7 WAYS TO FUEL INNOVATION SUCCESS
KEY THEMES FROM THE GLOBAL INNOVATION FORUM VIRTUAL EDITION (17-19 NOVEMBER 2020)
GIF VIRTUAL EDITION: BREAKING NEW GROUND

Use of the word ‘unprecedented’ has seen exponential growth in 2020! COVID-19 has been a true gamechanger: a global humanitarian emergency, accelerating trends, driving huge shifts in consumer behaviour and leaving many businesses grappling to adapt to the new reality. And we’re just at the beginning of its impact...

This was the landscape into which the Global Innovation Forum launched its first Virtual Edition - with the same goal of informing, inspiring and challenging our community of innovators – but all done from the comfort of your own office or home (if there’s a difference anymore).

Over 4 days we gathered around our digital campfire to share a diverse range of innovation stories – drawn from multinationals and start-ups, incumbents and disruptors, with insight from academics, dance stars, car designers and explorers – not to forget the kids of Teentech.

Though we missed the in-person connections, GIF took advantage of the move online to break new ground: with ‘virtual visits’ to Rio, Shanghai and Sweden; ballet, boxercise and book clubs; and more speakers and sessions than ever before, providing thought-provoking content.

This is Brand Genetics’ summary of seven key themes that emerged from those 4 days. While it looks to reflect all the sessions, it is not exhaustive, and nor (sadly) could we reference every speaker who inspired us. But we hope it sparks new thoughts and ideas, as well as happy memories of an ‘unprecedented’ time – and real opportunity – for innovation.

Tom Ellis  
GIF Chairperson & CEO - Brand Genetics
WITH THANKS TO ALL OUR WONDERFUL SPEAKERS & PARTNERS
1. TO INNOVATE IS HUMAN… SO GET OUT OF OUR WAY

Asked how, back in the late 1980s, he had developed such a clear vision of the future smartphone, Marc Porat of General Magic reminded us that “[Creative vision] is a superpower that is inherent in everyone”.

Humans are naturally creative: the human brain is a problem-solving machine and we relentlessly simulate what-ifs. At this year’s GIF we learnt about how to unleash that potential in ourselves, our teams and our partners.

For example, Hind Al Mualla told us how Dubai KHDA actively challenges existing ways of working in education; and Tim Heard spoke of how Barclays are looking to unleash intrapreneurs within the business.

As Ken Robinson commented: “We don’t grow into creativity, we are educated out of it”… We all need to start thinking about how we can remove barriers to that natural human creativity and desire to innovate.
This supports innovation’s shift in focus - from process to culture (and people) as the key drivers of success: to be truly innovative, we need to cultivate a culture that embraces the risks & challenges that come with it.

But as Marriott’s Lisa Swearingen reminded us, innovating in a large corporate is both exciting but also frustrating. According to Barclays’ Tim Heard “75% of corporations feel they promote innovative culture” yet 75% of entrepreneurs leave corporates because they feel stifled.

One silver lining to COVID is it has upended business as usual – bringing the importance of innovation to the fore. Seize this opportunity for a reset. If we’ve learnt anything over the past year, it’s that businesses need to empower their most creative thinkers and build greater agility and responsiveness into their cultures. It’s not just a recipe for survival in COVID, it’s a recipe for success when we finally get to the next normal.
3. FIND YOUR OWN TRUE VOICE – AND MULTIPLY IT

While organisations must work top-down to empower their teams, as individuals we must also seek out our own innovative purpose and power, by channelling our authentic voice and connecting with others.

As Jon Kersic of ING reminded us, stress and anxiety don’t have to be part of work, if only we can find and rekindle our lost connections with autonomy & meaning.

We also need to avoid being swamped by data and to trust our instincts: Ken Lashley of Marvel reminded us that “the strongest voice you should listen to should be the voice in your own head”. And Ivy Ross of Google urged us to trust that innately human part of us: our intuition.

So, identify where your personal passions align with business goals - and create an opportunity to act. Then tap into that other innate human trait and find ways to connect with others, to engage and multiply your ideas.
4. ASK WHO ARE YOU MISSING?

Diversity and inclusivity are critical to our future success – both in terms of driving our own corporate creativity and serving the largest possible market.

Internally, as Eric Tachbana of Amazon reminded us, not all great minds think alike: different perspectives unlock opportunities and spot new challenges. Diverse teams are statistically more insightful, creative, and productive.

When thinking about your audience, AirBnb’s Benjamin Evans urged us to ask, “Who are we missing?” and design to include, not exclude. P&G’s Sam Latif called on us to recognize the scale of the opportunity: some 15% of the world’s population live with some form of disability, yet all too often they’re not catered for. A massive market.

Which brings us back full circle to creating an inclusive and diverse culture internally. Because often the biggest challenge is simply not recognising there is an issue at all – and without seeing the problem, we can never solve it.
5. FALL IN LOVE WITH THE PROBLEM

Any innovation journey is full of passion, joy, pain and frustration: the path of true innovation never runs smooth! But the key to finding a happy ending is to fall in love with the problem, not the solution.

Gil Horsky of Mondelez shared how being truly consumer centric means putting their problems at the heart of your mission – not your solutions. So you need processes to kill ideas that don’t solve their problems, fast.

Put that love of the problem at your core by becoming a business that organises around problems, not solutions – for example, Marriott is shifting from providing hotels to helping people enjoy travel experiences.

Finally, remember innovation is 1% inspiration, and 99% perspiration. Only a true passion for the problem will drive you through the challenges needed to bring any innovation to life. Because success is rarely a leap but more often built – layer on layer – on the back of many necessary failures along the way.
6. SUCCESS IS BUILT ON THE LEARNINGS OF FAILURE

In the forest, when a tree dies, it provides the nutrients for others plants to grow from it. And often that’s what failure is – a falling tree that fuels new life.

Throughout GIF we heard about the importance of failure in the innovation journey. If you stigmatise failure (as many still do) when you’re looking to transform businesses and markets, you will limit learning and struggle to progress.

Freedom to fail is a critical ingredient of success in all areas. Carlos Acosta talked of having the tenacity to put up with bad reviews when pushing his boundaries. From the ashes of General Magic came the iPod, the iPhone, Android and so much more. Are these really failures?

Most importantly, as Disney’s Agnete Oernsholt encouraged us, “Don’t be afraid of failure – you learn so much from it”. So don’t be frightened to be wrong, be prepared to take a calculated risk. Samuel West from the Museum of Failure urged us to go out and be prepared to fail in the name of progress: that’s “positive failure”!
Innovation – particularly in 2020 – is challenging. But if it all becomes too pressured or too much of a slog, the creativity of you and your colleagues will suffer, as will the engagement of wider stakeholders.

Instead recognise that space to play is important – it naturally frees our imagination and removes fear of failure: as Sir Ken Robinson’s talk points out “Kids have a go - they are not frightened to be wrong”.

But companies that are focused purely on productivity can stifle this sense of freedom – as Ivy Ross of Google reminded us, “Play has no determined output”.

Breakthroughs come from smart people taking risks and having a go at something new – creating trust and psychological safety is paramount, so people can share new and challenging ideas.

And ultimately, as Walt Disney famously said, “It’s kind of fun to do the impossible”!
7 KEY WAYS TO FUEL INNOVATION SUCCESS

1. To innovate is HUMAN... so get out of our way

2. CULTURE eats strategy for breakfast

3. Find your own TRUE VOICE – and multiply it

4. Ask who are you MISSING?

5. Fall in love with the PROBLEM

6. Success is built on the learnings of FAILURE

7. Don’t forget to make it FUN
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2. HUMAN EMPATHY
   EMOTIONAL CONNECTION

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   THE UNSEEN & UNSPOKEN

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