



PERMANENT BETA PRESENTS



LEADING & SCALING AGILE
CORPORATE INNOVATION

WHY DO QUESTIONS WORK BETTER THAN ANSWERS?

By Uri Andersen
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LEADING & SCALING AGILE CORPORATE INNOVATION

– *WHY DO QUESTIONS WORK BETTER THAN ANSWERS?*

The concept of innovation is simple; get a good idea and make it happen. It's the second part that is difficult. When it comes to implementing innovation, I've found that an Agile still structured approach based on exploration is better than attempting to provide all the answers up front. The right answers do not exist up front, but the right questions do. In this short paper I'm introducing the most essential questions that organizations need to address in making corporate innovation a common mindset and a sustainable asset leading to competitive advantage.

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Start with asking the right questions

Innovation without realization creates only little value and that's why innovation in the essence is about transformation. Transformation of systems, products, people, and mindsets. This is where innovation creates real value and at the end of the day transformation is about human beings either directly or indirectly. Human behavior, however, is typically impossible to fully predict. This points to the fact that value creation through innovation is a lot more complex than just getting good ideas.

Unlike math or science where one answer can be proofed to be right, in dealing with human centric solutions there is never one right answer. In fact, there may be many, and they may shift over time as the transformation and behavioral change is taking place. Therefore an agile and explorative process is needed. Exploration means discovery along the way leading to the next step. Exploration is fundamentally about gaining insight first and then deciding what to do. Asking questions rather than giving answers. Exploration will take you both deeper into the matter and provide a more profound direction. In combination with agile it means roll out in increments based on the previous steps and the subsequent needs.

Even fluid in their forms, exploration and agile does not, of course, mean unstructured. Structure has the benefits of providing overview and optimizing efficiency. Structure creates peace of mind and progress because it substantiates a logical framework that no matter where the exploration might go, ensures a constant movement in the right direction. One could argue, that structure is the perfect accompaniment of exploration as it sets free the process while staying on track. Agile software development in sprints is an example of this, and it certainly goes for innovation too. No matter what methodology companies use to drive innovation (e.g. Design Thinking or Lean Startup) I'd say that a well-structured agile approach for scaling innovation to the entire organization is necessary. The point remains; what structure to follow and which questions to ask?

In eight steps containing around 50 essential questions I've captured what I believe to be the most important steppingstones in the process of taking Innovation to a strategic level where it becomes a common mindset, an inherent practice, and a competitive advantage. Because, asking the right questions will lead directly to all the answers needed in creating a human centered, innovation driven transformation.



The eight areas of attention are:

1. Vision
2. Governance
3. Methodology
4. People
5. Users
6. Relationships
7. Communication
8. Planning

These eight areas are interconnected and provide a useful, workable structure described more in detail in the following. One note, however, must be clearly pointed out. The structure is no replacement for sensemaking and sound judgement. Likewise, this is not a linear recipe. The areas should be continuously revisited just as they should be supplemented with other areas of relevance specific to the context.

It would be contradicting to believe that a structure on its own provide a complete plan. This is a tool for creating a plan. And my point is exactly that asking the right questions will help developing the plan step by step rather than providing it up front. But plans evolve and so do questions. This is a starting point.



VISION leads to an innovation strategy

The offset of lifting Innovation to a strategic level is to know why it's relevant in the first place. It seems like an obvious thing. However, making it tangible in terms of what the organization wants to achieve, how to quantify it and how to balance the risk is an outstanding starting point for creating an actual corporate innovation strategy with clear and measurable goals.

- Why do we want innovation?
- What will we achieve?
- How do we measure it?
- What is our innovation vs. risk tolerance?
- On which areas do we apply innovation and how much?
- What is our innovation strategy?



GOVERNANCE leads to innovation leadership

Governance is about establishing structures, systems and rules that enable an organization to deliver its goals also when it comes to innovation. A well-defined governance structure should provide enough compliance to fulfil the vision without saying exactly how. Answering the questions in this area will secure the fundamentals and advance innovation leadership.

- Where in the organization is innovation placed?
- What organizational co-dependencies exist?
- Who is responsible and whom do they refer to?
- What governance structure do we operate with?
- How is innovation funded?
- What is the budget?
- What time frame are we operating with?
- Where is innovation located physically?

Me
METHODOLOGY
METHODOLOGY leads to innovation tools

There is no single right innovation methodology for corporate innovation. In fact, there is a right methodology for each organization, and it will change over time. So, defining the organizations own innovation methodology is essential not only from a theoretical point of view but indeed also from a delivery perspective. Methodology defines what you put out there and how you do it. Answering the Methodology questions will qualify which innovation tools to use.

- What do we do?
- What do we not do?
- What are our services?
- What methodology do we want to work with?
- What tools do we already have?
- To what extent and how are we committed to existing methodologies?

Pe
PEOPLE
PEOPLE lead to innovation competences

People drive innovation and they do it to the best of their abilities. So, assembling the right team is one thing and making sure they have the right skills to use the tools and deliver the results is another. Competences live in people. Answering these questions will align goals and tools with the needed competences and the right people.

- Who are the team?
- What are the teams existing competences?
- What future competences do we need?
- Do we need to train the team?
- Do we need other team members?
- When will the team be able to use the tools?
- What motivates the team?

Us
USERS
USERS lead to innovation services

User driven innovation means putting humans at the centre of development. It means understanding the users underlying needs and delivering solutions that fulfil those needs. User needs are defining for the services and the outcome of corporate innovation since after all, it's about creating value for them. Understanding the users will improve the quality and success rate of any innovation or service. These questions are helpful in doing that.

- Who are our users?
- What are their main pains?
- What are their barriers or hold backs regarding transformation?
- How can we help them?
- What are we going to offer?
- What services are most relevant for our users?
- Who are we going to address first?
- How can we help our users help us?

**Re**

RELATIONSHIPS

RELATIONSHIPS lead to engagement

Relationships are probably *the* one most important thing in all human exchanges. Within relationships lie trust, transparency and ties. Relationships make everything work smoother from initial talks to long lasting collaboration. Answering the questions in regard to relationships will lead to answers on how to empower the organizations engagement in innovation and create ownership.

- Who are our primary stakeholders?
- How can we build strong relationships?
- How can we maintain relationships?
- How do we create engagement in our activities?
- How can we use this engagement to advance innovation?

Co

COMMUNICATION

COMMUNICATION leads to demand

Communication is both an internal and an external task that ensures awareness and transparency. Communication lives in every activity pushing information out and pulling interest in. It's helps innovation spread as well as it captures areas to innovate. Communication never stops – however, it does not begin by itself just as it doesn't maintain itself. So clear goals, target groups, messages and channels are a must in owning your communication. It is without doubt the important activity when it comes to knowledge sharing but it can never stand alone and requires constant attention.

- How will we communicate?
- What will we communicate?
- When do we want to achieve?
- How will we measure it?
- Who are our primary target groups?
- Where do we best reach them?
- What content do we produce?
- How often do we release information?
- How do we best manage ongoing communication?
- What systems can we use to make our task easier?

Pl

PLANNING

PLANNING leads to action

Nothing ever happens if it doesn't get implemented. This is common sense. But then again time after time ideas, improvements, suggestions, and good intentions, remain in the drawer because nobody had the time or resources to do anything about it. Subsequently, ironic as it may seem, the initiatives that do get carried out sometimes happens more due to available resources or random prioritization rather than actual value creation. Don't let execution stop innovation. Start planning the action.

- What deliveries must be realized in order to reach our goals?
- What task do each delivery contain?
- What is the prioritization of the deliveries?
- When are the milestones and deadlines?
- What are our first steps?
- How does our best proposal for a roadmap look?



The structure: Leading & Scaling

There is, of course, an underlying logic behind the structure by which the focus areas and questions are organized. This is both related to the order of relevance but also to a more extended inner context.

The order of relevance captures the certain logical consequence of for instance a vision preceding the plan. It's about alignment. The inner context is about the fundamental building blocks of innovative transformation: Leading and scaling. Practice and people.

I believe transformation in order to happen needs strong leadership but also scalability. Transformation of any kind is doomed to fail without leadership, which in its own terms needs tools to be anchored in more than strong individuals. Vision and Governance are the tools needed to create a mutual commitment to a focused process and the more general business when it comes to practice.

Scalability is about creating sustainable solutions that can last longer and be more resilient than any single event. Methodology and planning are powerful tools for this when it comes to application or practice.

An inevitable part of any transformation is people. At least if you are looking for long lasting and human-centered change. Here leading is about assembling the right team and assuring competences as well as knowing who to serve; the users. The scaling part of this aspect is communication and relationship building.

The ABCD-Framework

The eight interconnected areas, the structure and the questions introduced in this small paper are largely connected to the ABCD-Framework that I have previously described in the article "Scaling Innovation & Transformation with Design Thinking".

http://permanentbeta.dk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Scaling-Innovation_summary.pdf

The ABCD-framework has a strategic, holistic and very practical approach to corporate innovation and how to apply it.



About the author

Uri Andersen is an experienced design thinker, process consultant, and SAFe Scrum master helping companies and organizations develop the right methodology, tools and mind sets for innovation, digitalization, and business transformation.



Educated at The Danish Design School, Copenhagen Business School and the IT-University he has an outstanding background for contributing to transformative processes on both the strategic and on the hands-on level.

Uri teaches design thinking, leads development processes and engages in innovation projects. His field of expertise is innovation, digital transformation and capacity building which he addresses in various formats - including workshops, design sprints and deeper organizational engagement. His purpose is to be creating meaningful solutions, strengthening human centricity, and advancing the organizational capability in design thinking, innovation and digital transformation.

Uri Andersen has been working with this for more than 20 years. First as a design doer, entrepreneur and creative director - building and running a prizewinning design and communication agency for more than 10 years. Then, for the last 10 years, as a consultant, trainer and facilitator, where Uri uses his experience to create impact *with* clients rather than *for* them.

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