



During my presentations on innovation, it has become evident there is some confusion between innovation and improvement.

Make Room for Innovation

When I address audiences on innovation, I am reminded of the 1980s Quality movement. At that time, the Japanese were terrifying North Americans by their seemingly unstoppable ability to dominate the automobile and consumer electronics sector by relentlessly improving their product quality. In self-defense, North America started to worry about quality too.

However, as they were doing so, North America forgot something the Japanese always knew. The Japanese knew that you need to improve and improve and improve but at some point, you can't anymore. Then you have to innovate. While the present problems in the Japanese economy can be attributed to many things, one may be a problem they saw coming—they weren't good innovators.

Thus, organizations shouldn't confuse the need for improvement and the need for innovation. Clearly, finding ways to build a better mousetrap are invaluable—witness Japan's long success built on improvement alone. But it is not enough. To be competitive in a world where innovation drives the prosperity of nations, you must also be able to come up with that new and radical departure that will change the game completely. So, improve by all means but don't stop there. Make room for innovation.

Frances

Frances is beginning research on a new book ***Risk, Power, and Control: Dirty Secrets of Organizations***. She would welcome any insights you might have on this topic.

Frances Horibe, best selling author of ***Managing Knowledge Workers*** and ***Creating the Innovation Culture***, is an accomplished speaker and seminar leader. Look for Frances' columns or contact her directly at her website. www.franceshoribe.com