



# Innovation = Imagination + Integration

**Innovation shouldn't scare business folks – this is an equation you can master**

By [Kim Brauer](#), [SDNN](#)

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“If you don't have highly creative people in positions of real authority, you won't get innovation,” write Darrell Rigby, Kara Gruver, and James Allen in their Harvard Business Review (HBR) article [Innovation in Turbulent Times](#).

Their main argument? That creative people “typically imagine a whole picture and see every innovation as a part that has to fit that whole. They are less concerned with perfecting any one component than with creating a brand statement that enhances the entire customer experience.”

In other words, creative people are not only skilled at imagining innovation, but also at integrating it into their organizations.

The creative generation of ideas is where many discussions around innovation begin and end. Many of the metaphors we use for creative inspiration are used to describe innovation as well - lightning strikes, a light bulb switches on, the muse whispers in an ear tuned to her frequency. In each of these metaphors, innovation happens capriciously at best, and most often to other “creative” people.

If you don't typically think of yourself as creative, and you don't have The Muse on speed dial yet, can you still become an innovator?

“Yes,” says Holly Green, definitively.

Green [writes about innovation regularly](#), drawing on over 20 years of executive-level and operations experience in FORTUNE 100, entrepreneurial, and management consulting organizations - as CEO of The Human Factor, Inc., former president of The Ken Blanchard Companies, and a former senior executive of The Coca-Cola Company. This fall, she'll be teaching critical leadership skills in the [Professional Certificate in Core Leadership & Management](#) program at SDSU's College of Extended Studies.

“The brain has an amazing capacity to consider things differently,” she says. “Our problem today is that we're running so fast that we never pause to do that. We'd rather do it over than do it right. The key is to learn some of the triggers for your brain, and to use those. Give it five seconds, and you can be innovative. It's about asking key questions: What if someone else has different data? What if we look at this from a different perspective? What would our competitor do? What do our employees think is the most important thing to change?”

“It’s about considering different angles, changing your perspective, and challenging your own assumptions and your own belief structures. These are fairly simple approaches; the problem is that everything in the world around us beats that out of us today. The more successful we are, the more we get stuck doing the same things that helped make us successful.”

If your ability to generate innovative ideas can be improved with practice, what about that crucial second step?

The common recipe for increasing innovation predominantly focuses on generating and vetting new ideas,” write authors James Cash, Michael Earl, and Robert Morison in their HBR article [\*Teaming Up to Crack Innovation and Enterprise Integration\*](#).

“But that’s not the problem: Large corporations generate plenty of ideas. Too many, in fact. They well up everywhere-in interactions with customers, working with business partners, fixing operational glitches. The problem is harvesting them, allocating the company’s vast resources to them, and managing their development in a coordinated and efficient way.”

“Innovation is more than brainstorming or idea generation,” Holly Green agrees. “To be truly innovative, you have to *do* something different. And for businesses, whatever it is you do must have value for at least one of your stakeholder groups - employees, customers, suppliers, partners, etc.”

Green will address the broader challenge of integrating innovative ideas in her courses in far more detail than can be covered in a brief article; you can find more information online at the [\*Core Leadership and Management\*](#) program page.

*Kim Brauer writes for SDNN and works for the SDSU School of Extended Studies.*