

# Will Innovation be the Silver Lining of 2020?

by Jay Connolly



The current global health crisis is going to leave everyone with lasting memories, and for the majority not the kind we would want. The human impact, and business impact, of the pandemic is significant and continues to grow.

One consequence that is becoming clear is the scale of innovation that is happening in response to the pandemic in service industries, such as in the legal sector. The swift onset and substantial impact of COVID-19 on businesses has been unprecedented, creating an enormous push for businesses to make changes for survival. This innovation survival response may not feel like innovation as we have known it in peacetime, however, it is still innovation. Wikipedia defines innovation as the development of new methods of production; the establishment of new management systems; both a process and an outcome.

In the legal industry, for example, in recent weeks we have seen trial lawyers experimenting with new technologies and a wave of innovation from the litigation support industry, as well as court processes going digital, to name a few. The UK courts have been forced to adapt in a bid to stay operational and although video calling and streaming is not new technology, until now there has not been much appetite for it. And, while in some sectors remote working is often highlighted and discussed, for others, we are only seeing the tip of the iceberg.

The Financial Times recently launched a legal hackathon focused on addressing the challenges and opportunities in the wake of COVID-19. Part of this rich seam of ideas is making service industry sectors more efficient and effective and it is receiving a great deal of attention. Clearly, there is a new level of activity and drive bringing innovation to all aspects of firm activity.



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So one key question is, how do we continue to harness this innovation drive in the future?

While the current health crisis will ultimately pass, a return to how things were before is unlikely. And, while the human and economic impact may be devastating, some changes, such as this renewed and invigorated innovation mindset, are likely to be the silver lining. So, what have we learned and how do we keep the innovation momentum?

Firms need to drive a culture that supports innovation in ways that make today's level of change, engagement and focus sustainable. Here are five learnings we should apply:

#### **1. Stop calling it 'innovation'**

The word is overused and can often have negative connotations. During the COVID-19 pandemic we have responded and built new solutions, adapted to the evolving circumstances, and worked to ensure our survival. The message was not to go and 'innovate'; it was about urgent, necessary change to enable businesses to continue to function. Ongoing change, development and enhanced approaches will be required for business to continue to survive over the coming months and years. Innovation needs to be replaced with a mindset of faster change and evolution.

#### **2. Make sure everything is on the table**

Innovation budgets and resources are often focused on visible and typically consumer or client facing activities. Improving processes or increasing efficiencies are often not the goal. Over recent months, organizations have needed agile thinking across all of their businesses processes in order to be able to function in this changed environment. Organizations need to remember that business survival requires change, innovation, in all areas, whether that's product or process. Everything needs to be on the table.

#### **3. Harness dissatisfaction**

Realizing what needs to be enhanced often does not require in-depth review or analysis. Rather than accepting what is not working organizations need

to embrace a culture that harnesses dissatisfactions and focuses on changing them. Dissatisfaction within organizations can provide powerful insights, so capture them and empower action.

#### **4. Clear space for change**

Change doesn't happen in a defined part of the organization and organizations need to make space for innovation to be a part of the daily routine. Creating space for innovative thinking acts as a stepping stone, reinforcing the need for change as a priority, business commitment, and helps to put frequent discussions around innovation on the agenda. Set time in the week for thinking about innovation and how you can mobilize and engage the organization to bring it to life.

#### **5. Track progress - success and experiments**

Organizations need to track their progress. What ideas are being created, what will they change, where and how? For the ideas that do advance, what is working, and most importantly what are we learning? If things do not go as expected, capture the insights and learnings and make these visible to the organization. Tracking progress will help organizations to build on past learnings and keep innovation high on the agenda.

Now is the time to make change. We are never too busy - we are just making other choices. Change and evolution, aka innovation, need to be part of everyone's mindset for the future and the current pandemic has highlighted how constantly embracing change is going to be required to survive in the new dynamic.





**Jay Connolly** is the Global Chief Talent Officer for Dentons. He advises the firm's leaders on opportunities to enhance all aspects of talent management including recruitment, performance management, diversity, training and development, and compensation and benefits programs for everyone at the firm. He has lived in the US, UK and Europe and built extensive experience working across the Middle East and Asia.