Identifying Innovators
“Unusual Suspects”

March 12, 2015
As a number of factors increase the need for more and more innovation:

– Falling trade barriers
– Increased global competition
– Shifting customer demands and allegiances
– Shorter product lifecycles

You need to innovate more frequently, more consistently and more successfully.

You should be asking the following question:
Who are the best “innovators”? 
Agenda

• Introduction to OVO
• People and the importance to innovation
• Why people are important to innovation
• Existing assessments and their limits
• Finding “unusual” suspects
• InnoTraits™ Innovator Assessment
• Why it matters
Introductions

- OVO is an innovation consulting firm, focused primarily on development of sustainable, repeatable innovation processes
- I’m Jeffrey Phillips, a senior consultant with OVO and author of two books – Relentless Innovation and Make us more Innovative
The most important innovation ingredient

• We can’t “automate” innovation
• Processes and tools can accelerate innovation but don’t create or manage ideas
• Passionate, engaged people working in a culture that supports innovation are the most important ingredient
Staffing Challenges

• Many “innovation” projects are led and staffed with people who have been successful at “business as usual”, tightly wedded to existing processes

• These individuals may actually hinder innovation by forcing it to work within existing confines, structures, processes and decision making models
Who are the best innovators?

• If people are the most critical ingredient, you need to identify your “best” innovators
• But most firms have little experience assessing their employees on this criteria.
• Who are the best innovators?
  – Senior individuals who understand existing processes?
  – Visionary R&D leaders?
  – Marketing and sales people who understand the customer?
Lacking Assessment?

In an environment where everything is defined, measured and assessed, very few firms have bothered to understand which people have innovation capability or skills.
KAI / FourSight

KAI, the Kirton Adaptive Innovation index, indicates an individual’s preference for adapting or innovating.

The Foursight assessment signals the preferred role of an individual on an innovation team.
What’s Missing

• What traits or characteristics do innovators share?
• What traits improve innovation capacity?
• What traits or experiences are vital in various innovation activities?
• Which traits are absent in your innovation team?
Finding “Unusual” suspects

Why “unusual”? 

• Our research indicates that good innovators are often at the periphery of the business rather than the mainstream

• They are open to changing processes, products and paradigms, which can make their ideas seem risky
Other Research

There is academic research in this field, specifically The Innovator’s DNA:

• 5 key traits they share
  – Associating
  – Observing
  – Questioning
  – Experimenting
  – Networking
Building the Assessment

• For over a year we reviewed academic research, our own experiences, and published material
• We conducted a series of surveys with customers and innovation partners
• This lead to the identification of a number of characteristics or traits
• We’ve documented that research in a 50 page white paper, to be published in May
InnoTraits™ Assessment

To identify the best innovators, we built an assessment based on traits that innovators share.
InnoTraits™

Demographic

Psychographic

Habits/Experiences
Demographics

From our research we found that, on average, good innovators are:

– Older than their peers
– Have more education than their peers
– Have a more diversified work experience than their peers
Habits/Experiences

Also from our research we found, on average, good innovators:

– Have larger and more complex personal networks
– Travel more extensively
– Come into contact with more diffuse ideas
– Pursue hobbies that “stretch” their thinking
Psychographics

• We’ve identified 24 traits or characteristics that good innovators share
• We’ll review a handful in this presentation
## Psychographic Overview

**“InnoTraits™”**

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<th>Adjacent Thinking</th>
<th>Experimenter</th>
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<tr>
<td>Associative</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
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<td>Beginner’s Mind</td>
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<td>Collaborative</td>
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<td>Comfort with risk</td>
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<td>Creativity</td>
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<td>Curiosity</td>
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<td>Empathy</td>
<td>Lifelong learner</td>
<td>Unconventional</td>
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Beginner’s Mind

Often, ignoring convention and established expertise and looking at a challenge with a fresh perspective opens up unexpected opportunity.

In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities. In the expert’s mind there are few.

Shunryu Suzuki
Risk Taking

Innovation requires working outside the conventional accepted processes and taking risks to explore new ideas or markets.
Creativity

Creative people have *original* ideas, not derivative ideas based on existing products. They create those ideas from their *imagination*, limited by facts or experience.
Curiosity combines two important ingredients: the desire to know, and the energy to search. Curiosity creates energy and enthusiasm for innovation.
Empathy

Truly understanding customer needs, met and unmet, requires the ability to “walk a mile” in someone else’s shoes, to feel at the same depth and level as another.

Empathy is:
Seeing with the eyes of another,
Listening with the ears of another,
Feeling with the heart of another.

Alfred Adler
Good innovators have flexible interpretation of rules and requirements, that is, they don’t assume the scope is fixed and are willing to “break” rules to generate new ideas.
Future Oriented

Good innovators are constantly looking “over the horizon” to discover emerging needs. They aren’t bound by short term thinking.
Humility

The best ideas are combinations of good ideas, insights and concepts which originate from many different people or places. Pride of ownership or arrogance gets in the way.

More the Knowledge
Lesser the Ego,
Lesser the Knowledge,
More the Ego.....

Einstein
The best innovators are motivated by solving problems, not by money or rewards alone. Passion and engagement, motivated by internal motivation, is much more powerful than extrinsic reward.
Life-Long Learner

Good innovators are constantly learning – within their field or industry, and expanding their knowledge by learning new skills or gaining new knowledge.
The “InnoTraits™” Assessment

• Working with a professional research firm, we developed an assessment to identify people who possess these traits
• The assessment examines 24 attributes and can be completed online in 15-20 minutes
• From the assessment we can report:
  – An individual’s profile based on the traits
  – A selected team’s aggregate profile
  – And compare both to the cumulative profile of the organization
Individual Assessment

Each individual receives a report that reports their score against each trait, and maps their score to the corporate aggregate. This insight can lead to more training or development opportunities.
Team Assessment

You can select a team and compare the team’s profile to the aggregate corporate profile and identify significant gaps in the team’s composition.
The assessment generates reports that allow executives to identify individuals who possess critical innovation skills and traits and staff innovation teams.
What to do with the insight

With this insight, your company can improve:

– **Innovation projects**: Place the most capable people on innovation tasks
– **Recruiting**: hire people who possess more innovation traits
– **Training**: Improve the insights and skills of your existing workforce
– **Personnel Development**: Identify individual strengths and areas for development
– **Leadership Development**: Improve leadership development; understand how to lead innovators
Findings to Date

• Several traits stand out for two reasons:
  – First, they are important for good innovation and
  – Second, they are rare in corporate America

• Those traits include:
  – Beginner’s Mind
  – Creativity
  – Empathy
  – Future Oriented
  – Humility/Low Ego
Learn More

If you are interested in learning more about our research and the traits (and other indicators) we’ve uncovered, check out the white paper on our website entitled “Unusual Suspects”
Which will contribute more?

These radar charts represent the scores of two people in the same company. Which will contribute more to an innovation effort?
Conclusion

• Who you choose for an innovation project matters – a lot

• People are the most important component of an innovation activity
  – Engaged, creative people create better ideas
  – Disengaged, risk averse people will stymie or cripple innovation efforts

• Therefore, identifying and recruiting the best people creates a much greater chance of innovation success
Questions/Contact

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• The recording of today’s presentation, along with the PowerPoint slides, will be available shortly on our Career Resources web page:

http://www.mccombs.utexas.edu/Alumni/Career.aspx