

Embracing Innovation: Volume 6

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Innovation and innovation policy are once again back on the agenda. This has been led through federal government policy¹ and the debate about it that has shone a light on the role of innovation in securing a prosperous future for the Australian economy, especially as we transition from the mining boom toward a future 'knowledge economy'². But innovation is a slippery topic and in Australia is not often associated with art, craft and design. How innovation actually occurs and what it looks like remain contested issues.

I propose to lay out a few positions from which to examine and hopefully illuminate this topic. First I will look at innovation and human behavior, which provides both the needs base and motivation for our acts of innovation. I will touch upon the policy settings that governments enlist to provide 'factor conditions' that are conducive to innovation. This will involve a brief discussion on the role of the Science,

Technology, Engineering and Mathematics sector (STEM) in innovation and reconcile this against the offering from the Humanities Arts and Social Sciences sector (HASS) relevant to the issue. Finally I will address what *Embracing innovation: Volume 6* contributes to discourse on innovation and the sort of impact it seeks to achieve though engaging audiences with the themes it presents.

If we accept that innovation is a product of human action, then to better understand innovation we might benefit from considering why the drive to innovate is such an important aspect of the human condition. Doing things better advances our position in a range of tangible ways to meet our various needs.³ It can provide us with reliable access to food and water. It guarantees improvement in the security of our body, employment, health, and home. The quest for love and belonging is an innate desire that is not beyond the reach of innovation. Consider the impact of innovative technologies such as the pill, *Viagra* and *Tinder*. Our esteem and confidence and sense of achievement often emerge through respect we have both for and from others. Work and the innovation we achieve through toil have frequently played an important and formative role in construction of esteem. Finally self-actualization is enabled by and enables innovation through creativity, spontaneity and problem solving. Innovative behaviors sustain and enable us and constitute the manner by which we craft our selves, our relationships and communities.

So our behavioral needs play a significant role as drivers of innovation and consciously or otherwise play an important role in motivating governments – as both policy makers and service providers – to foster 'factor conditions' that enable innovation to occur. The predominate view is that technology



Images (top to bottom):

2D Lattice Symmetries series, square, small,

Jennifer Robertson

Stainless steel, silk, linen, hand-woven on digital

loom, double cloth with supplementary weft

Image: Courtesy of the artist

Hemispheres; Northern Hemisphere; Southern Hemisphere,

Jenny Judge

PLA 3d printed shelves, kiln-cast and hand

polished glass

Image: Courtesy of the artist

¹ <http://www.innovation.gov.au/>

² We define the knowledge economy as production and services based on knowledge-intensive activities that contribute to an accelerated pace of technical and scientific advance, as well as rapid obsolescence. The key component of a knowledge economy is a greater reliance on intellectual capabilities than on physical inputs or natural resources.

Walter W. Powell and Kaisa Snellman

http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/kaisa/files/powell_snellman.pdf

³ Maslow, A: *Motivation and Personality* NY: Harper, 1954.

emergent through the STEM sector alone drives innovation and pushes innovation out of the 'laboratory' in a form that's fit for use and commercialization. Innovation however is also a product of pull factors that relate to people and their needs. To understand the human ecology that innovation serves and with which it is enmeshed, is the remit of the HASS sector. Without it our innovation agenda is sadly half-baked.

Recently Prime Minister Turnbull has branded his innovation policy framework the 'National innovation and science agenda' using the by-line 'the ideas boom', where he has stated that 'innovation and agility' are the key priorities for his government⁴. While the renewed interest in innovation is welcome, the emphasis of current policy is almost exclusively on the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics sector (STEM) as the source of innovation. This could be interpreted in such a way as to exclude the Humanities Arts and Social Sciences (HASS) from the innovation equation.

Other approaches, such as that voiced by Kevin Rudd at the conclusion of his 2020 Conference,⁵ have been informed by the work of innovation expert and consultant Terry Cutler⁶. He said that the STEM and HASS sector had been divided from one another and policy had reinforced divisions between the humanities and the sciences. Rudd proposed a new approach from government designed to ensure the correct factor conditions are in place to foster future innovation and included both HASS and STEM sectors. He said:

This false divide between the arts and science, between the arts and industry, between the arts and the economy: we've actually got to put that to bed. As if creativity is somehow this thing, which only applies to the arts, and innovation is this thing over here which applies uniquely to the sciences, or technology, or to design. This is actually again a false dichotomy: it's just not like that.

Private enterprise, university research, entrepreneurs and transnational corporations are frequently at the center of discussions related to innovation. When operating effectively these stakeholder link in an innovation chain that channels intellectual property (I.P) to markets through sophisticated systems designed for commercialisation and deployment of innovations. These entities are in part reliant on the factor conditions that enable enterprise which consist of people, policy settings, capital and both natural and built ecologies. Their efficiency and success is reliant on understanding that innovation is a holistic enterprise that leverages both technological and cultural capital for our collective benefit.

Embracing innovation: Volume 6 offers some important contributions to this discussion. In particular it shows that artists, craftspeople and designers – and even design brands – are significant stakeholders in the innovation chain. The unifying element is the practical and applied manner in which these exhibitors have evidenced innovative thinking. The scope of offerings spans learning tools to building materials to works that ponder the ethical dimensions of innovation, to work which is spliced with an embedded taxonomy of innovation incorporating 'elemental' and 'applied' innovation. Others make an argument for the significance of craft knowledge for how we might continue to innovate toward a viable and vibrant future.

Rohan Nicol is a craftsman, designer, academic and curator. His practice and research spans jewellery, silversmithing and design. He holds qualifications from the Australian National University and Charles Sturt University where he was awarded a PhD. He regularly exhibits his work at peak venues in Australia and internationally. His work is held in public and private collections including the Powerhouse Museum and the National Gallery of Australia.

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Exhibition runs from 21 July – 27 August 2016



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⁴ www.innovation.gov.au/

⁵ www.ellisjones.com.au/disciplines/marketing-pr/australia-needs-arts/

⁶ Dr. Terry Cutler has a background in the information and communications technology sector. He authored numerous influential reports and papers on technology policy, regulation and innovation. During 2008 he chaired the Australian Government's Review of the National Innovation System which culminated in the Report, *Venturous Australia* and served on the CSIRO Board from 2002 to 2012, latterly as Deputy Chairman.