

## Management

# Tapping the capacity for innovation

Catalyst for Change workshops aim to activate creativity

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Companies worldwide are making investments in innovation a priority to sharpen their competitive edge in the globalised world. According to "The World Business/INSEAD Global Innovation Index 2007" report published in the February 2007 issue of *The World Business*, simply adhering to status quo is a losing strategy and in order to succeed, companies are jumping on the innovation bandwagon in order to create new value in their business.

That's why Alpha Catalyst Consulting, an Asian-based management consulting firm, has been conducting in-house programmes on organisational innovation and renewal for multinational companies such as Panasonic, AffinBank, DHL, Airfoil Services and Shell.

It also recently organised a public "Catalyst for Change" workshop series that was piloted by a workshop on "Innovation Activation: The Chemistry of Creativity and Constraints" in early September.

The programme seeks to help participants increase their capability and capacity to innovate new solutions to problems and challenges that would enable their organisations to be more competitive and achieve higher performance.

Alpha Catalyst's principal consultant and founder Azim Pawanchik said the "Innovation Activation" programme sought to introduce the fundamentals of innovation and its application in managing work culture and organisational processes.

"The word innovation... people would think about inventions. But we're talking about internal processes and the way you manage can be innovative. Things like six sigma is an example of management innovation," he told *The Edge Financial Daily*.

He said the consulting firm has assisted clients develop innovative solutions such talent retention, developing synergies between departments and integrating work cultures.

The keystone of the workshop is its



The Catalyst for Change workshops seek to introduce the fundamentals of innovation.

"Innovation Activation Framework" Azim said the four-stage process of innovation starts at the "conception" stage where an organisation's stakeholders rationalise the needs and urgency for change, followed by the "creation" of possible ideas and solutions. Then comes the "conversion" stage where ideas are turned to reality, followed by the "connection" stage where participants are taught to integrate the new idea or product within the organisation in a way that would create value.

"Innovation cannot be taught, but it can be learnt. I can't teach you to be innovative, but I can provide you with the process and it is up to you to discover what's your style when it comes to being innovative," he said. "If we provided a framework, a structured approach to thinking, then chances are people will be able to generate ideas as provided people feel safe to express ideas without the fear of peer ridicule. Our role is more of a facilitator, in a sense that we get people within the organisation to discover the problems, ideas and solutions."

"We can't expect everyone in the organisation to be innovative because it is part 'nurture' and part 'nature'. When

you were growing up, which part of your brain developed more? What we hope for in the organisation is for people to understand that different people have different roles at different stages of innovation," Azim said.

One of the programme participants, Adeline Looi, who is the change manager cum assistant training and development manager for Dutch Lady, said the programme provided practical approaches to innovation and change management in the event of situational constraints.

"For change management, constraint is very real. We usually respond to it as something negative or something holding us back. We're trained that constraints set a boundary for us. What worked for us was the concept of embracing constraint," she said. "If the organisation wants to introduce a culture change, there is a way you can do it — by putting it on boards, on posters — or you could look at it from the perspective of where the company is today and where it wants to be tomorrow and you can innovate accordingly. After all, we always want to improve and every step of improvement is an innovation," she said.

The workshop series is highly interac-

ive and experiential; it engages participants in activities involving drama props, play dough, juggling, programmable Lego robotics and even the martial art of Aikido. The activities, however much they may resemble child's play, aren't just for fun as therein lies the strength of the programme.

But more than that, Azim said the ability to think creatively or innovatively is a function of the right side of the brain and the activities Alpha Catalyst uses helps stimulate those brain functions.

Looi said instead of giving a dry lecture to 15 grown adults, for a full day, Azim and his team kept the programme fun and challenging, yet managed to tie each activity to innovation.

"How Azim did it was very good because he covered the concepts of Aikido and he tied it back to innovation and it was relevant. It was physical, hands-on practice. The robotics was good exercise that involved teamwork and thinking creatively. None of us are mechanics and putting two robots to the test is not our cup of tea, but we were practising what we learnt and at the end of the tournament, we reviewed it. It was very good way to drive the point home," she said.

## THE 4 Cs OF INNOVATION

**1** **Conception**  
Ask yourself why is there a need for change? Find out what every stakeholder wants to achieve and come up with a universal purpose or objective. Weigh the risk and possibilities; and identify the constraints of the problem so you can work around it, or perhaps leverage on it.

**2** **Creation**  
Explore all possible ideas. Be creative with how you explore those ideas such as using visuals, stories, storyboarding and mind maps. Understand your options thoroughly and weigh the risk and benefits of each idea. Gather as much knowledge, insights and ideas from your stakeholders as you can, and try seeing the problem and the solution from their perspective.

**3** **Conversion**  
Consider your best option based on the chances of success and ease of execution. Decide on how much risk you're willing to take. Then, work out the resources, be it cash, talent or other resources, and make the tangible solution happen.

**4** **Connection**  
Great ideas don't always create great value if they are unnoticed or unappreciated. Create value with your innovation. Hone your presentation and marketing skills and get creative again. Ask yourself how you can connect the solution to the challenge. How do you convince the cynics and "sell" or "brand" the idea.



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