

Factors for innovator success



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Innovators

An innovator is known as an individual who comes up with an idea, practice or object that has not previously been explored (*Encyclopedia of small business* 2017, p. ^pp.). This essay will discuss the essential characteristics of an innovator through examples of Michael Dunworth and Joe Gebbia.

First, one of the contributing factors towards the success of outstanding innovators is courage. This idea can be shown through Michael Dunworth, the co-founder and CEO of Wyre, the leading platform in using blockchain technology to complete cross-border transactions (Mitchell 2018).

Dunworth's fearless attitude can be described through his advice to his fellow innovators: " Get out of your comfort zone, plan for the worst and hope for the best" (Aussie Founders Network 2018, p. 39). Indeed, being an innovator requires a tremendous amount of courage to overcome fears of risks to keep moving and pursuing the desired goals. From my perspective, being courageous also means not being afraid of making mistakes. Dunworth embraces failures through his innovation style: " I find inspiration in exploring how we can fail, every single way" (Aussie Founders Network 2018, p. 39). It is through making mistakes that innovators can generate new ideas and figure out which method can be used (Q1). This is also the message that Sir Ken Robinson (2006) and David Kelley (2012) wanted to deliver through their TED talks: innovators can effectively learn from mistakes and making mistakes is a way to encourage your creative confidence (Q3).

Secondly, persistence plays a pivotal role in contributing to an innovator's success. Dunworth described his struggle in funding Wyre at the early

stages: “ With my seed round in 2014, I sent 2, 300 cold emails, I got 800 replies, that turned into 100 calls, which was 25 meetings and two cheques” (Aussie Founders Network 2018, p. 39). It took Dunworth tremendous persistence to build Wyre from a small start-up to an 18-million-USD-networth company. This indicates that persistence is the key for all innovators to make positive impacts on society. High level of persistence and resilience shows that the innovators truly believe in themselves and the unique value of the products. Persistence can also create motivation as the results start to show along the way. (Q1).

Thirdly, being an innovator requires creativity and the ability to think divergently. An example is Joe Gebbia, the co-founder and CFO of Airbnb, one of the most rapidly growing peer-to-peer accommodation-sharing platforms (Cheng & Foley 2019, p. ^pp.). Airbnb’s creativity peaked when they were looking for ways to fund the business at the early stages. Before the 2008 Obama-McCain Election, he had a brilliant idea: to design and sell limited edition cereal boxes and call them Obama O’s & Captain McCain. In the end, he managed to fund \$30, 000 for the company. Through this example, we can see the importance of creativity in innovation.

Implementing diverse ways of thinking helps innovators see more possibilities and solutions (Q1). Divergent thinking is especially important in the Ideating phase, when we apply myriad techniques like ‘ twist what exist’ or ‘ worst possible idea’ to see from different perspectives, steer out of traditional routes and come up with unconventional solutions. (Q3)

Finally, the ability to empathize is a powerful tool for innovators. With Airbnb, Gebbia engaged an empathizing method called “ dogfooding”, which is “

experiencing your own products so that you understand from the inside out what you are providing for the customers” (Gebbia 2017). During 2009, Airbnb was not gaining much traction in New York. Thus, Gebbia and his co-founder travelled all the way there and booked spaces with 24 hosts. They figured out that hosts were not doing a great job of presenting their listings. Therefore, a photographing program was carried out. This approach led to three times as many bookings, and by the end of the month, Airbnb’s revenue in the city had doubled (Brown 2015). This is similar to the success of Gordon’s gin after redesigning the bottle using users’ feedback that Lisa Kennewell (2019) presented in her lecture (Q3). These examples indicate that empathizing is a contributing factor towards innovators’ success as it provides them with materials that they can reflect on to delve into the problem and come up with effective solutions. (Q1). This Empathizing phase is the first and foundation step of the 5-step process of design thinking (Wahlstrom 2018), which helps the innovators to truly understand the customers’ need before proceeding (Q3).

Personally, I feel more inspired by Joe Gebbia. Gebbia has a very interesting insight into empathy. To his perspective, empathizing does not mean noting down every feature request or every complaint that a customer has and just transmitting that into a one-to-one match. Instead, innovators should combine the customers’ need with their own creativity and imagination of a designer to create a new idea. This is what he called “enlightened empathy” (Gebbia 2017). I completely agree with this idea as over-empathizing can make innovators fall into empathy traps such as biased empathy or conflicts

in the design. It is crucial to understand that empathizing only assists the innovators with seeing the problems, not the final solution. (Q2)

Through this assessment, I gained more insight into the challenges that innovators have to face in the real business world and how they use their strengths to overcome their problems. I understand the importance of empathy in design thinking and the consequences of abusing it. Moreover, I also know what it takes to be a successful innovator and feel motivated to work towards my future goals. (Q4)

Reference List

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