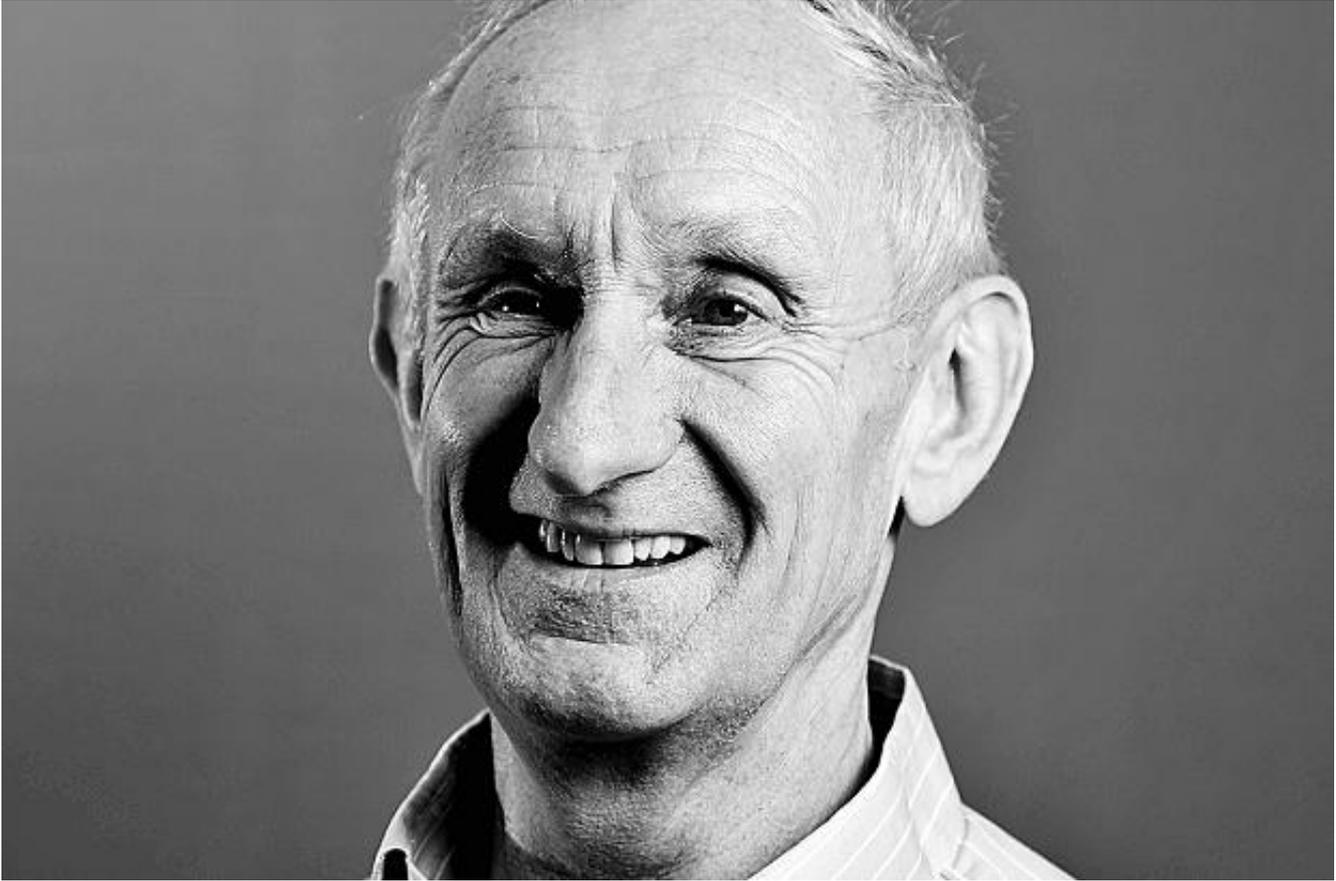


## Ten tips to being a successful innovator



**John Bessant** Tim Pestrige Photography

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### **John Bessant**

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## John Bessant gives his advice on making the most of innovation

Innovation matters. If we don't change what we offer the world (our products and services) and the ways we create and deliver them (our processes) then there's a good chance that we won't survive long in today's turbulent marketplace. The issue isn't about whether or not to innovate but how.

The good news is that we've learned a lot about this challenge; while innovation remains a risky business there are some key insights which can help stack the deck in your favour. Research shows that successful innovators:

### **1 Manage the process**

Innovation isn't like a cartoon moment where a light bulb flashes above someone's head. It's a journey, involving key steps to create value from ideas. Anyone can get lucky once, but in order to repeat the innovation trick you need a process to manage it; it doesn't have to be bureaucratic but it does have to be systematic.

## **2 Explore *all* the available options**

There are many different ways to innovate, from changing our offering, updating our processes, exploring new market contexts or even switching our underlying business model. Think of it like an innovation compass with the challenge being to make sure you explore the full 360 degrees of opportunity.

## **3 Have a strategy**

You need a clear roadmap of where and how innovation will take the business forward. It's easy to shout about how important innovation is, but you need to think through a strategy for dealing with it, then share that roadmap and make sure that people buy into it.

## **4 Heed the small stuff**

Although radical changes are the ones which hit the headlines, the underlying economic evidence is clear; most innovation is about doing what you do a little better. Incremental innovation of this kind adds up and has the additional advantage that it is much lower in risk, advancing slowly along well-known frontiers.

## **5 Mobilise the mainstream**

Many organisations have specialists who are given the responsibility of innovation. But every human being comes fitted with the standard equipment to enable them to be creative, find solutions to problems and come up with new ideas. Smart innovators mobilise this creativity across the entire organisation.

## **6 Make connections**

Innovation has always been a multi-player game rather than a solo act and these days the talk is all about "open innovation". Simply put, in a world rich in knowledge even the largest organisation has to recognise that "not all the smart people work for us". The game has shifted from one where knowledge creation and ownership was key, to one where managing knowledge flow is the critical ingredient. The good news for smaller businesses is that this levels the playing field; you don't have to have all the resources for innovation, as long as you know where they are and how to connect to them.

## **7 Build an innovative organisation**

Companies such as 3M and Google give their staff time and space to explore and experiment, trying to recreate the entrepreneurial spirit which sparked their businesses.

## **8 Co-create with users**

Learning from markets has always been important but customers aren't passive; they can be a rich source of ideas for innovation. Finding ways to tap into user innovation not only generates more diverse ideas but it also helps create a partnership with the marketplace, which improves adoption of innovation.

## **9 Accept failure**

Innovation is omelette territory and the odd broken egg is an important part. The key is to learn from failures and use the information to build and strengthen capability for the future.

## 10 Build dynamic capability

Innovation involves a moving target — constant changes in technologies, markets, competition, regulation and a host of other variables. Successful innovators build on the above principles but they also keep checking and updating their capabilities, learning new tricks and discarding old ones which no longer work.

**John Bessant is professor of innovation and entrepreneurship at the University of Exeter and co-author of *Strategic Innovation Management*. For more information and resources to help manage innovation go to [innovation-portal.info](http://innovation-portal.info)**

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