Building a Culture of Experimentation

Aarni Heiskanen & Mikko Taskinen
"How to make experimentation part of the everyday?"
Culture of experimentation
The two business cultures

- Creativity
- Serendipity
- Uncertainty

- Productivity
- Efficiency
- Predictability

Inspired by Ralph-Christian Ohr
"Clash of social contracts"

Rules of the Rainforest  
(for innovation)
- Break rules and dream
- Open doors and listen
- Trust and be trusted
- Experiment and iterate together
- Err, fail, and persist
- Pay it forward

Rules of the Plantation  
(for production)
- Excel at your job
- Be loyal to your team
- Work with those you can depend on
- Do the right thing the first time
- Strive for perfection
- Return favors

By Viktor W. Hwang
Plan - Do - Check - Act

Do - Check - Plan - Act
Experimentation can be a bridge between the two cultures

Experimentation improves a company’s ability to be proactive and adaptive to the changes in the business environment.

**What are experiments**
Experiments are an agile and efficient procedure for developing, testing, and implementing new practices and technologies.

**How to experiment**
The participants experiment to find a solution to a challenge or utilize an opportunity.

**Why they work**
Experiments are inspiring, they use the strengths of individuals, they advance learning and discovery in teams. Successful experiments can grow into new practices without pressure from above.

**What is needed**
Experiments require management commitment, small investments and tolerance to occasional failure. The experimenters need an open mind.
Three success factors

**Attitudes**
- The past does not determine the future
- From stagnation and cynicism to growth

**Behavior**
- Awareness of the capacity to influence things and people
- Examining what drives my present behavior and what can I change

**Interaction**
- Utilizing the potential of an individual internally and externally
- Creating ideas and new ways of working from a combination of individual and team capabilities
The value of experimentation
A value map of experimentation

- Stories
- Foresight
- Improved customer orientation
- Faster speed to market
- High development ROI
- New markets
- New perspectives
- Finding new capabilities
- Positive cultural change
- Fresh attitude towards work
- Learning how to learn
- Commitment to work
- Team
- Individual

Short term

Company

Long term
How to experiment?
Elements of experimentation

Management commitment
A challenge
Right people
Interaction
Metrics
Challenging the roles and habits of people
Evaluation
Communication
Application
DOING and learning
DOING and learning
## Types of experimentation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>With whom</th>
<th>For what</th>
<th>How</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Customers</td>
<td>New services/products</td>
<td>Rapid prototyping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Existing services/products</td>
<td>Pilot projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Customer experiences</td>
<td>Idea capture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Business processes</td>
<td>Online campaigns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knowledge / skills</td>
<td>Crowdsourcing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Technologies</td>
<td>Focus groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partners</td>
<td></td>
<td>Competitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td></td>
<td>Surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal</td>
<td></td>
<td>Discussion groups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **How**
  - Competitions
  - Surveys
  - Discussion groups
  - Tests
  - Hackathons
  - Gaming
Impact areas

- Company’s vision and strategy
- Cultural evolution
- Team learning
- Personal growth
A learning path

1 - Understanding
• Wake up!
• What is experimentation
• Why it is necessary
• What to experiment on
• What makes experimentation successful
• What is reflection on/in action

2 - Personal development
• What assumptions do I hold true
• How can I challenge my assumptions
• What is my potential
• What’s holding me back
• How to strengthen self-knowledge
• What should I let go/update
• What should I practice

3 - Experimentation practice
• How to set goals
• How to organize
• How to carry out
• How to evaluate
• How to feed-forward
• How to decide on next steps
• How to ‘sink’ new methods into daily routines
• How to practice/reflect
A clandestine trial that changed how a company manages projects

Niina Jaatinen, an engineer at Sweco Structures, was pondering how to improve the way engineering was done in the company. She discovered scrum, an agile project management framework widely used in IT development.

She prototyped scrum, without informing his seniors, with a group of project managers. Once the clandestine operation was exposed, she was first scolded, then praised. The new way of working had proved to be so successful that it is now becoming a norm in the company.

Learn more at AEC-Business.com.

Practical insight and prototyping resulted in a new business

Ali is a construction engineer who realized, while working on projects, certain limitations with existing construction software. They were internal solutions that did not allow collaboration with subcontractors that are responsible for most of the tasks in a modern project.

After prototyping and collecting customer feedback, Ali and his team created BulldozAIR. It allows teams working in the field to better collaborate with the office by exchanging information in a visual way.

Learn more at AEC-Business.com.

An impossible goal revamped a master planning process

The city of Constitución in Chile was practically obliterated by a tsunami in 2010. The city leadership decided to create the new master plan in 90 days instead of the normal process that can take up to 15 years.

Reaching the impossible goal forced the system to rethink the whole process and involve citizens in novel ways. The result was a better, faster, and cheaper way of planning.

Learn more at AEC-Business.com.
An unserved need inspired a new online business

The developers of ServiceWhale had learned that 40% of consumers include the words ‘price,’ ‘cost,’ or ‘estimate’ when shopping for major home improvement projects. However, the information is hard to find. Based on that notion, they developed a service that allows a homeowner to get upfront, customized quotes online.

Read the whole story at AEC-Business.com.

Innovation could happen over a weekend

A hackathon is typically a weekend-long event where teams of professionals solve problems given by industry participants.

AEC Hackathon has quickly become a global community of innovators that include all elements of the built environment. They offer the opportunity to collaborate with cutting edge technologies and its developers and designers.

Learn more at aechackathon.com.

An idea competition helped improve professional services

A few years back, we organized an idea competition for a professional services organization. They invited their staff of 300 to the online event and asked them to generate ideas on how to support their clients’ sustainability efforts.

The outcome was over 120 ideas of which 20 were chosen for voting. The winners got resources for working out solutions from the ideas. Another result of the campaign was a database of categorized and evaluated ideas that my client could use in the future.

Learn more at AEC-Business.com.
Contact us for more information

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