



## The 10 Faces of Innovation

In an exclusive book excerpt from the general manager of Ideo, we meet the personality types it takes to keep creativity thriving--and the devil's advocate at bay.

**From:** Issue 99 | October 2005 | Page 74 **By:** Tom Kelley with Jonathan Littman **Illustrations by:** Yukio Shimizu

We've all been there: the pivotal meeting in which you push forward a new idea or proposal you're passionate about. A fast-paced discussion leads to an upwelling of support that seems about to reach critical mass. And then in one disastrous moment, your hopes are dashed when someone weighs in with those fateful words: "Let me just play devil's advocate for a minute. . . ."

Having invoked the awesome protective power of that seemingly innocuous phrase, the speaker now feels entirely free to take potshots at your idea and does so with impunity. Because he's not really your harshest critic. Instead, he's essentially saying, "The devil made me do it." Devil's advocates remove themselves from the equation and sidestep individual responsibility for the verbal attack. But before they're done, they've torched your fledgling concept.

The devil's-advocate gambit is extraordinary but certainly not uncommon since it strikes so regularly in the project rooms and boardrooms of corporate America. What's truly astonishing is how much punch is packed into that simple phrase. In fact, the devil's advocate may be the biggest innovation killer in America today. What makes this negative persona so dangerous is that it is such a subtle threat. Every day, thousands of great new ideas, concepts, and plans are nipped in the bud by devil's advocates.

Why is this persona so damning? Because a devil's advocate encourages idea wreckers to assume the most negative possible perspective, one that sees only the downside, the problems, the disasters-in-waiting. Once those floodgates open, they can drown a new initiative in negativity.

Why should you care? And why do I believe this problem is so important? Because innovation is the lifeblood of all organizations, and the devil's advocate is toxic to your cause. This is no trivial matter. There is no longer any serious debate about the primacy of innovation in the health and future strength of an organization.

As the general manager of Ideo, I have worked with clients from Singapore to San Francisco to São Paulo, and witnessed firsthand how innovation has become recognized as a pivotal management tool across virtually all industries and market segments. And while we at Ideo used to spend the majority of our time in the world of product-based innovation, we have more recently come around to seeing innovation as a tool for transforming the entire culture of organizations. Sure, a great product can be one important element in the formula for business success, but companies that want to succeed today need



# STRATEGIC VISION ALLIANCE

much more. They need innovation at every point of the compass, in all aspects of the business, and in every team member.

Building an environment fully engaged in positive change, and a culture rich in creativity and renewal, means creating a company with 360 degrees of innovation. And companies that want to succeed at innovation will need new insights, new viewpoints, and new roles.

All good working definitions of innovation pair ideas with action, the spark with the fire. Innovators don't just have their heads in the clouds. They also have their feet on the ground. The company 3M, one of the first to fully embrace innovation as the essence of its corporate brand, defines it as "new ideas--plus action or implementation--which result in an improvement, a gain, or a profit." It is not enough to just have a good idea. Only when you act, when you implement, do you truly innovate. Ideas. Action. Implementation. Gain. Profit.

All good words, of course, but there's still one piece left out. People. That's why I prefer the InnovationNetwork consultancy's definition: "People implementing new ideas that create value." The classic 3M definition might leave you with the impression that, as a bumper sticker might put it, "Innovation Happens." But unfortunately, there's no spontaneous combustion in the business world. Innovation is definitely not self-starting or self-perpetuating. People make it happen through their imagination, willpower, and perseverance. And whether you are a team member, a group leader, or an executive, your only real path to innovation is through people. You can't really do it alone.

"Innovation is all about the roles people can play, the hats they can put on."

Innovation is all about people. It is about the roles people can play, the hats they can put on, the personas they can adopt. It is not just about the luminaries of innovation like Thomas Edison, or celebrity CEOs like Steve Jobs and Jeff Immelt. It is about the unsung heroes who work on the front lines of entrepreneurship in action, the countless people and teams who make innovation happen day in and day out.

At Ideo, we've developed 10 people-centric tools, talents, or personas for innovation. Although the list does not presume to be comprehensive, it does aspire to expand your repertoire. We've found that adopting one or more of these roles can help teams express a different point of view and create a broader range of innovative solutions.

And by adopting some of these innovation personas, you'll have a chance to put the devil's advocate in his place. So when someone says, "Let me play devil's advocate for a minute" and starts to smother a fragile new idea, someone else in the room may be emboldened to speak up and say, "Let me be an anthropologist for a moment, because I personally have watched our customers suffering silently with this issue for months, and this new idea just might help them." And if that one voice gives courage to others, maybe someone else will add, "Let's think like an experimenter for a moment. We could prototype this idea in a week and get a sense of whether we're onto something good." The devil's

Visit [www.svalliance.com](http://www.svalliance.com) to learn about SVA - Business Operations Management Certificate Program



# STRATEGIC VISION ALLIANCE

advocate may never go away, but on a good day, the 10 personas can keep him in his place. Or tell him to go to hell.

## The Learning Personas

Individuals and organizations need to constantly gather new sources of information in order to expand their knowledge and grow, so the first three personas are learning roles. These personas are driven by the idea that no matter how successful a company currently is, no one can afford to be complacent. The world is changing at an accelerated pace, and today's great idea may be tomorrow's anachronism. The learning roles help keep your team from becoming too internally focused and remind the organization not to be so smug about what you know. People who adopt the learning roles are humble enough to question their own worldview, and in doing so, they remain open to new insights every day.

1. The Anthropologist brings new learning and insights into the organization by observing human behavior and developing a deep understanding of how people interact physically and emotionally with products, services, and spaces. When an Ideo human-factors person camps out in a hospital room for 48 hours with an elderly patient undergoing surgery, she is living the life of the anthropologist and helping to develop new health-care services.
2. The Experimenter prototypes new ideas continuously, learning by a process of enlightened trial and error. The Experimenter takes calculated risks to achieve success through a state of "experimentation as implementation." When BMW bypassed all its traditional advertising channels and created theater-quality short films for [bmwfirms.com](http://bmwfirms.com), no one knew whether the experiment would succeed. Its runaway success underscores the rewards that flow to Experimenters.
3. The Cross-Pollinator explores other industries and cultures, then translates those findings and revelations to fit the unique needs of your enterprise. An open-minded Japanese businesswoman was taken with the generic beer she found in a U.S. supermarket. She brought the idea home, and it eventually became the "no brand" Mujirushi Ryohin chain, a 300-store, billion-dollar retail empire. That's the leverage of a Cross-Pollinator.

## The Organizing Personas

The next three personas are organizing roles, played by individuals who are savvy about the often counterintuitive process of how organizations move ideas forward. At Ideo, we used to believe that the ideas should speak for themselves. Now we understand what the Hurdler, the Collaborator, and the Director have known all along: that even the best ideas must continuously compete for time, attention, and resources. Those who adopt these organizing roles don't dismiss the process of budget and resource allocation as "politics" or "red tape." They recognize it as a complex game of chess, and they play to win.



# STRATEGIC VISION ALLIANCE

4. The Hurdler knows that the path to innovation is strewn with obstacles and develops a knack for overcoming or outsmarting those roadblocks. When the 3M worker who invented masking tape decades ago had his idea initially rejected, he refused to give up. Staying within his \$100 authorization limit, he signed a series of \$99 purchase orders to pay for critical equipment needed to produce the first batch. His perseverance paid off, and 3M has reaped billions of dollars in cumulative profits because an energetic Hurdler was willing to bend the rules.

5. The Collaborator helps bring eclectic groups together, and often leads from the middle of the pack to create new combinations and multidisciplinary solutions. Not long ago, Kraft Foods and Safeway sat down to figure out how to knock down the traditional walls between supplier and retailer. One strategy--a way to streamline the transfer of goods from one to the other--didn't just save labor and carrying costs. The increased efficiency sent sales of Capri Sun juice drinks, for example, soaring by 167% during one promotion.

6. The Director not only gathers together a talented cast and crew but also helps to spark their creative talents. When a creative Mattel executive assembles an ad hoc team of designers and project leaders, sequesters them for 12 weeks, and ends up with a new \$100 million girls'-toy platform in three months, she is a role model for Directors everywhere.

## **The Building Personas**

The four remaining personas are building roles that apply insights from the learning roles and channel the empowerment from the organizing roles to make innovation happen. When people adopt the building personas, they stamp their mark on your organization. People in these roles are highly visible, so you'll often find them right at the heart of the action.

7. The Experience Architect designs compelling experiences that go beyond mere functionality to connect at a deeper level with customers' latent or expressed needs. When Cold Stone Creamery turns the preparation of a frozen dessert into a fun, dramatic performance, it is designing a successful new customer experience. The premium prices and marketing buzz that follow are rewards associated with playing the role of the Experience Architect.

8. The Set Designer creates a stage on which innovation team members can do their best work, transforming physical environments into powerful tools to influence behavior and attitude. Companies such as Pixar and Industrial Light & Magic recognize that the right office environments can help nourish and sustain a creative culture. When the Cleveland Indians discovered a renewed winning ability in a brand-new stadium, they demonstrated the value of the Set Designer. Organizations that tap into the power of the Set Designer sometimes discover remarkable performance improvements that make all the space changes worthwhile.

9. The Caregiver builds on the metaphor of a health-care professional to deliver customer care in a manner that goes beyond mere service. Good Caregivers anticipate customer needs and are ready to look



# STRATEGIC VISION ALLIANCE

after them. When you see a service that's really in demand, there's usually a Caregiver at the heart of it. Best Cellars, a retailer that takes the mystery and snobbery out of wine and makes it simple and fun, is demonstrating the Caregiver role--while earning a solid profit at the same time.

10. The Storyteller builds both internal morale and external awareness through compelling narratives that communicate a fundamental human value or reinforce a specific cultural trait. Companies from Dell to Starbucks have lots of corporate legends that support their brands and build camaraderie within their teams. Medtronic, celebrated for its product innovation and consistently high growth, reinforces its culture with straight-from-the-heart storytelling--patients' firsthand narratives of how the products changed or even saved their lives.

## **Note:**

The appeal of the personas is that they work. Not in theory or in the classroom but in the unforgiving marketplace. Ideo has battle-tested them thousands of times in a real-world laboratory for innovation. The personas are about "being innovation" rather than merely "doing innovation." Take on one or more of these roles, and you'll be taking a conscious step toward becoming more of an innovator in your daily life.

Adapted with permission from *The Ten Faces of Innovation*, by Tom Kelley with Jonathan Littman, to be published October 18 by Currency Books, a division of Random House Inc.