imagination requires breaking those rules. Start giving yourself reminding factors that ignite your imagination with a spark of humor. For example, put a child's wooden slingshot in your top desk drawer. *Nobody* keeps a slingshot in their drawer! Then each time you open your drawer you will see this astonishing slingshot! The shock will remind you that you have an imagination that can introduce you to worlds of innovation never before seen by anyone. Just remember: *Every really new idea at first appears to be crazy*. By reclaiming your right to be a little bit crazy you give yourself permission to champion new ideas in your company. A lively imagination is the 21st Century manager's greatest resource.

INNOVATING MANAGERS

We are past the time when becoming a "learning organization" produced enough change to keep a company abreast of market conditions. Imitating benchmark practices is no longer fast enough. What is required today is an "Evolving Organization" that itself sets new industry standards. An Evolving Organization changes the game before anyone else even learns the rules. Such innovation cannot come from leadership – top down change is too slow. Companies evolve when leaders support courageous managers to set new standards for their projects or their departments. What kind of manager has the power to create innovation culture in his or her project or department? The same kind who would study an article about practicing new soft skills for counteracting the seven barriers to innovation.

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**SUMMARY OF THE SEVEN INVISIBLE BARRIERS TO INNOVATION
AND THE SOFT SKILL KEYS FOR DISSOLVING THEM**

- BARRIER 1: FEAR** – Innovativity is held within the already known to avoid feeling real fear.
SYMPTOMS: Silence. Hidden procrastination. No risky proposals. No dangerous questions.
SOFT SKILL: Change opinion about fear so it is okay to enter the unknown and innovate.
- BARRIER 2: REASONS** – The need for reasons blocks innovativity for which there is at first no reason. Critical analysis kills innovation before it is born.
SYMPTOMS: Producing excuses rather than innovation because both have “equal worth.”
SOFT SKILL: Create a gap between reasons and choices so you can innovate for no reason.
- BARRIER 3: COMPETITION** – Belief in scarcity promotes “I win, you lose” survival tactics instead of innovation.
SYMPTOMS: Colleagues viewed as a threat. Tension. No generosity. Hidden back-up plans.
SOFT SKILL: Create Winning Happening. Take responsibility for sourcing the resources so that resources are abundant and competition is irrelevant. Seek transparency.
- BARRIER 4: LINEARITY** – Innovative possibilities are diminished to Linear Thinking solutions.
SYMPTOMS: Ordinary way is best. Expanded possibilities are threatening. Lacking humor.
SOFT SKILL: Go orthogonal. Expand thinking beyond patterns. Practice Nonlinear Thinking.
- BARRIER 5: WORDS** – Innovativity is imprisoned by vocabulary. Experience ends at words.
SYMPTOMS: Intellect-centered discussions. Endless arguing. Nothing actually changes.
SOFT SKILL: Shift from Verbal to Experiential Reality. Innovation happens previous to naming.
- BARRIER 6: IDENTITY** – Innovativity is boxed-in by rigid or outdated self-definition limits.
SYMPTOMS: Crystallized positions. Defending status quo. Surrounded by followers.
SOFT SKILL: Shift and use expansive identities rather than defensive. Welcome diversity.
- BARRIER 7: SANITY** – Innovativity is restricted to behavior that is already regarded as sane.
SYMPTOMS: Nonstandard options are rejected. Play is forbidden. Adapt to authority.
SOFT SKILL: Reconnect to unrestricted imagination. New ideas *always* look crazy at first.