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THE**SANDBOX**BLOG

Do innovative products threaten our own ability to innovate?

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"Innovation" has emerged as one of the biggest buzzwords of the past decade. We can't seem to get enough streamlined new gadgets, processes, and programs to help us do our work.

But do you ever wonder if all these innovative technology products are making us less able to innovate ourselves?

Innovation developments may appear prolific, fun, and beneficial today—but will these feelings last?

Pilot Projects' founder and director Scott Francisco has long been fascinated by the idea that the cognitive (and cultural) attributes that are vital to innovation, creativity, risk-taking, and complex problem solving are actually increasingly at risk the more "innovative" (and hands-off) products become. Research on the core skills and mental structures necessary for innovation find that they are best cultivated in hands-on, socio-spatial environments. Yet much of our current design thinking sees advancement as removing 'man' further and further from 'machine.'

This conflict between innovation *products* and *process* is the Innovation Paradox. Some other thinkers tackling it recently have been David Brooks in *The New York Times*, Nicholas Carr in *The Atlantic,* and Chad Brooks for *BusinessNewsDaily* (via Mashable).

Figure 1. 1975 VW Bug engine - a transparent interactive system that encourages user participation.

Figure 2. 2009 Prius engine: an opaque system that excludes user participation and knowledge.

Many popular books on this topic—particularly as it affects businesses and economics—have been published in recent years. In his essay "The Innovation Paradox: How Innovation Products Threaten the Innovation Process" (originally published in the journal *Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture*), Scott discusses it with a focus on design thinking, the creative process, and daily life in the modern world.

"The more we innovate in our current fashion," he says, "the more we undermine the very environments and skills necessary for robust innovation ecosystems. But, by redefining what we call (and how we practice) innovation, we can begin to change the narrative and unbind the innovation paradox."

Read the entire essay here, and see more about Pilot Projects' approach to the innovation paradox on our Pinterest page.

What do you think? Do today's innovative products dull our desire or ability to be innovative ourselves? Share your thoughts in the comments.

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