

Deadlines Bring New Ideas to Life!



BY JILL MINKOFF

Deadlines help avoid the innovator syndromes of “Yesterday’s Idea is Old” and “A+ Paper” which result in a continual improvement cycle that never gets to implementation. Deadlines focus innovators on implementation.

MANDATORY AND enforced deadlines provide boundaries that help bring new ideas to life. Without deadlines, it is possible an innovator will get stuck in a particular aspect of the innovation process. Without deadlines, the probable outcome of an innovation process may be death of the process and, subsequently, of the innovation.

As Project InCiTE (<http://www.projectincite.blogspot.com>) was being designed, deadlines for specific aspects of its activities were identified. Due dates were set with the knowledge that Fellows and coaches would need to be at particular points of achievement by certain points in time in order to reach their ultimate goals.

Let’s use a metaphor of sports or games to help understand this. Imagine you are playing a sport or technology-based game. Your goal is to have the most points by the end of a specified period of time (the deadline). The minutes are counting down and now only seconds remain. Pay attention to what you are thinking, feeling, and doing as the clock approaches zero. Now imagine playing without a time limit (deadline). You might spend hours, months, or years trying every play possible, or you could even procrastinate, and the game may never end.

Many of our Project InCiTE Fellows wanted to pursue every possible play in order to find and design the best project imaginable. They found it most difficult to adhere to the deadlines imposed for idea generation and idea development. In turn, this kept them from the next phases of the innovation process (e.g., prototyping/piloting, evaluation, etc.). These Fellows wanted to find the next great idea or the slight change that would make the current idea better. When caught in this cycle, there is no end to the possibilities of improvement. Successful innovators either know when to stop within a stage of

the innovation process and move on to the next, or they are part of a process with imposed and maintained deadlines.

“Yesterday’s Idea is Old” Syndrome

For those having the greatest challenge moving forward in the process of innovation, it appeared that by the time something is fleshed out in a concept idea (or just before that), it no longer seemed creative, innovative, applicable, or exciting. Just at that point, a new idea would come to awareness that was exciting. And, this “Yesterday’s Idea Is Old” cycle would start again.

“A+ Paper” Syndrome

For others, the issue was the desire that each aspect of the innovation process was met with excellence—the A+ paper. Similar to the “Yesterday’s Idea Is Old” cycle, the “A+ Paper” cycle is one of constant improvement or, at times, the inability to even begin because of a sense of ambiguity of what is needed or wanted. The operating motto for this type of person could be: “You need to give yourself plenty of time to do it well.” Recently the concept of “PTS: Permission to Suck” (<http://www.permissiontosuck.net>) has been used as an antidote for this dilemma.

The innovation training from SIT (Systematic Inventive Thinking) (<http://www.sitsite.com>) included an interesting experience. Fellows were placed into teams and asked to develop a creative idea/solution to a given need/problem. The teams had ten minutes to generate an idea/solution. Initial thoughts and feelings included: “We’re anxious that we can’t do this as a team that quickly.” Proven wrong, because they were able to accomplish the task, the SIT facilitators then assigned a new task with only five minutes in which to achieve it. The ideas generated in the shorter round were generally better than the first. Deadlines played a strong role in accomplishment.

For Project InCiTE Fellows, imposed deadlines (along with the reinforcement of these deadlines from their coaches), helped the Fellows to focus their attention on the task at hand and the outputs required for each stage of project development. Deadlines help as an impetus for focusing on the task at hand as well as for moving forward with other aspects of the work.

Note: In a recent game-play experience provided by Global Kids (<http://globalkids.org>), the philosophy and cycle of “1) Try, 2) Expect to Fail, 3) Reassess Strategy, and 4) Try Again” was demonstrated as innate and habitual in the world of online game play. Perhaps our future generations of innovators



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(those spending hours in the worlds of technology-based game play) will be more adept at accepting (whether or not they understand) the value of deadlines to enforce movement within this cycle. ■

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