

# The Sandbox Strategy

*"Innovation thrives on collaboration, improvisation... and permission to play with new ideas."*

—**Susan M. Newell, Ph.D.**, Cammarata Professor of Management, Bentley University;  
founding member of IKON research center, Warwick University, UK



Bentley Professor Sue Newell studies the social aspects of organizational change: What enables some organizations to innovate and adapt while others get mired in the process? Here she answers questions about successful innovation and how a "sandbox strategy" can jumpstart creativity.

**Organizations today know they have to innovate to survive. But you can't just flip a switch, can you?**

No, but you can create a culture where innovation flourishes. Organizations that excel at innovation often embrace the idea that each and every person has the potential to innovate—all they need is opportunity.

**Is that where the "sandbox" comes into play?**

Innovation thrives on collaboration—people of different disciplines working together, often informally, to improve their work practices. By giving them time and permission to experiment off-line, play in the sandbox so to speak, you're fostering creativity, which leads to innovation.

**Why focus on the social aspects of organizational change?**

Because even the best-planned projects will run into problems if managers ignore the social "communities of practice" within their organization. The most successful projects are flexible, iterative processes that involve the people who actually do the work.

**What advice can you offer today's change agents?**

Organizations often attempt to implement change according to a fixed plan. And when the plan hits a snag, they think they have failed. Instead, plans and project methodologies need to be revisited constantly. Whether it's a biomedical project or a new enterprise IT system, plans almost never work out as expected—so be prepared to improvise.

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