



## Making Innovation Contagious



Many organisations have a plethora of great ideas but are unable to turn these ideas into some form of value. Many great ideas do not catch on and the potential impact of related innovations is lost. The harsh reality is that it does not matter how good an idea is, there are a multitude of reasons why they cannot be made to stick.

Contagion depends on joining the **DOTS**; infection **D**uration, **O**pportunities for transmission, **T**ransmission probability and the **S**usceptibility of the exposed population. Stickiness and brand awareness help increase the duration of time to exploit an innovation and super-connectors can increase the opportunities and probability of transmission to a susceptible receptive target market.

Creating stories that people can relate to will increase dissemination and adoption of new potential innovations. Good stories stick – they are repeated and shared, and the more often this happens, the greater the possibility that an innovation will catch on.

The minimum requirement to communicate an idea begins with creating a narrative about its origins, its development and its value to users. People are interested in stories, and some stories resonate more than others. This is why the timing, communication channels and environment for raising awareness of an idea and creating a message can have a huge impact on levels of adoption and spread. Timed correctly, a story that resonates with people can ignite an explosion of demand, creating new market behaviours and long-term system change.

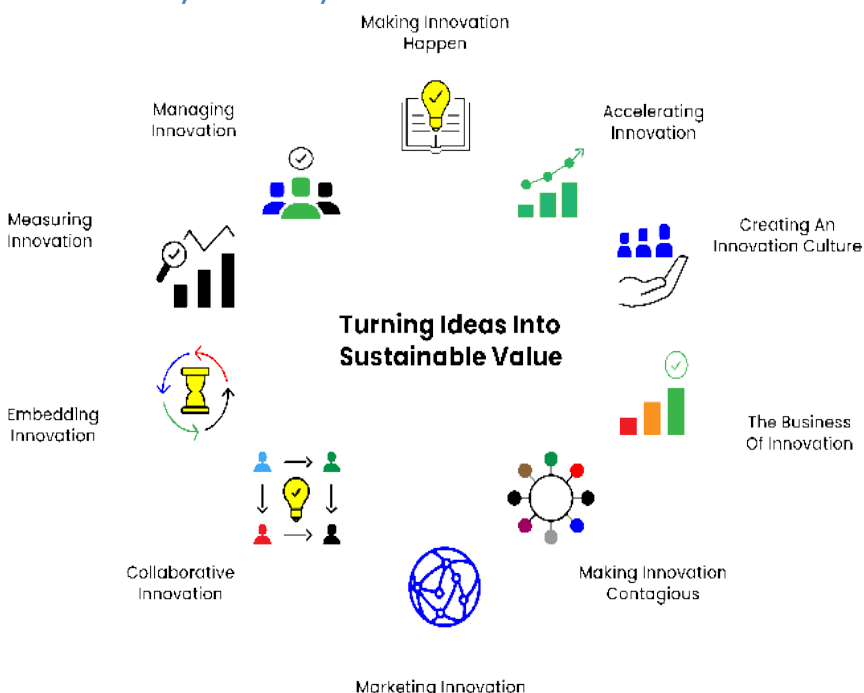
Brand awareness and innovation are often not linked. The sole focus is just the innovation itself. This means there is a danger that the “company becomes the product” or the “product becomes the company.” In both situations, innovative products and services will be slow to catch on if there is no distinction between the company and the value created by its product or service offer.

Many innovations fail because they do not have key influencers engaged. This does not just mean the top executives – it also means those who have “hard” and “soft” influence when it comes to making decisions in an organisation. Influence is linked to effective communication and creating engaging stories that will be repeated by super-connectors will create contagion.

**Making Innovation Contagious** is one of the 10 themes in the Making Innovation Happen (MIH) Framework. The MIH Framework provides a means of changing the way that people, teams and organisations look at innovation, innovation journeys, and how to systemically turn ideas into sustainable value.

**The 3 Innovation Enablers**

- **Creating stickiness**
- **Increasing brand awareness**
- **Identifying super-connectors**



*“To create one contagious movement, you often have to create many small movements first.”*  
Malcolm Gladwell (The Tipping Point)





## Innovation Enablers

### Creating stickiness

An idea needs to stick to have an impact – and stickiness can often be tweaked by changing the presentation and messaging around innovations. Finding a shared purpose helps create sustainable value, whatever its form, and increase the commitment to solve problems via innovative solutions. System reframing can provide new insights about how different innovations can remain relevant, increasing the duration of time available to create irreversible tipping points that make change stick.

Changing the messaging around innovations means understanding context via the interaction between people, process, technology and culture. And context changes over time. So the identification and creation of tipping points – those few and sometimes small things that when changed, change everything else – must also change over time.

### Increasing brand awareness

If no-one has heard of your organisation, they are unlikely to have heard about your offer. Increasing brand awareness moves your organisation away from the notion that “the company is the product,” ensuring that current and future innovations endure longer than one-off product and service offers. This attracts customers, investment and partnering opportunities. However, brand loyalty requires more than just making customers and suppliers aware of your brand. Your brand also needs to stand out from the crowd. Developing a stand-out purpose with an aligned offer can extend the shared purpose with customers and suppliers, providing a platform for long-term relationships.

### Identifying super-connectors

Some people are especially effective at spreading an innovative idea, often through storytelling. These ‘super-connectors’ have wide networks and are known across diverse markets. They have real influence – whether that be hard or soft – and must be identified and engaged.

Hard influencers have positions of relative power – usually executives, directors and managers. Soft influencers can exist anywhere in an organisation. Their influence comes from their personality, subject expertise, relevant knowledge and relationships. Soft influencers can accelerate or slow down the pace of change depending on whether they back change, are ambivalent, or resist change.

Finding and harnessing the influence of super-connected advocates and early adopters of innovation helps create contagion. They are the people with opportunities for transmission with increasing transmission probability. Early adopters with strong networks increase the rate, as well as the level, of contagion. High profile adopters with large numbers of followers can reach large audiences and act as lightning rods that deliver rapid growth.

### So What?

*Great ideas do not guarantee great innovations. Turning these ideas into sustainable value requires contagion. It is not about being first to market, or last, but having an idea that catches on. Thomas Edison wasn't the first or last person to invent the lightbulb – but he is the one whose innovation became contagious.*

*Changing the presentation and messaging of an innovation can cause an explosion of demand and new market behaviours. These changes do not need to be large – it may be that a series of incremental changes is what makes innovations stick. Understanding the context and timing of the changes and adapting them to the audience are key to making innovation contagious.*

*Looking at the interaction of people, process, technology and culture in a complex system and their role in innovation leads to an obvious conclusion: change that “sticks” needs tipping points – **those few and sometimes small things that when changed, change everything else**. The contagion challenge is to increase the success rate of turning concepts and ideas into products and services of value in a system that is influenced by a mix of organisational, market, and external factors.*

*Leveraging the influence of super-connectors through storytelling using a whole-systems lens can trigger tipping points and increase the chance that innovations will stick. And system reframing, part of the MIH Framework, helps create repeatable stories can make innovation contagious.*