

Breaking Through Innovation Theatre: A Transformation Story from Theory to Practice

It's time to rethink innovation decision-making. Being innovative is seen as a competitive advantage, but many businesses fall into the trap of innovation theatre. They unintentionally get caught up in superficial innovation efforts as they confuse activity with progress.

Although traditional management approaches may excel at optimising existing businesses, they often fall short when evaluating new opportunities. Even experienced VCs, whose sole focus is to identify promising new ventures, have a 90% failure rate. Corporate managers, hired and trained to optimise existing operations, face even steeper odds when evaluating innovation initiatives.

Denis Oakley & Co helps businesses break through innovation theatre by implementing an immersive programme that provides a structured framework for decision-making. This programme enables organisations to transform their innovation journey and deliver solutions with real business impact.

OUR SOLUTION

A transformational programme for market-driven innovation

Our programme fundamentally shifts the traditional dynamics in business innovation. Instead of relying on management judgment alone, we let the market be the ultimate arbiter. Through rapid customer discovery and validation, teams gather real-world evidence that either validates their assumptions or quickly reveals fatal flaws. This approach:

- Removes the burden on managers to be innovation experts
- Provides objective, market-based criteria for decision-making
- Reduces the risk of pursuing opportunities based on internal assumptions
- Creates a clearer path for identifying and scaling promising innovations

With this approach, innovation moves from theory to reality with minimal risks.

A programme that paves the way for
innovation that works.

THE VALUE PROPOSITION

A structured programme for smarter, faster innovation

Our value proposition delivers powerful results: bad ideas fail fast, teams gain true ownership, and organisations build a customer-first mindset.

The programme value proposition

*'We'll evaluate any idea from your business units through customer validation.
No cost to them, no management overhead for you,
and teams own their decisions based on real market evidence.'*

We guide business units in validating ideas through real customer insights. By ensuring objectivity, weak ideas fail fast - whether they come from frontline teams or CEOs. Since teams actively participate in the validation process, they gain ownership of their innovation journey, driving them to innovate with confidence. Furthermore, the organisation builds customer-centric muscle memory that accelerates future development cycles.

Through this structured approach, we help organisations establish a repeatable, scalable path for future innovation.

OUR APPROACH

Learning by doing

Instead of innovation theatre, we implement a practical, immersive programme that pushes participants out of their comfort zones from day one. The 15-week journey starts with immediate customer engagement, not theoretical frameworks. We train teams to conduct structured interviews with real customers to uncover pain points and validate market demand.

**A 15-week programme that builds the foundation
for years of continuous innovation and future adaptability.**

"Get out of the building and talk to customers."

"But I'm a lab engineer. I've never done that."

"Exactly. Trust the process."

This conversation happens in nearly every cohort. And almost every time, these same engineers return transformed: *"That was incredible—they talked to me for hours. We had it all wrong. They don't care about what we thought was the problem, but they showed us something much bigger."*

By putting teams in control of their validation process, we equip them with the skills and confidence to drive future innovation. We provide more than just training, though; we cultivate a mindset shift that fuels continuous innovation and future adaptability.

Just-in-time learning

Unlike traditional innovation programmes that overload participants with theories, our approach is built on a just-in-time learning approach. Teams receive content and contact exactly when they need it and immediately apply learning in real-world situations. With guidance given as challenges arise, learning becomes more relevant and practical.

Using a methodology that has proven to be effective across a diverse participant base, with teams from 70+ countries, spanning multiple cultures and technical backgrounds, we:

- Push teams to engage with customers immediately in week one
- Let them struggle (safely) with initial attempts
- Provide targeted guidance based on their specific challenges
- Build trust through this cycle of attempt, feedback, and improvement
- Provide support from expert mentors who adapt the approach to each team's unique situation

By embedding learning into real-world action, teams go beyond understanding the innovation process - they experience it firsthand.

Hands-on, just-in-time learning
Immediate customer engagement
Safe, structured challenges
Real-time personalised guidance
Continuous feedback and iteration
Expert mentorship

A shift in mindset

The programme's success lies in its ability to transform highly technical experts into customer-focused innovators. It guides participants in a transformation journey where they discover not just new market insights but new capabilities within themselves. Through careful coaching, support, and practical experience, they overcome their initial fear or discomfort in handling customer conversations.

This shift in mindset happens through:

1. **Immediate application.** Concepts are learned exactly when needed, not in theoretical isolation.
2. **Safe failure.** Teams spot mistakes early, learn from them, and make rapid improvements.
3. **Personalised coaching.** Mentors meet each team where they are and provide targeted guidance.
4. **Trust building.** Teams learn to trust both the process and their own capabilities.
5. **Cultural adaptation.** The methodology works across diverse global teams.

IMPACT IN ACTION

A case study of successful transformation from lab to market

One team's journey exemplifies this transformation. Initially focused on complex enterprise systems, their first customer conversations completely shifted their perspective. Through dozens of interviews, they discovered an untapped market segment seeking simpler solutions. It was a classic 'bottom of the pyramid' opportunity they would never have identified from behind a desk.

Scale of understanding

The following metrics demonstrate that our programme's success isn't mere luck. It is driven by a structured and proven methodology resulting in meaningful innovation.

2,500+ customer discovery interviews conducted	1,200+ employees transformed and empowered	300+ innovation experiments launched and validated	up to 100 teams per cohort trained simultaneously
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Participants consistently gave our programme net promoter scores in the mid-to-high 80s, increasing further to 94% with our last cohort. This makes our average NPS score one of the highest among corporate training programmes.

Key learning outcomes

Through our programme, only the most promising ideas move forward. These outcomes demonstrate how the programme helped teams test ideas quickly and focus on high-potential projects.

- 70% of initial ideas eliminated early through customer validation and insufficient problem severity
- Teams conducted at least 30 customer discovery interviews within the first 4 weeks
- Over 75% of teams changed or pivoted their solution based on what they discovered through the programme.
- From initial cohorts of up to 100 teams, final groups of 4-5 teams emerged with strongly validated market opportunities

THE BENEFITS

Strategic benefits for all stakeholders

Our innovation programme drives impact across all levels.

For business leaders

We take the burden off leadership by streamlining idea validation through real customer insights. This ensures resources are invested in market-proven opportunities while weak ideas are eliminated early to reduce risks and accelerate development time.

Efficient resource management <i>Streamlined decision-making processes optimise resource allocation. We streamline idea evaluation, reducing</i>	Objective, market-driven decisions <i>Biases are removed through politically neutral idea filtering. Every idea, whether from the CEO, frontline employees, or</i>	Lower risks, higher returns <i>Weak ideas fail fast based on market evidence, not opinion. Time and resources are diverted to more promising projects.</i>	Accelerated time-to-market <i>Development times are significantly reduced. Teams learn to strip away unnecessary product features based</i>
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<i>time and effort spent on assessing innovation initiatives.</i>	<i>market trends, is validated through real customer insights.</i>		<i>on real customer needs.</i>
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For employees

Employees take ownership of their innovation journey, gaining hands-on experience in testing ideas and making data-driven decisions. This enhances engagement and fosters a culture of continuous learning and problem-solving.

Enhanced agency <i>Encourages ownership and recognition.</i> <i>Teams own their innovation journey, with their ideas taken seriously and evaluated fairly.</i>	Self-directed learning <i>Fosters independent thinking.</i> <i>90% of the time, teams self-identify when ideas aren't viable based on their own customer discovery findings.</i>	Higher employee retention <i>Improves job satisfaction.</i> <i>A structured, high-impact development experience enhances engagement and loyalty.</i>	Cultural empowerment <i>Boosts confidence in innovation.</i> <i>Teams gain confidence in rapid market testing and customer-centric development.</i>
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For the organisation

Our programme creates a repeatable system for market-driven solutions based on evidence-based insights. Teams return with the skills and mindset to sustain long-term innovation success.

Evidence-based decision-making <i>Replaces opinion-based decisions with market-driven customer validation.</i>	Increased agility <i>Teams learn to validate ideas in weeks rather than spending years on untested concepts.</i>	Reduced political friction <i>Decisions are based on real evidence, minimising friction and subjective debates caused by internal politics.</i>	Sustainable innovation culture <i>Employees bring back a customer-first mindset that drives ongoing innovation long after the programme ends.</i>
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PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

What our clients say

[Placeholder text: "The customer insights we got through this programme helped us steer our efforts in the right direction." – Client]

'Customer interviews were key - the pain we thought everybody should feel did not 'burn' for everyone we talked to!'

'Great business school experience combined with top-notch one-on-one mentoring.'

'I believe this is a must programme for anybody who wants to build or manage products and services effectively, whether their idea gets selected or not.'

'This programme is a masterclass in entrepreneurship and problem solving and an invaluable experience.'

'My biggest learning was understanding market size. TAM is the ocean, SAM is the area that can be fished and SOM is the amount of fish that can actually be caught!'

'This training has opened my eyes to what really matters. Everybody in product development should do this course!'

WHO WE ARE

About Denis Oakley & Co

Denis Oakley & Co specialises in helping organisations innovate smarter and align their transformation efforts with strategic goals. We bring the frameworks and expertise you need to optimise innovation processes, drive transformational change, and accelerate your path to success.

Contact us today to learn how we can help you achieve your innovation goals.