Innovation and imagination at work

Corporate Australia’s failure to recognise that people, not technology, drive innovation has resulted in Australia stagnating on the World Competitiveness Scoreboard, leading Australian corporate identity Sir Roderick Carnegie claimed at the launch of this new book in October. Sir Roderick said that Australia had to earn its right to a great future.

“Innovation is about people and enterprises,” Sir Roderick said. “Science and technology are merely tools that need to be applied effectively and developed selectively. The leading countries have recognised the importance of brains to their corporate survival, encouraging and importing talent if it is not readily available, because innovation is based on flexible, productive and focused workplace relationships. What really matters is the concerted efforts of people around their customers, their supply system, leadership, resources, and systems for innovation.”

Carolyn Barker, the editor of the new Management Today Series and National Director of the Australian Institute of Management (AIM), said the focus of innovation in Australia must be shifted to harness the creative energies of all the staff within organisations.

“The new millennium poses a new paradigm: innovate or perish,” she said. “But there is also a danger in change for change’s sake. In the rush to innovate, many companies focused on new technology, only to find this is no panacea. Successful organisations create a top to bottom culture of innovation. The single most important message coming from this ‘slice of life’ publication is that survival depends on bedding down innovation in all areas of the business. This means seeking input from staff to improve frontline operations, or building innovation into the organisation’s strategic planning.

Ms Barker said that there was a misconception that involving staff in these processes was too hard. But, “thinking about how to improve a business is something that can and should be a training priority”.

“Innovation must become a key strategic tool, supported by people committed to new ideas, if a business wants to thrive and survive in an increasingly competitive world,” Sir Roderick concluded. “In the end, the so-called soft or people issues and the ‘vision thing’ always make the difference.”

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