

Burtonian Methodology Series
Essay O

Intentional Innovation

Distinguishing Innovation Myths from Innovation Realities

Craig Burton
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Intentional Innovation

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Introduction

The term “Intentional Innovation” comes from addressing the myths of innovation that I constantly run into. The basic myth about innovation is that innovation usually happens by chance. I call it the Jed Clampett Innovation Myth. Most people believe that the only way to strike it big is by accident. I am not saying the accidental bullet doesn’t happen. It does. It just isn’t a good philosophy for formalized innovation.

Jed Clampett struck it rich with an *accidental bullet* while hunting. My grandkids don’t know this ditty, but I bet you do.

*“Come and listen to my story ‘bout a man named Jed
Poor mountaineer barely kept his family fed
Then one day he was shooting at some food
And up through the ground came a bubbling crude
Oil that is, black gold, Texas tea”*

If you grew up watching this stuff, you spoke the last line instead of singing it.

Granted, the myth of innovation is romantic. The reality is that innovation is best achieved when it is *intentional*. I would much rather have the results of intentional innovation than the disappointment of a lot of spent bullets hoping to hit crude.

Can innovation be intentional, formalized and predictable? Good questions. Let’s look at the answers by first distinguishing innovation myths from innovation realities.

Comparing Innovation Myths with Innovation Realities

There are four basic myths of innovation (show stoppers):

1. Innovation shows up as “the next big thing” the “accidental bullet.”
2. Innovation is like lightning, it only strikes once.
3. Innovation is done by small companies.
4. Innovation is hard to repeat.
5. Innovation is risky.
6. Innovations must be protected. (Some companies take this myth so far that your success in the company is measured by the number of patents attributed to your name!)

Here is my list of innovation realities (myth busters):

1. Innovation often shows up as a service pack.
2. Innovation is seldom a lightning strike—intentional innovation can be repeated over and over again. A 12 month innovation cycle is acceptable, a 6 month cycle is common, an 18 months cycle is stretching it.
3. Any size company can innovate—size doesn't matter.
4. Innovation is very repeatable. It can be formalized and practiced consistently.
5. The biggest risk is in not innovating. If you are not innovating, you are stagnating.
6. Innovations, over time, are purposefully—and intentionally—exposed and given away. Some innovations should be given away at their onset. This reality is a tough one for most to swallow. I leave it for last.

Burtonian Innovation Matrix

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Burtonian Innovation Matrix

Innovation Myths	Innovation Realities
The Next Big Thing	Service Pack Release
Lightning strikes only once	12 month cycle
Small companies only	Any size will do
Difficult to repeat	Formalizable
Risky	Requirement
Protectionism	share

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Beyond Myth to a New Reality—Intentional Innovation

I stumbled (literally, with my daily [stumbleupon](#) routine) upon a great set of talks about technology, technology acceleration and evolution.

--> Kevin Kelly: [How does technology evolve? Like we did](#)

In this talk, Kevin Kelly masterfully equates technology to the animal kingdom and to evolution in the animal kingdom. *He posits that technology evolves like any other organism.* I love that thinking. In that vein, he puts forth the question:

What does technology want?

His thesis then is that technology is like a living organism. Technology—exactly like evolving organisms—seeks and wants the following:

- Ubiquity
- Diversity
- Specialization
- Complexity
- Socialization

This is brilliant. Thank you Mr. Kelly.

I want to take things now to the next level regarding innovation, not just technology. I am positing that innovation also seeks the same traits as evolving organisms or technology.

Innovation's wants:

- Ubiquity—The more widespread an innovation is, the better it is. Protecting or artificially limiting innovation is stifling and counterproductive. Protection does not give or protect leadership. Innovation protectionism only gives the illusion of leadership. Leadership is gained and maintained by continued intentional innovation. There are times when a measure of protectionism creates mystique and buzz. But protectionism buzz has the life cycle of a box office hit—a few weekends at most.
- Diversity—This is both good and bad. Innovation diversity keeps things interesting. It also is an opening for innovators to get off track.
- Specialization—As things change so rapidly and get more complex, specialization is natural. Digging into specifics is a great resource for innovation direction. Specialization also helps balance diversity.
- Complexity—Innovation can—and should—start simple. As new things occur, things change, complexity follows. As innovation wants complexity, it creates all sorts of openings for more innovation.
- Socialization—Think of socialization as the need to be known and thought well of. Innovation—and innovators—want to be known and thought well of amongst all of its constituencies.

Conclusion

If the thought of an accidental bullet is a romantic rush, Intentional Innovation can produce even a better rush. It's repeatable, sustainable, predictable and can be formalized. Intentional Innovation is exciting when you start to realize most futurists and inventors are way off in the future. Modern day Innovationists are in a 12 month window. A good innovation team does the seemingly impossible, predict the future of a 6 to 12 month window and build to that time table (with fixes and minor upgrades every 90 days). The methodology I have developed to formalize that process is called the Burtonian Innovation Methodology.

The first step in learning that methodology is distinguishing between Intentional Innovation and the Accidental Bullet.

Comments and criticism are always welcome. It's part of the process.

One final note, Mr. Kelly also said some other brilliant things in his talk about the evolutionary nature of technology. One was about the Infinite Game and how technology is the medium in which we as humans play that game.

The other related statement I love and Judith really likes is, “there are millions of children being born whose technology of self expression has not yet been invented... We have a moral obligation to invent technology so that every person on the globe has the potential to realize their true difference.” Watch the video, really.

Is [Twitter](#) a form of self expression?

--> [Judith on summer's progression.](#)

--> [Kevin Kelly link again.](#)

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