

Innovation Inertia

Creativity and curiosity around customer interactions can fuel innovation efforts

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There are opportunities to innovate in every industry and internal function.

Most businesses believe innovation is a priority. For example, there are rental car organizations that don't own cars (Uber) and hotel organizations that don't own property (Airbnb). You may be thinking innovation is everywhere if you work for an organization such as Apple or Google, but perhaps not in your line of work.

Having worked in a broad range of industries—from financial services and healthcare to automotive and space—one of the things I learned is there are opportunities to innovate in every industry and internal function. And they don't have to be as game changing as a whole new business model to be interesting and helpful.

Take the bottled water industry, for example. In the United States, water is delivered to our homes practically for free via the tap.

And yet, the bottled water industry is expected to sustain a compounded annual growth rate of 13.5% globally from 2018 to 2026—the largest growth rate of any beverage category!

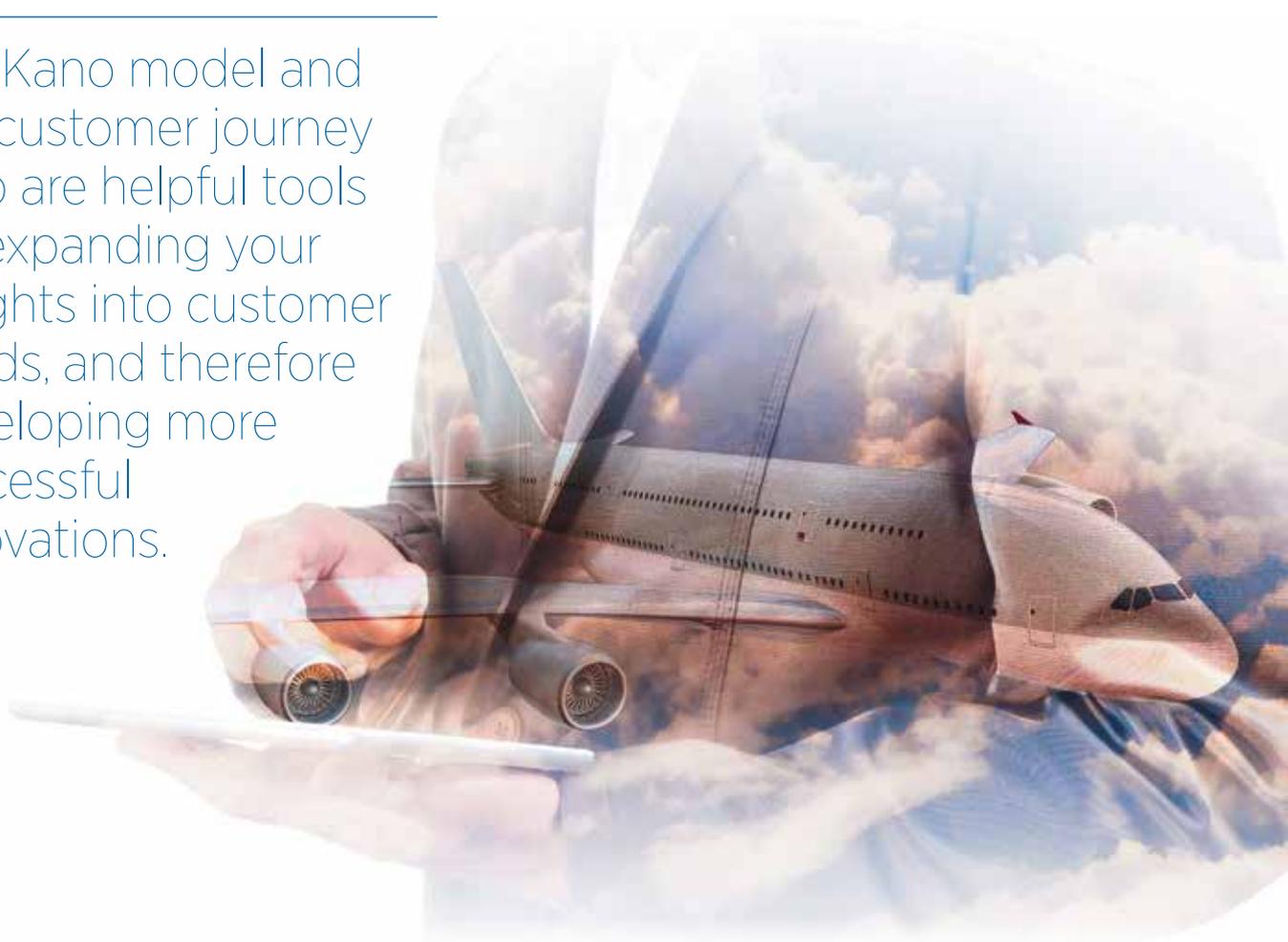
Designer water sells for \$15 a bottle in fancy restaurants, and there's an International Bottled Water Association that lobbies to protect the interests of the bottled water industry. In the furthest range of possibilities, there now is an edible, zero-waste water "bottle" made from an edible gelatinous encasement of seaweed extract.²

All of this, for water.

Maximize creative potential

As Albert Einstein once said, "I have no special talent. I am only passionately curious."³ Are you passionately curious about your innovation opportunities at work? Anyone who has spent time with young children knows that we are born curious about our world. You've probably heard that, on

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average, adults can think of 15 ideas while kindergarten students can think of 200.

George Land, an author and general systems scientist, administered a creativity test to 1,600 5-year-olds.⁴ The test, which he developed for NASA to identify innovative scientists and engineers, found that 98% of the children tested registered at a genius level on the creativity scale. Five years later, however, when Land re-administered the test to the now 10-year-olds, only 30% scored at the genius level of creativity. After another five years, the number dropped to just 12%. The same test, administered to more than 200,000 adults, found that only 2% registered at the genius level for creativity. Land concluded that noncreative thinking is learned.

One school of thought about why this may be is that, historically, the U.S. educational system has emphasized rote memorization and formulas instead of creativity. Being asked how to calculate the area of a triangle, for example, isn't an interesting creative problem. You're given the formula— $\frac{1}{2}$ base x height—and simply plug in the numbers over and over.

In a separate study, the CEO of a major publishing house was concerned about the lack of creativity among his editorial and marketing staff. He hired a group of high-priced psychologists to determine what differentiated creative employees from the others. After studying the staff for a year, the psychologists discovered only one difference

between the two groups: The creative people believed they were creative and the less-creative people believed they were not.⁵

Create the innovative environment that is best for you and move forward with confidence. Many leading philosophers and scientists claim to get their best ideas when walking, but surely you don't get your best ideas while answering emails and running between meetings.

Ask good questions and be open to a wide range of answers

How can you break into new ways of thinking? There are several interesting frameworks for asking questions that will broaden our perspective of any problem. The seven essential innovation questions were originally developed by innovation consultant and strategist Bill O'Connor:⁶

- 1. LOOK.** What aspects of the problem can be looked at in a new way or from a new perspective?
- 2. USE.** What facets of the problem can be used in a new way or for the first time?
- 3. MOVE.** What parts of the problem can be moved, changing the problem's position in time or space?
- 4. INTERCONNECT.** What can be connected that hasn't been connected before? If it's already connected, how can it be connected differently?

- 5. ALTER.** What about the design or performance can be changed or altered?
- 6. MAKE.** What can be made that is truly new?
- 7. IMAGINE.** What can be imagined that would create a great experience?



If there isn't a customer, there isn't a sale.

In the pursuit of innovation, the volume of ideas is critical because one idea can lead to another. Don't be concerned if some seem silly—just keep brainstorming. Challenge yourself and your colleagues to come up with something truly unusual. When you're solving a problem, the option always exists to go back to the most obvious solution, but that shouldn't be the only option on the table.

To be a successful innovator, you also must address your discomfort with uncertainty and fear of failure. No one wants to fail or try something that doesn't work, but if everything must be fully formed and perfect on the first try, you can't try anything that is innovative at all. During his baseball career, Reggie Jackson struck out more times than any batter in history—but he also broke almost every batting record.

Focus on customers

Innovation lore is full of wonderful products and services that customers have absolutely no interest in. If there isn't a customer, there isn't a sale. The

Kano model and the customer journey map are helpful tools for expanding your insights into customer needs, and therefore developing more successful innovations.

The Kano model is an easy-to-use framework for classifying and categorizing customer needs.⁷ It is useful for understanding the current state, as well as identifying new ideas and opportunities for improvement. It is most widely known for product innovation, but is equally applicable to services and processes. Let's apply the Kano model to the airline boarding process as an example (Figure 1):

- + **BASIC NEEDS** are minimum performance requirements. If they're absent or not functioning, it's a big problem. For airline boarding, customers want to board the plane and have their seats be available. Typically, basic needs aren't explicitly stated because they are presumed to be so obvious.
- + **SATISFIERS** are performance requirements that improve the experience when they're met and dissatisfy the customer when they aren't. For airline boarding, customers want to board the plane on time, quickly and efficiently, and have sufficient overhead storage. If you interview customers, this is the category of needs that usually is explicitly stated.

Figure 1 KANO MODEL FOR THE AIRLINE BOARDING PROCESS

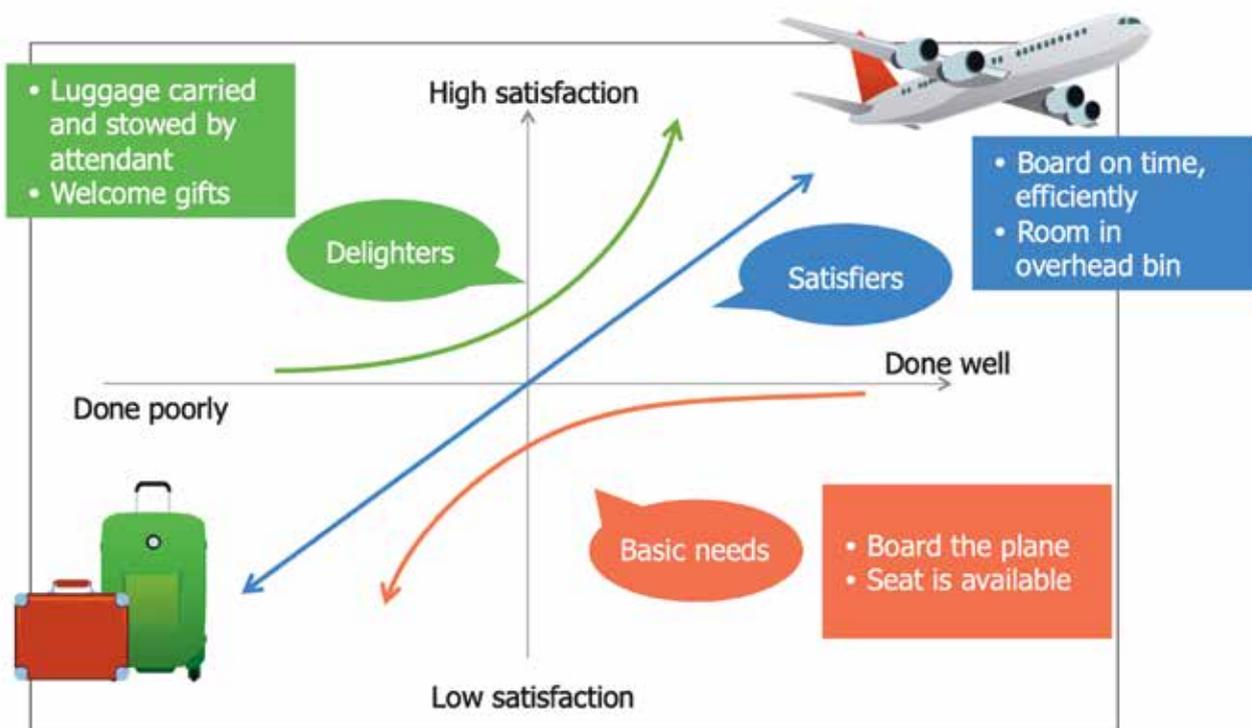


Figure 2 CUSTOMER JOURNEY MAP FOR A TRAVEL EXPERIENCE



+ DELIGHTERS are needs that excite the customer when filled but don't cause dissatisfaction when they're not filled because the customer wasn't expecting them in the first place. For example, I recently traveled on an Asian airline that carried my carry-on luggage, put it in the overhead bin for me and gave me some small gifts.

Take the time to understand the basic needs, satisfiers and delighters in your industry.

One of the best tools for generating a new understanding of customer needs is the customer journey map. Through words and pictures, the tool captures customers' actions, emotions, concerns and questions at key points in their interaction with processes or offerings.

A sample customer journey map is shown in Figure 2. It's from the viewpoint of a travel reservations organization that wants to understand how to improve its customer experience. The organization believes business will improve if customers not only find its website easy to use, but also if using its services makes the customers' whole travel experience more enjoyable and less stressful.

Every customer journey map begins by deciding on the scope of the investigation. Here, the phases of the travel process—the value streams—are listed across the top of Figure 2 in area one. The diagram depicts an end-to-end travel experience,

so the phases cover everything from planning and researching to writing reviews after the trip.

Area two shows the actions that customers take and, most importantly, the touchpoints they have with any product or service provider. As the example shows, the key is to capture the touchpoints in pictures, not just words. The visual component is crucial because you want the basic flow of the process and the touchpoints to be easily understood by anyone who looks at the map.

Area three—the customer thoughts section—is where customer journey maps differentiate themselves from all other process maps. Knowing what customers need and how they feel during each phase and touchpoint can help organizations deliver that exceptional experience.

By developing a customer journey map and analyzing related data, the travel services organization can explore ways to ensure concerns are addressed during the customer's touchpoints with the organization. This might include having liberal cancellation policies and making it easy to figure out how to use reward points or change plans. The organization also could consider ways to improve the overall travel experience. This way, customers will continue using its website not

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just for the ease of booking, but also because customers are confident they can trust the information they receive to make decisions about destinations, accommodations and attractions.

There's always room

Room for innovation exists in every step a customer takes with your business. From products as ubiquitous as water to services as familiar as flight, wherever there is opportunity for differentiation, there is space for innovation. The innovator must move forward boldly with new ideas and be confident that creativity is not a reserved resource for the privileged few.

As lean Six Sigma practitioners, we are expected to implement innovative solutions to the challenges faced by our businesses. By maximizing our own creative potential, being curious and asking good questions, we all can be more innovative in our project work. Leveraging customer-focused methods such as the Kano model and the customer journey map ensures our innovative solutions are well-received by customers. &

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3. Albert Einstein, www.brainyquote.com/quotes/albert_einstein_174001.
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By being curious and asking good questions, we all can be more innovative in our project work.

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DILBERT

