Innovation in Freemasonry

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Introduction

We have been managing our Grand Lodge as if it were a business, but any business that requires that there will be no innovation is doomed to stagnation at best.

   Economist Joseph Schumpeter,[1] who contributed greatly to the study of innovation, argued that industries must incessantly revolutionize the economic structure from within, that is innovate with better or more effective processes and products.

Yet we require our WMs-elect to 'admit that it is not in the power of any man or body of men to make innovation in the Body of Masonry'.[2]

   Of course we have had innovation in Freemasonry and will continue to do so.
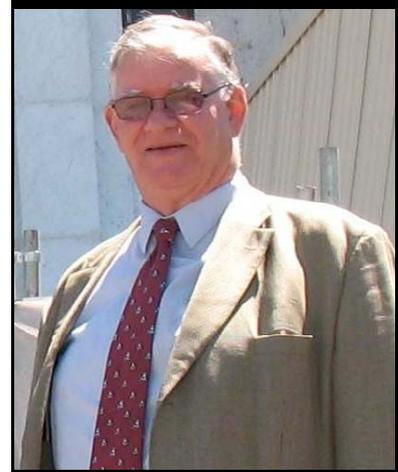
Objective

This paper discusses 'innovation', defined broadly as 'the process of change'. It is the intention to consider policy towards innovation and about the process of innovation, so as to gain some insight into how policy might be enhanced and innovation might be better achieved and managed.

Parties to Innovation

Change usually requires at least a proponent and a client or target group. The greatest single factor in bringing about change is the attitudes and actions of and between these two entities. The discussion on managing innovation is therefore partly a discussion with a sociological perspective. It is essential to define the roles each plays, for each to understand them and to know and respect the communication channels between them.

   There may be three or more identities involved – a proponent, a client and an approving authority and even an outside body with an interest. The entities may play different roles, for instance an idea may come from the Lodge Executive for implementation in their own Lodge in order to attract new members and require an approval, through the DGIW, by the Grand Lodge Executive. Or a new procedure may be suggested by the Grand Lodge Board of Management, to be approved by Grand Lodge Executive for implementation in Private Lodges.

Innovation, morale and consultation

In business, improved performances come about primarily through improved social and technological productivity, which depends largely on, and interacts with, morale and innovation. The role of morale is intertwined and often inseparable from innovation. Roethlisberger and Dickson[3] showed us that morale and productivity can be enhanced simply by seeking client participation and by experimentation. The most conservative person still wants to be consulted if any change is mooted. It is certain that morale is usually enhanced even by simply adopting an attitude towards innovation through participation.

   While innovation is not always 'good', it cannot be claimed that we have an excellent record for supporting it. This may be due partly to a lack of real emphasis on the need for consultation or, alternatively, on the need for change. With burgeoning costs it is easy to see why Lodges and Grand Lodge may tend to isolate and restrain expenditures, believing that consultation and change will add to costs, at least to administrative costs. However, in today's electronic age it is difficult to believe that consultation with Lodges will add much to costs and it is not at all necessary that innovative change will add to costs.

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[1] 'American Institutions and Economic Progress', 1983, *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Staatswissenschaft.*

[2] Installation Ritual.

[3] The Hawthorne Experiments.

Grand Lodge is an autocracy and it may be that there is a perception that policy is, or needs to be, dominated by Grand Lodge rather than an open attitude that inspires the Lodges to suggest the roles each might like to play. If such a dominant role is adopted by, or expected from, Grand Lodge, then a more aggressive innovative position could also be expected from it.

However Grand Lodge has only moral authority, although this is a strong motivation. It only has reserve powers (removal of a charter) and the ability to reward only with status recognition. Therefore, it often arises that there is a passive attitude by Grand Lodge to co-operation by the Lodges. We tend to regulate the Lodges and expect them to co-operate, often with no real confidence that they will do so. Therefore we have little real alternative but for Lodges to take a more active role in generating change and for this to be acceptable policy.

If productivity, morale and efficiency can be improved through consultation and innovation, our first aim should be to seek to find out what different things the Private Lodges are doing and want to do.

Conservatism

Innovation is not primarily about research, however, but also about the implementation of ideas into our practices. Therefore the policies relating to research and consultation are only a part of the broad picture of innovative change. Of possibly greater importance are the relatively conservative attitudes towards innovation adopted by many Masons of all rank and office. This cannot be denied and needs to be understood.

Conservatism is a social philosophy that promotes the maintenance of traditional institutions, and supports, at the most, minimal and gradual change in society. Some conservatives seek to preserve things as they are, emphasizing stability and continuity, while others oppose modernism and seek a return to the way things were.[4]

Progressives or liberals win victories through rational debate. But after a victory is won, liberals tend to drop the issue and move along.[5] Conservatism, by its very nature, does not give up. In addition, most liberals tend to be lone crusaders but conservatives seek supporting company.

Conservative people may exhibit one or more of the following psychological factors:
- Tolerance for inequality, often expressed as 'rewarding merit' or dressed as Charity;
- Dogmatism and intolerance of ambiguity, often expressed as Duty and dressed as Truth; and
- Fear of instability, uncertainty avoidance and the need for quick resolution, often expressed as tradition.

Conservatives believe the world is stable or at least in equilibrium and have difficulty recognizing that the world is at least partially imbalanced and is constantly evolving.

These attitudes are normal human behaviour, not wrong or symptoms of psychiatric illness, and need to be catered for by looking for ways in which these attitudes do not become destructive.

It is not acceptable to brand liberals as 'rocking-the-boat' nor is it acceptable for conservatives to be branded as 'part of the problem'. The most innovative and successful firm I know had an ambitious Chairman with great but often impossible ideas, and a Managing Director who could control him and understand him.

To some extent, what might be taken to be conservative policy is brought about by the Grand Lodge's duty to satisfy itself that the Craft is protected and practices are monitored or auditable—that they relate to the '*ancient landmarks*' however defined—and run no risk of lack of international recognition.

Although these responsibilities, which sometimes seem onerous, can cause resentment or delay, they should be regarded as part and parcel of the management of an innovative process, rather than official reluctance or bureaucratic obstruction.

Similarly, with this perception, many Lodge officers act conservatively, believing that this expresses their loyalty to 'the system', rather than acting out their own preferences and being seen to be 'stirring the pot', even if they do see mutual advantage in change.

Being conservative should not necessarily be seen as an expression of satisfaction with the current state of affairs. It may spring from a pessimistic fear of the possible unknown consequences of change – a fear that inspired leadership can easily overcome.

It cannot go un-noticed that the most innovative Lodges, for instance Sydney Lodge, are the happiest and the most successful.

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[4] McLean, Iain & McMillan, Alistair: 'Conservatism', *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics*, 3edn.
[5] Agre, Philip E: 'What Is Conservatism and What Is Wrong with It?', August 2004.

A sociological perspective

The actions and attitudes of the proponent for change or the client, rather than the nature of the change itself, is often the reason why innovation falters or fails. An innovation is not 'good' simply because the proponent thinks it so. Neither is it good simply because it is initially accepted by the client.

There are many innovative changes which have been successful at the time, but have later been regarded as a backward step or had a very limited life, sometimes leading to client resistance to change in general. Similarly there are many instances of really good ideas never being implemented for puzzling reasons.

What, then, makes innovation a success? What is the environment which breeds successful innovation? How do we manage our innovation processes?

When the noted sociologist Margaret Mead, a student of Boas, first documented her 'Theory of Cultural Relativity',[6] she provided a fairly clear framework within which innovative change could be managed to gain most acceptances and therefore be most efficient.

She chose an anthropological setting for her case studies, presumably because she could demonstrate her theory in the most dramatic and interesting way. She first gave many examples of the disastrous and unintended social consequences brought about by well-meaning proponents for change, who did not understand the cultural settings in which these changes were implemented. Innovations which are highly acceptable in our culture can be damning in another culture, such as banning cannibalism in West Africa, which created intensified social problems such as drunkenness, lawlessness and marital failure because the British did not understand or value the traditional cultural mores of the African people in that area.

Her vivid examples clearly showed that a clear understanding of the cultural setting is essential for successful innovation.

Rule 1 – Test that the cultural setting for change is favourable

She then synthesized a series of practical guide-lines to assess how proponents for change might analyse and implement their intentions, based, in the first instance, on gaining a clear understanding of the relative differences between inter-acting cultural structures.

Today, however, we work in pluralist or multi-cultural societies in which it is more difficult to establish the relative cultural settings between the proponent for change and the recipient.

It is always more difficult to define your own cultural setting than anyone else's. Our Masonic culture nevertheless has some definite characteristics: we are male, ageing, fundamentally religious or at least monotheistic, racially tolerant, free, loyal, literate, computer-literate, and not in the lowest income brackets.

In Australia we are predominantly white Protestant Caucasians, but this is changing. We have and are continuing to acquire some skills in managing voluntary groups, as well as training our memories, and our ability to make friends and understand others. We are social people, and volunteers, with a high degree of awareness of the need for public service and some degree of spiritual awareness.

However, our cultural profile cannot easily be described in tribal terms but needs to be identified through industrial cultures and social grouping. The work of Homans and Whyte[7] with street gangs in New York, or the work of Schein,[8] can give us some insights into how leadership patterns of different types emerge and how they influence committee cohesion and productivity. Whyte's concepts of human behaviour in Committees, if applied in our Masonic structure, might well improve their productivity.

More particularly we have been brought up in an industrial age with attitudes to management more akin to those 'social man' theories described by Mayo,[9] which emphasized that people are more responsive to the social attitudes of their peer group than to any management economic or intrinsic incentives (or coercion). Given that Grand Lodge has only moral authority, even though that is substantial, then we have little alternative but to work with Mayo's concepts. Our organization needs to work with the attitudes of our Lodges rather than seek to impose changes from the Centre.

Identifying cultural attributes has also been made more difficult because sociological scientists seem to have forgotten the industrial beginnings and retreated into academia.

People like Whyte,[10] a disciple of Homan's[11] theories of inter-personal relations, who established a

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6   Mead, Margaret: *Cultural Patterns and Technical Change*, Greenwood Press [1953] 1985, ISBN 0313248397.
7   Whyte, William Foote: *Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum*, University of Chicago Press, ISBN 0-226-89545-9.
8   Schein, Edgar H: '*Organizational Psychology*', Foundation of Modern Psychology Series, Library of Congress.
9   Mayo, E: 'The Social Problems of an Industrial civilization', Boston Harvard Grad School of Business 1945.
10 Whyte, William Foote: '*Organizational behavior theories and practice*'.
11 See G C Homans '*The Human Group*'.

monumental reputation as an industrial practitioner in the United States, are difficult to find today, except in the more progressive marketing firms, particularly those who do their social research rather than rely on media know-how. Their success does not depend on the product but on their ability to understand, analyse, express and sculpt market perceptions of the product within the recourses and facilities available, including the media.

We need this expertise and we cannot afford to act like the Fuller Brush Man providing a 'hard sell' instead of seeking competent marketing advice relating to client perceptions and 'cultural' expectations or behaviour. It is not sufficient to attempt to implement new ideas that have been generated without client input and in isolation from client perceptions even though it is thought and claimed that they serve his interests.

Rule 2 – Implement change when other things are changing, as this shows adaptability

Margaret Mead clearly demonstrated the difference between rigid or conservative cultures and adaptive ones. Success can often depend on recognizing adaptive clients and understanding the reasons why adaptation is acceptable behaviour in their environment. The expressed wish for change is, of itself, not sufficient grounds for believing innovation will be successful. It is safer if there is other clear evidence of adaptation or change since innovation can be more successful when other changes are taking place.

Successful innovators spend their marketing dollar where there is clear historical evidence of adaptive effort, albeit in different fields.

In our world there is very clear evidence of change taking place. How often do we turn to our grand-children to learn how to use the latest gizmo-apps. Would our grandfathers have turned to us in the same way? How long would you expect your son to stand before you being lectured by rote in the same way we do it in Lodge? They would much prefer to Google it.

Rule 3 – Good Leadership moulds Opinion

Client perceptions are often not rigid, but are malleable. Acceptance is also a process with some degree of freedom for moulding. Group attitudes are not uniform but can vary greatly. They can be held mildly or strenuously. Attitudes change and can be changed. Effective leadership can mould attitudes to assist change.

Rule 4 – Adapt the Innovation not just the Client Culture

The innovations themselves are often as equally malleable as their target groups. The reasons for their acceptance can often be a surprise, leading to product moulding. In Western Samoa, Christian missionaries were accepted readily into an otherwise brittle culture, because of the high regard in which story tellers (Tusi Tala) are held. In Africa, churches have flourished where singing is a cultural attribute by adapting music and song.

Innovation can therefore be a two-way affair and it is more permanently and easily adopted if this process takes place.

There is then ample scope for improving our performance by looking at the lessons of history through the eyes of sociologists and marketing experts, provided we do not look on marketing experts as being purely concerned with advertising and fully employ their special professional skills.

A biological perspective

In biology the concept of cultural diversity is seen as essential to the long-term preservation of species. Theory has it that cultural diversity strengthens survival in the Darwinian evolutionary process.

Certainly Australian culture has been enriched in many ways by multi-ethnic immigration. So has our Masonic experience, where today men from many nations and ethnic backgrounds sit with us in Lodge and, with their differing Masonic experience, bring different viewpoints to our procedures.

Rule 5 – Look for opportunities where Cultural Diversity exists

There has been innovation in forming Lodges with an ethnic character which provide some opportunities for ritual with an ethnic background – for instance Lodge France or 'The Thistles'. It cannot be claimed that these initiatives have been vigorously supported by Grand Lodge, although some support has been forthcoming.

The participants in these initiatives are pleased to welcome visitors to display their cultural character and biology tells us that this is healthy behaviour. This mixing of cultural attitudes also provides an excellent environment for adaptability and change.

Means for Inspiring Ideas

Many organizations have tried different management patterns intended to create an innovative environment to sponsor creativeness and generate new ideas. There is, however, a general belief that the 'think tank' or 'task force' concepts are no more productive of ideas than the apparently chance inspiration that occurs to an individual on the golf course or in the bath.

If you visit Dhaka, in Bangladesh, take the time to go to the Art Museum, where you will see examples of Islamic art. This is confined to Koranic writing but the works you see there, in different scripts—Arabic, Sanskrit, etc—and in gold, silver, ebony, or carved in stone—are so outstandingly beautiful they will show that art does not need total freedom in order to find expression.

There is no timetable for ideas and no artificial environment will necessarily create them.

Rule 6 – Listen—Everyone can have ideas

The actual synectic moment or act is probably much less important than this debate implies. Of greater importance is a management attitude to set general but imprecise themes and to respond to all ideas in the knowledge that, as in a kaleidoscope, each individual and each idea may contribute to an emerging pattern which will eventually gain the symmetry and value to be worthy of development.

The Process of Implementation

Rule 7 – Start from existing practice

Whatever the catalyst for ideas, the research and development process will be less expensive and more acceptable if it is firmly based within existing practice. It is easier for a conservative person to accept minor gradual change than what he may perceive as wholesale disruption. Innovations which take completely new directions normally take much longer to introduce.

Most clients can more easily accept change if it is seen to be a normal and natural progression of their current work practice rather than a deviation which might disrupt their current activity momentum. Thus a number of small changes taken step-by-step are a safer innovative concept than a single large change achieving the same result.

Rule 8 – Design the System to accept Modular Change

In computing parlance, this leads to system design principles based on modular design, where each module interacts with others but can be progressively replaced to introduce innovative ideas with a minimum of disruption to the on-going process.

This form of system design also permits greater flexibility for customisation or adaptive change during the implementation process. Implementation techniques are therefore an integral part of the idea itself.

In our Masonic context this means that each Masonic unit should only be required to act within responsible guidelines for its inter-action with others but it should be perfectly free to innovate and change within this responsibility.

It also emphasizes the role of adequate market research at an early stage of development and its integration within the development process to support and guide the system design.

Rule 9 – Know when to hand over to others

The attitude of the inventor to implementation is often an important ingredient for success.

There are many examples of excellent technological ideas being derailed or delayed because their original proponents, who feel a natural pride in their work which they may have nurtured for some time, become suspicious of, cannot cope with, or actively interfere with the marketing and implementation process.

It can be very difficult for an inventor to step aside and give over control of the development and marketing to those with the ability and resources to do this effectively. For instance, look at the history of the Sarich engine or the electric bus or car. Larger scale industrial production involves a variety of motives, some not necessarily inductive for innovation.

Sometimes the difficulties are more with the proponent and it is by no means certain that the inventor is always the best person to carry the innovation into production. He might constantly feel that some more research is needed to make it better, such as with the ritual for 'The Thistles', or that he is not achieving proper financial reward or personal recognition. He may not understand the roles of trade unions, marketing, financiers, production experts or Grand Lodge officers. In industry, he may feel that continued funding support for research is easier to obtain than entering into the fearful and unprotected world of commerce and trade. He may carry emotional baggage such as extreme views about investors, banks, or other 'gamblers'.

As in any other management decision, picking the right person is essential to success.

The management of Masonry is the same: know your people and look for the right person to manage each phase of change.

Rule 10 – Research the Target Group

Implementation will proceed more smoothly if, amongst the target group, it is possible to identify those who will be most responsive to change. Many businesses use personality tests, like the Myer Briggs[12] Type Indicator, to help them understand how members of their staff, or their clients, will behave and react to situations. It identifies the extent to which people are intuitive or logical, introverted or extroverted, thinking or feeling, etc, and this can be related to the roles they play or should play in the organization, or how they will react to suggestions or innovations.

Rule 11 – Support the implementation

Competence and support is an essential ingredient in the innovation process. Innovation will fail if the ideas are not soundly tested or if they are implemented without competent installation, documentation, training and back-up support.

The permanent presence of the proponent, to support or underwrite the success of an innovative venture, and the knowledge that his reputation is integral with this support, goes a long way to provide confidence to the client that innovation will be successful. Good ideas are cheap and anyone can help the idea-generation process. The hard work is in the development, testing and support to the marketing process.

Rule 12 – Monitor—You may be surprised

Monitoring is usually neglected. It is easy to think that an innovation is 'successful' simply because it actually took place—the money was spent on time without over-run and the action intended is complete—and so no further attention need be given to it.

Yet monitoring the after-effects of change often leads to new ideas and often to surprises, as the results are seldom what they were originally expected to be.

'Success' does not necessarily mean that you obtained what you expected. It could mean that you received another challenge. Innovation is a continuing process.

One of the issues with monitoring is to measure the reality rather than the emotional response. Just as it is sometimes difficult to admit failure it can also be difficult for some to admit success when they were not participants or opposed the idea. However the emotional response is also part of the outcome and can point to deficiencies in the implementation process, and to better ways to manage it, so it too should be monitored.

The Role of Education

Masonic education is usually and singularly directed towards training officers for their roles in Lodge, which is part of a Mason's growth in responsibility and experience, in teaching him skills in managing and administering voluntary groups in society. It is the development of leadership, the ability to become a person others want to follow.[13] But it is much more than that, and vitally important to our future. Continued daily education is an ingredient in keeping a mind young. It is an old axiom that we start to grow old the day we stop learning. This is true of organizations as much as for individuals.

Professor Stephen Parker in his 2011 Don Aitkin Lecture at the University of Canberra[14] drew attention to his premise that it was not the Protestant work ethic that created the industrial revolution but the fact that the Protestant movement insisted that people learn to read, particularly the Bible, and that it was in fact *education* that created the industrial revolution.

In our context it is Masonic Education that is the key to innovation and our future progress.

Conclusion

The paper has attempted to describe the innovative process by concentrating on several issues of importance and suggests some rules to assist in implementing this process. Support for innovation is not a highlight of current Masonic policy, but the paper puts the view that support for research leading to innovative change is

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[12] Myers, Isabel Briggs with Peter B Myers: *Gifts Differing: Understanding Personality Type*, Davies-Black, Mountain View CA [1980] 1995, ISBN 0-89106-074-X.

[13] Nairn R J: 'Masonic Education, Training and Mentoring—What are the differences?' in *Harashim* #47, ANZMRC, July 2009.

[14] See University of Canberra website.

critically important for morale and growth.

Most Masonic institutions do not accept innovative change easily and need to better understand the process and its benefits. Innovation must be the core of our survival and Masonic Education is the engine for innovation and growth.

The need for better forms of consultation is stressed so that Lodges are encouraged to look for change within a broad scope. This improves understanding of the different roles each unit must play, leading to greater respect for these roles.

The role of marketing is also emphasized. Marketing firms with the required special skills to assist the innovative process are seldom active in Masonry. This may be due to the domination of growth-in-membership interests, with attitudes that are essential to, but sometimes run counter to, successful progress. Future efforts will require increasing understanding and use of marketing skills to improve our internal performance rather than just our membership drive.

The over-riding theme in this paper is the role of social research, education and understanding in promoting innovation and growth. Continued revitalization of Masonic Education will bring about a broader understanding of Masonry's objectives and activities and, dare we hope, a more fruitful contribution to our mission.