

# Workshops on Creativity, Innovation, Design Thinking & Experience Design

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## Introduction

The continued and very visible success of corporations such as Apple in markets dominated by well-entrenched giants such as Microsoft, who have access to far greater resources, compels one to reflect on why some corporations are at best merely successful while others such as Apple can generate, and more importantly, are able to sustain, a fanatically committed following. This is especially crucial during a global financial downturn when businesses are scrambling to find every means of retaining and possibly, even growing their customer and client base. It transpires that corporations such as Apple excel at least in three critical areas:

- Innovation
- Design
- (Customer) Experience

Most critically, such corporations carefully and purposefully hitch these strengths to their business strategies. This is noteworthy because the marketplace is littered with organisations that either lack the capacity to innovate; have poorly executed their innovation vision; or worst of all, who given little thought to linking their innovation capabilities to business strategy.

These three areas: **Innovation**, **Design** and **Experience** are distinct but very closely interrelated, and it is by integrating and harnessing their combined power while seamlessly linking them to business strategy that Apple maintains market leadership.

While innovation, design, and experience deliver tremendous market-facing advantages, their application in organisations is not limited to market-oriented business functions such marketing, sales and support. Indeed, the standard-bearers in industry integrate innovation, design and experience into their overall organisational strategy, which means into practically every organisational function.

My different workshops help organisations - whether in manufacturing, service, retail, or any other business configuration, and including government and not-for-profit agencies - to learn how to integrate innovation, design and customer experience into their strategies, structures, systems and cultures.

## So what are these workshops about?

We know from research that the organisational environment plays an overwhelming role in determining whether individual employee creativity finds expression and is transformed into path-breaking innovations. The right policies, strategies, structures, and systems can ensure that innovation and design are formally institutionalised and sustained.

Research also has shown that creativity is a potential inherent in all (although frequently lying dormant and unrecognised) and the purpose of a creativity training program is to provide ways to develop and unleash that potential.

Innovation and Design, however, depend on higher-order learned skills. Well-tested techniques and methodologies enable individuals and teams to systematically and routinely generate innovations.

Since the subject is complex and layered, I offer a variety of modules and typically custom-tailor workshops to address specific organisational objectives. In particular, I design my workshops to match the requirements of specific managerial levels and functions - senior, middle and operational.

The following table provides an overview of the types of knowledge and skills pertaining to Innovation, Design and Customer Experience provided by my workshops and the varying emphases for different managerial levels.

Nature of knowledge and skills	Managerial level		
	Senior	Middle	Junior
Policies, Strategies, Structures, Systems, Processes	Knowledge	Appreciation	Appreciation
Understanding, nurturing, developing creative potential	Appreciation	Knowledge & Skills	Knowledge & Skills
Methodologies & Techniques	Appreciation	Knowledge & Skills	Knowledge & Skills

A specific workshop (or series of workshops) can be tuned to match the needs of the audience.

- Senior executives typically are interested in learning how to develop, monitor and sustain policies, strategies, and systems that will institutionalise a climate of innovation.
- Mid-level managers often directly oversee specific innovation initiatives, and can benefit from learning methodologies and techniques for generating innovations, in addition to understanding how to motivate and manage their charges for maximizing innovation success. They also to have an appreciation of policies, strategies and systems needed for insititutionalising innovation.

- Operational level managers and personnel usually are assigned primary responsibility for generating specific innovations. It is most critical to develop and enhance the creative potential of these individuals and train them in appropriate methodologies and techniques.

As an example, a workshop on **experience ecosystems design** focuses on methods for business teams to imagine, explore, invent, design, and test client-facing **experience ecosystems**, including prototype products and services, and the policies, processes and systems that support them.

A workshop on **developing personal creative resources** provides the knowledge and skills to enable participants to think and act more creatively and to work more creatively with others. Participants will learn to appreciate their creative abilities and to recognise and overcome obstacles to creative behaviour.

An **innovation techniques and methods** workshop will provide participants with tools and techniques to systematically and deliberately generate innovations on demand, individually or as teams.

A **senior executive** program will include discussions on the kinds of organisational strategies, structures and processes most conducive to generating market-leading innovations, including do's and don'ts for establishing a climate of innovation in organisational contexts.

## How can I use what I learn in the workshops?

The knowledge and skills acquired may be applied to a limitless variety of situations. Here are some examples:

- Develop organisational structures, processes and systems to promote and sustain innovation in your organisation
- Solve or resolve a technical or organisational problem/issue
- Develop or improve a new product/service/process
- Identify new uses/markets for an existing product/service
- Formulate a new organisational strategy
- Develop a brand name/identity for a new/existing product/service
- Develop/modify an organisational policy, e.g., employee retention or customer service
- Generate new perspectives and initiatives on some organisational issue, e.g., 'how to enhance employee retention' or 'how to reduce wastage'
- Develop an organisation mission/vision statement

## How are the workshops structured?

The format of a workshop will vary depending on the nature of the audience and specific workshop goals.

**Group Size.** For senior executives, group size, ideally, should not exceed 20 persons, with 10-15 being optimum. For other managerial and personnel levels, optimum group size is about 20-25 persons.

**Workshop length.** Introductory senior executive workshops can run from two to four hours or longer. Participants in these interactive sessions acquire knowledge and perspectives on policies, strategies, etc. essential for promoting and sustaining innovation. This session can be followed up with facilitated workshops where executives get down to actually developing policies, strategies and structures. Since this usually involves the generation and exploration of alternatives and building consensus (using the very methods that are intended to be institutionalised), the sessions could run from half a day to a full day. More than one such session may be needed in specific situations.

Workshops for mid-level managers could run from one to two days. Workshops for other managers and personnel typically require two to three full days.

**Process.** Leveraging one's innate creativity demands engaging the entire person and all of one's faculties, and not just the intellect, as is often the case with conventional education and training.

Consequently, the workshops for middle- and operational level managers are structured as a sequence of experiential, interactive, activity-driven sessions where concepts, techniques and processes are experienced, discussed, and practiced. Lecturing will be minimal.

*Exercises* and *games* are employed to generate awareness and build skills that will form the foundation of future creative and innovative thought and behavior. Research shows that learning of this sort is enhanced in a relaxed environment - therefore, the workshops are designed to be fun, engaging, and energizing.

## What are the intellectual foundations of the workshops?

I integrate the *Design Thinking* paradigm into my workshops for generating innovations and designs and delivering outstanding customer experience. Design Thinking involves an integration of critical, creative, and abductive thinking, but it is much more than that. Design Thinking is closely wedded to business strategy and draws on a rich array of techniques and perspectives that go well-beyond what organisations typically use to

develop, deliver and deploy products, processes, systems, strategies, and policies.

Among the more noteworthy research-based frameworks integral to my workshops are the following:

- Systems Thinking
- The 4P's of creativity
- The Osborne-Parnes Creative Problem Solving Methodology
- Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory

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### Dr. Murli Nagasundaram



Dr. Murli Nagasundaram is a consultant on creativity, innovation and design thinking in business, government, education and other sectors. He has a PhD in Management from the University of Georgia, Athens, USA, an MBA from the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Kolkata, and a Bachelor's of Engineering from the National Institute of Technology (NIT), Tiruchirapalli.

A former Information Technology professional, software entrepreneur, and business school professor, Dr. Murli has been training and facilitating business teams, conducting research, and teaching creativity and innovation for over two decades, in the USA and India. In the 1980's he helped design and develop VisionQuest, one of the world's first PC-based Group Decision Support/Electronic Brainstorming Systems, which was adopted by several Fortune 50 corporations. His research on creativity and innovation has been published in leading international academic journals. He has been trained and certified in the Osborne-Parnes Creative Problem Solving (CPS) Methodology at the Creative Problem Solving Institute in the USA.

Dr. Murli has trained his corporate clients (including Hewlett-Packard and Micron Technologies) in methods and strategies for generating business opportunities by developing breakthrough products, technologies, services and customer experiences that help them thrive in a competitive market. They also have acquired the means for generating creative solutions to business problems and for designing and implementing innovative business strategies, policies, processes and systems.

Dr. Murli's work with a diverse range of organisations is informed by his varied experiences - as a researcher, marketing executive, professor, trainer, systems analyst, facilitator, speaker, business process consultant and entrepreneur.

