

of course everyone's issue. The days of a silo mindset are over.

These three forces are converging and interdependent. For example, what is the main tool that groups and teams use? Meetings! Yet as more work is done collaboratively, it means more meetings which are, in turn, time-consuming and often ineffective, which places even more pressure on performance and resources.

How can you break-out of this negative meeting cycle? Business people have tried all sorts of incremental improvements (stand-up meetings, daily meetings, speed meetings, etc). There have also been numerous books written about how to improve meetings, yet frustration with this tool seems to expand rather than diminish.

We believe that the only way forward is to reinvent meetings. It requires radical rather than small, tiny improvements. We have tried tinkering with meetings and these don't seem to work. If you have a continual flow of frustrating experiences with meetings, then no amount of playing around at the edges will suffice. Managers, leaders and business owners need a third way of working in groups and teams, other than meetings and brainstorming. One that is faster, more creative and productive. And that gives people a real choice.

A tool we have developed, which we call Blitz, is based on a number of insights. For instance, most meetings are an hour. Why? The majority of decisions, problems and issues are day-to-day and can be addressed effectively in minutes. We also knew from studying creative organisations that most innovation occurs as a result of brief, informal and spontaneous interactions when people bump into one another (hence the reason why many businesses are designing informal meeting places). What if those interactions could be formalised and embedded in any organisation? And what if there were a tool that could be used quickly when it was most needed?

The features of our approach are that 'Blitz' meetings should be 15 minutes or less. There should be only one challenge only per Blitz, involving six people or less. A semi-structured approach should be used—start, build, connect, evaluate and action.

Anyone should be able to call such a meeting, on any topic, at any time, at any place (and they become leader when they do).

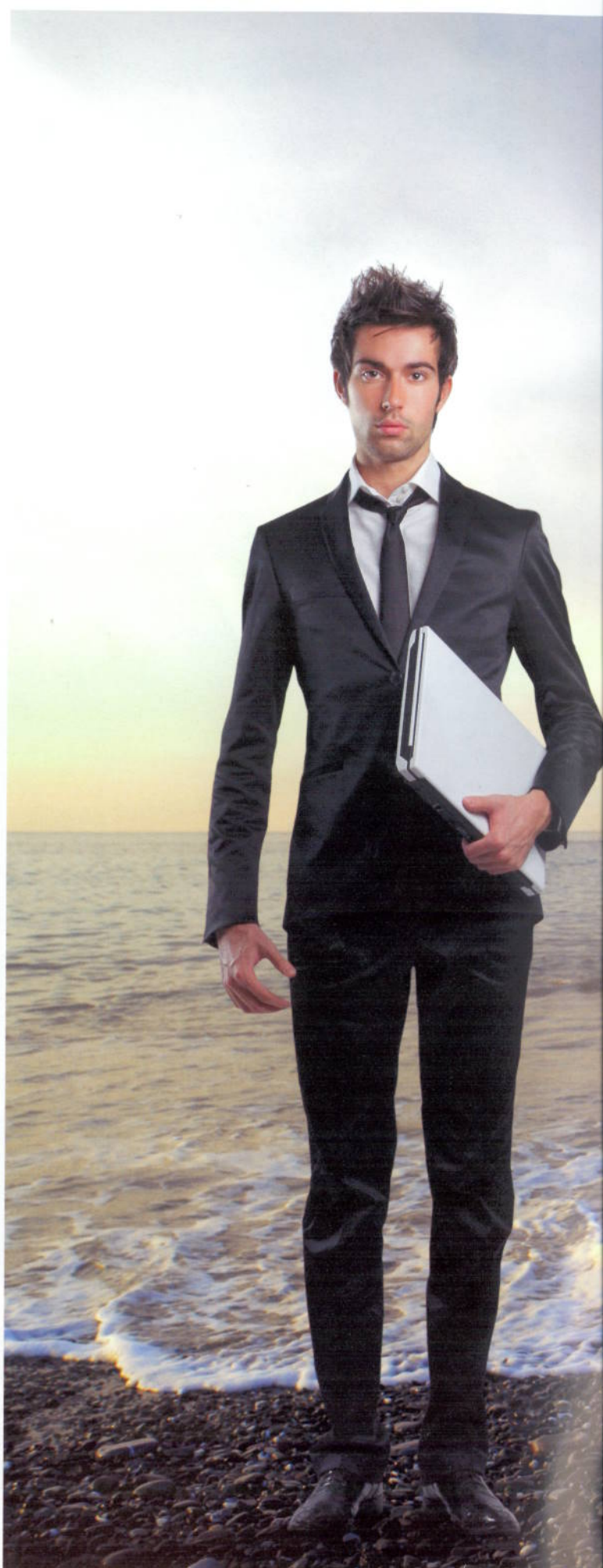
The leader retains responsibility for the challenge. All or some of the group are volunteers (brings a divergence of views) and in a Blitz you work from the 'individual up' not the formal leader down.

We have run a number of pilot programs, including with a major hotel, freight company and retailer, with strong positive results. Although the numbers are small and it is early days, some of the survey results include time spent in traditional meetings has decreased, group work is more efficient, there is a reduction in analysis-paralysis, decision-making has accelerated, everyone contributes equally and collaboration between and across other departments and divisions has improved.

In our focus groups and reviews with leaders they also talk about how creative and energised people feel during and after such meetings. They also mentioned that it was an effective new way to identify and develop future talent (particularly Generation Y). As one IT director commented, it *"allows everyone in the team to contribute and be part of the process, creating better solutions with more ownership"*.

We are not saying that traditional meetings are unnecessary. In fact, by adding Blitz to the tool-kit of leaders, meetings finally become more effective because it frees up time to discuss the more important strategic issues while solving the many and varied daily business issues with Blitz.

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INNOVATION CULTURE

Vanessa Gavan looks to top down inspiration and bottom-up ideas.

In uncertain times, it can be easy to put innovation on the back burner as too expensive, too time-consuming and too risky. Yet controlled, ROI-driven innovation is an essential element of a successful business growth strategy and can generate ideas worth millions of dollars. In our experience, fresh thinking is essential to take organisations to new heights at any stage of the economic cycle.

Australia was founded on innovation and natural entrepreneurial spirit is now part of our DNA. Every day, innovative people generate ideas in every Australian organisation. But realising the value of these ideas is something that few organisations do well; they lack formal processes for collecting, qualifying and prioritising ideas based on strategic and financial returns.

By investing time and effort into channelling smart, results-focused thinking, you can gain a competitive edge and secure a more sustainable future for your business.

You should aim to create a culture of innovation, with robust processes that underpin and crystallise the value of ideas. Innovative businesses grow regardless of how the economic landscape looks. Why? Because they are clearly differentiated, they invest cleverly through different market cycles, they seize growth opportunities and they respond quickly to changing markets.

But how do you turn a reactive, risk-aware operation into a proactive, progressive, entrepreneurial enterprise?

As a management consultancy, we are often approached by companies wanting to transform their businesses and leverage further growth opportunities. We always start at the top, because executive leadership support is essential for true culture change. Every senior executive must be on the same page around the balance of innovation and risk. Clear parameters must be defined to empower different business areas and teams to step outside their comfort zones, encouraging entrepreneurial skills and exercise lateral thinking that may otherwise be regarded as too risky. This must be balanced with the 'business as usual' requirements of meeting KPIs, targets and performance initiatives.

Leaders within innovative cultures have to be able to operate across two horizons: the here and now, the next horizon of growth and, ideally, the horizon beyond that.

Recently, we worked with a leading insurance company to identify new initiatives worth over \$10 million using innovation as a catalyst for improved business performance. Given the insurance industry is naturally averse to risk, our approach was to engage a cross-section of key business leaders

across the top two layers of the organisation to focus on 'business unusual' initiatives. These would either return improvements to the bottom line within a key time horizon, or create value through business growth opportunities within a predetermined timeframe.

The solution spanned several months. It involved intensive, innovation-oriented events with executives and senior leaders; business unusual projects; integration with the organisation's strategy and planning team; and alignment to an ROI framework. As part of the solution, the group identified 16 ideas that aligned with their business strategy and had a strong financial payback. Their teams developed seven of these ideas into business cases with an estimated total revenue potential of \$12.7 million year on year. Several of these initiatives were implemented immediately.

The company now has a pipeline of other ideas that can be implemented in the future; a framework for identifying, fostering and implementing new ideas; and a workforce that understands their ideas are valued. In other words, it is well on its way to being an innovative organisation.

Right now, innovation should be high on every company's agenda. Over the next decade, fundamental demographic, consumption, lifestyle and technology changes will transform

the whole world, including Australia. Already, they are causing a seismic shift in the global economic landscape that is affecting every sector. These changes present great opportunities for Australian companies. We will all be forced to rethink the products and services we offer and how we deliver and market them. In this environment, organisations that take a strategic, commercially focused approach to innovation will not only survive, they will thrive.

To harness innovation, you will need to:

- Define what innovation means to your organisation.
- Ensure members of your executive team understand and are aligned in terms of what good innovation looks like for your business.
- Engage your broader leadership group to think-tank innovative concepts regularly and build a bottom-up culture of idea generation.
- Leverage your strategy teams and business experts to work with your high potential leaders to turn concepts into strong business cases.
- Prioritise good, ROI-focused ideas and gain executive agreement on value-based investing.
- Create a culture that supports the continual flow of new ideas and strong feedback

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