

## Management Insights

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## Get Your Ideas Implemented

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Some time ago I wrote a [column on the importance of curiosity](#). This attribute is essential to the process of innovation at any level. People who develop and exercise their capacity for curiosity are better able to solve problems.



Today, I write about curiosity's offspring -- *exploration*. This is the ability to play out various scenarios that curiosity has introduced. These scenarios are the pathway to implementing good ideas. Curiosity leads to ideas; exploration makes the best ideas actionable.

Exploration is so important because these times demand new solutions, innovation and adaptation. I'm not talking about policy innovation or innovation at the level of senior executives. This column is written for those of you who work close to the front line where innovation, these days, is most needed.

What is the difference between good ideas and good ideas that get implemented? Often, exploration is the difference. There are usually problems with getting good ideas adopted -- a boss that doesn't listen, a colleague who won't do what you need, lack of time or resources. Whatever. Explorations are about finding ways through those problems.

Let's try a simple experiment. On a sheet of scratch paper, write down a specific untested idea that you have had. Pick an idea that intrigues you but is a half-baked idea, not something you have fully fleshed out. Pick an idea that will be hard to get adopted. I'm going to offer a simple step-by-step process for using exploration to work through such problems to get your idea adopted.

Before we look at the steps, it is important to understand that the "enemy" of exploration is, in fact, another very important attribute that we use in our work every day: *judgment*. In a way, judgment and exploration are countervailing forces. Most of us have jobs that require about 90 parts judgment to 10 parts exploration. The problem is that, because we need to use judgment so often, our exploration muscles may have atrophied. To effectively apply the exploration steps, we have to hold our judgment instincts in check until the end.

So, what would it look like to submit your idea to exploration?

**1. Set aside time and space for exploration.** It can be just 30 minutes. Some organizations allow workers one day per month to work on anything they wish. But most of us cannot do exploration work in the midst of dealing with everyday issues. You have to get out of the flow. Will the exploration be just you with your thoughts? Or will you engage a colleague or two to join your exploration?

**2. Get clear about the outcome you want.** What is your best hope for the result your idea can produce? Exploration works best with a destination in mind.

**3. Suspend judgment.** You need to use judgment often, but in exploration, especially in the early stages, judgment only gets in the way. To explore is to venture into the unknown -- in this case, the unknown of thought. For lots of good reasons, judgment doesn't like the unknown. "That won't work," "we are wasting time," "this will never happen" are all examples of how judgment will kill exploration.

**4. Explore arenas outside your own.** Take a walk outside your box. Look at it from the outside. For example, pick a field very different from your own. How would people in that field look at your idea? If you limit your thought to areas of the known, you aren't exploring. Generate alternative solutions to the problems associated with adopting your idea.

**5. Now let judgment come in.** Test the alternatives you have generated against the realities of your situation. Will they work? The reasons why the alternative might not work may be fodder for further exploration. If you are convinced you've solved the problem to getting your idea adopted, then you can move beyond exploration to planning.

**6. Share what you learned.** Log in to the [Better, Faster, Cheaper website](#) and leave a short comment connected to this column. Let us know the results of your exploration. What worked? What didn't? Which steps turned out to be the most fruitful?

Now more than ever it is imperative that governments at all levels adapt to the tight fiscal circumstances. Contrary to popular belief, doing so is not the exclusive domain of governors, mayors and department heads. Those that can do the most good are often at the "bottom" of the hierarchal pyramid. Yet many times these good folks feel their ideas haven't a chance to see the light of day.

A little exploration can change all that.