

Book Review | By Dr. M Rashid Khan

Conquering Innovation Fatigue: Overcoming The Barriers To Personal And Corporate Success

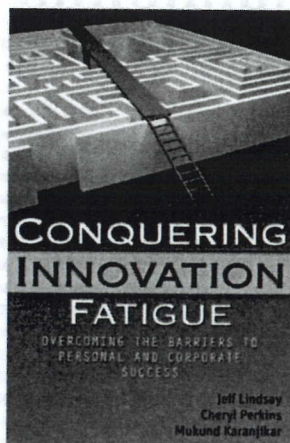
By Jeffrey Lindsay, Cheryl A. Perkins, and Mukund Karanjikar
Wiley, ISBN-10: 0470460075

Introduction

This well-written book by Dr. Jeffrey Lindsay, Director of Solution Development at Innovationedge, Cheryl Perkins, founder and President of Innovationedge, and Dr. Mukund Karanjikar, a consultant, reveal nine major “fatigue factors” that can block the path to innovation success. They also recommended solutions to energize innovation. Original advances in innovation practices and new case studies were applied to guide users in conquering innovation fatigue.

Innovation fatigue has been experienced by nearly all organizations in one way or another, and some were successful in overcoming the fatigue. For example, Scottish Higher Education in 1998 acknowledged that schools were suffering what they called “innovation fatigue” factors and took appropriate actions to address the issues. The result of addressing the fatigue was that Scotland led Europe with high-speed broadband networks allowing interactive multimedia links among higher education institutions in various regions.¹

The authors highlight the fact that the road to innovation fatigue is paved with good intentions embodied in laws, regulations, and even corporate policies. Therefore, organizational leaders must be aware of unintended consequences that may follow from their good intentions that end up “killing innovation.” My preferred view is that innovation happens easily when we deal with our real needs and passions solving a practical problem and seeking a solution that yet does not exist.^{2,3} Much talk about championing innovation is not always effective in all cases. The fatigue in internal innovation process could have been the positive forces for organizations to look into new ideas to overcome the barriers of innovation. “Open innovation” or “challenged-based innovation,” which created dramatic changes in many companies and businesses, are in a way fighting the fatigue of innovation experienced by many. As an example, P&G is one of many companies who embraced the concepts of open innovation. Others discovered “challenged based



innovation” as a radical way to solve difficult problems.

The three major fatigue factors identified in the book can be simplified by the three Ps in this reviewer’s opinion. These three Ps are People, Process (Organization Culture/Strategy) and Public (External Sources).

People factors relate to personal flaws of individual inventors. The book also challenges the notion that

only the gifted genius has the monopoly on significant innovations. People fatigue means that the way people act is based on their perceptions. For example, theft of IP can result from individual greed. Excessive demand and expectation from inventors can block the innovation process. Arrogance and too much demand from the internal corporate innovators can also serve as a fatigue factor:

1. Idea theft, lack of trust: Theft of invention and exploitation of inventors.
2. Innovator deficiencies including unreasonable expectations, impatience and unhealthy pride. Systematic flaw in understanding the innovation process.

The “Not Invented Here” (NIH) syndrome: Arrogance and excessive pride can shutdown opportunities. A lot of innovation fatigue can be overcome in relatively small steps. Would-be innovators face some very dangerous streets that must be crossed, and steps can be dangerous. Months of progress can be erased when an innovator is hit by “Don’t Understand Innovation” (DUI) syndrome with a momentary exposure to an “innovation fatigue” event. Theft of an invention, corporate NIH syndrome, painful process with IP processes or regulations, and other factors can stand in the way of success.

The “Black Hole” of the patent office was identified as a source of people fatigue. When patents are not protected in a cost-effective, proactive and timely manner, the innovators are discouraged. The example cited in the book was not only a unique case for Boise, Idaho, where HP computer employees faced a wall of fatigue because the changes in which the patents were managed in a centralized command and control manner, but the situation is relevant in many organizations around the world.

1. Wojtas, Olga, *Innovation Fatigue*, Published on 29 December 1995, www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storyCode=965376§ioncode=26 (Extracted on Dec. 8, 2009).

2. Khan, M. Rashid, *Innovation, Intellectual Properties for Business Development*, ISBN13 (TP) 978-1-4363-4778-5, www2.xlibris.com/books/webimages/wd/48328/book.htm.

3. Khan, M. Rashid, www.triz-journal.com/archives/2005/01/02.pdf.

Process or Organizational Factors

Major fatigue factors identified in the area of process include: (a) Breaking the will to share because of loss of trust in the company process (loss of trust); (b) Flaws in decision-making and vision are also fatigues related to open innovation. These fatigue factors are not only reflections of human nature, but a reflection of a culture that prevails in many corporations, or even government. This includes organizational strategy and culture.

These fatigues arise from strategies, policies and cultures in an organization. Poor decision making process, weak Performance Management Process (PMP), weak incentives, stricter or matrices in valuating opportunities contribute to the fatigue factors. Large corporations can pose a huge barrier to creativity to individuals who “think differently” from the prevailing corporate cultures. Immigrants and minorities can be categorized in this class, despite lip service by the management on diversity. The authors categorized these factors into the following categories:

1. Breaking the will to share and loss of trust;
2. Flaws in decision making and vision—means failure to engage creative people into decision; and
3. Fatigues related to open innovation—corporate barriers to external innovation and collaboration.

Public (External) Fatigue sources include the Laws and Regulations:

1. Patent pains and barriers to IP protection;
2. Regulatory pain and challenges in policy regulations, and law; and
3. University industry barriers.

Although the barriers of innovation were intended to be external sources and external regulators outside the area of scope or organizations, many of the barriers can be organizational as well—such as patent pain. In many companies, patent processing is not only slowed by the patent office backlog, but also because Lawyers, rather than IP professionals, with little experience in innovation and product development are running the patenting business, a point the authors failed to include. The authors highlight that conquering innovation fatigue is vital in avoiding many pitfalls.

The book identifies the factors that lead to innovation fatigue in many organizations, and recommend cost-effective solutions including guidance on intellectual assets, dealing with disruptive innovation, and driving innovation using the “Horn of Innovation” and “Circuit of Innovation” models. An interesting view of DaVinci, as an engine of open innovation was presented. Throughout the book, a unique aspect is exploring the voyage of innovators, including corporate employees

and entrepreneurs, at the often overlooked personal level using the image of immigrants in a strange land to identify barriers and solutions.

Concluding Remarks

To achieve innovation success in the corporations or organizations, one needs to better understand the nine major innovation fatigue factors and their variations. Once these factors are understood, innovation managers can then work around the factors identified and discover energizing factors that can overcome the fatigue.

Innovation can be risky and often very hard work, even when one knows what is expected. Although, navigating the path of innovation blindly without a map or GPS, or without knowing the risks and what to look for can cause a painful DUI encounter that can erase all those steps previously taken. Sometimes, small steps are no longer appropriate, and one needs to take a “giant leap forward,” to carry over an accident-prone crossing. The book can be a guide in taking that giant leap forward.

According to the authors, the factors that drive some companies to become great can also become a barrier to innovation. Large companies tend to implement complex processes with good intentions and grow a culture of barriers that impede innovation, often without knowing. Changing culture can be a very painful experience. The authors correctly cite that the first step must be to recognize that a problem exist in a corporate innovation process.

Many innovative leaders recognized the fact that problems may have crept into their innovation process and many have been visionary enough to implement a major cultural shift. Shifting the culture and changing the behavior of the management and employees is not easy—and often requires some major stimulus for change. The U.S. success in space industry and science and technology was triggered by former soviet “Sputnik” challenges. Faced by crisis, many stagnant corporations around the world are in need of such a “Sputnik moment.” Rather than responding to crisis by facing hard reality, many resorted to cost cutting, firing very innovative people that would otherwise reinvigorate the engine of growth by cultivating innovation into the corporate culture. In the world economy today, organizations cannot afford not to innovate. Conquering “innovation fatigue” is an urgent and serious imperative in today’s world and the book highlights some very useful insights toward the cause. ■

The view expressed is that of the author, Dr. Rashid Khan, and does not reflect that of his employer.

About the reviewer: Dr. M Rashid Khan is Leader, Corporate Innovation at Saudi Aramco, e-mail: Rashid.khan.1@aramco.com