

Listen to this interview with Dana White, innovation manager at CucinTech, a kitchen gadgets company

Optional exercise

Decide if these statements are true (T) or false (F).

Dana White believes...

	T or F?
1. ...her work at CucinTech wasn't entirely successful.	
2. ...CucinTech have made a fortune	
3. ...there was a lot of knowledge and skills among CucinTech personnel	
4. ...innovation is an ongoing process	
5. ...strategic innovation is the same thing as product development	
6. ...strategic innovation has a place in every company department	
7. ...innovation should be a state of mind	
8. ...telling people about strategic innovation didn't work	
9. ...CucinTech was only a research and development company	
10. ...the end-user only sees new products or services	
11. ...innovation can often be imitated	

I = interviewer; DW = Dana White

I: So, Dana, you managed the innovation project at CucinTech...

DW: I did indeed.

I: Well then, first up, congratulations! It seems to have been very successful...

DW: Thanks, yes...I really helped things turn round at CucinTech.

I: Was the revival in their fortunes entirely due to strategic innovation?

DW: Yes, yes, I think it was. CucinTech was a company who were very much following the pack, doing what everyone else was doing...and getting rapidly left behind. I could see there was a lot of talent there, and some great potential – particularly in their product development. I just had to harness that somehow...

I: Was innovation at the core of the project?

DW: Absolutely. If it doesn't sound like too much of a cliché, our world is constantly changing, and it's changing quickly. We need to be innovating constantly to keep up with this. Stand still, and you're lost.

I: No stopping to sniff the roses?

DW: Well, I'll do that in my personal life...sure (laughs), erm, but as a business strategy...I'm afraid there's no stopping, no...

I: What exactly *is* strategic innovation, then?

DW: Strategic innovation is the process of managing innovation, of making sure it takes place at all levels of the company, and that it's related to the company's overall strategy.

I: I see...

DW: So, instead of innovation for innovation's sake, new products being created simply because the technology is there, or the design idea is there, for example, the company culture must switch from these point-in-time innovations to a continuous pipeline of innovations from everywhere and everyone.

I: So strategic innovation is more than simply developing exciting new products...

DW: Exactly. The process must form part of the company mindset. A strategy has to be aligned throughout the company – otherwise it's just an idea, worthless on its own unless it's put into practice. The company's overall strategy *is* innovation.

I: How did you align strategies throughout the company?

DW: I rapidly became aware that campaigning is useless. People take no notice. Simply, it came about through good practice trickling down, a ripple effect. This built consent – people could see it was the best way to work.

I: So the entire company becomes the r&d laboratory, in effect?

DW: That's a good way to put it... Innovation can exist in logistics systems, organisational structure, recruitment policies, communications and distribution channels and other areas.

I: It's not just about product development...

DW: Absolutely not. The consumer might see new products and services – but this is only the tip of the iceberg, only the effect of what is really going on in the company.

I: Does innovation on this scale really give a competitive advantage?

DW: I'm certain of it. Absolutely. Especially if it is difficult for a competitor to copy – the risk is, of course, that innovation may frequently lead to imitation.

I: But not if it's strategic...

DW: Precisely!

I: Thanks for talking to us...

DW: Thank *you!*

Answers: 1F, 2F, 3T, 4T, 5F, 6T, 7T, 8T, 9 F, 10T, 11T