

INNOVATION AT MELBOURNE IT 2017

NEW ERA

I'm excited to have recently moved into the role of Executive Director of Innovation within [MIT Enterprise Services](#) (ES). ES had an established and industry-leading Cloud Solutions practice when [Outware](#) joined, adding a Mobile competency to the group. I had been a co-founder and Director of Outware. A year after that, [Infoready](#) came into the fold, further extending our capabilities with Data and Analytics.

These competencies have come together to allow us to provide end-to-end, continuous value digital solutions for our customers. It's an energising and inspiring time as we move towards our vision of being Australia's most impactful technology company by improving people's lives through technology.

Each practice has been successful due to innovation and Melbourne IT has acknowledged that Innovation will be key to our future success together. To support this, the leadership role focused on Innovation has been created.

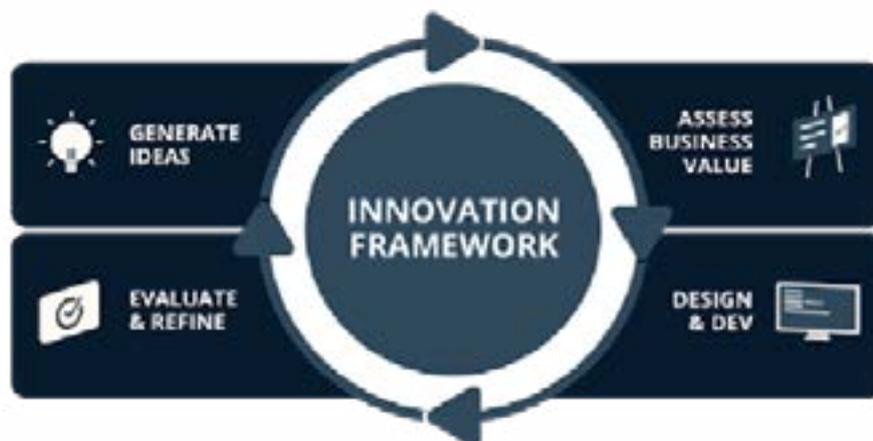
FOUNDATION

The idea that Innovation is 'Change that adds value' (a definition we borrow from Inventium), forms the foundation of our Innovation programs across the business. Creativity is essential, but it's not until it is focused that it results in a tangible and positive outcome.

Innovation doesn't just happen on its own. It's not enough to throw in a few bean bags and paint the walls (although that can help with creativity). It's essential that there is a process, that time is allocated, and that people have the necessary capability and can operate within a climate where experimentation and risk-taking is encouraged.

CHANGE THAT ADDS VALUE.....

At Melbourne IT, all Innovation initiatives fit into an overarching framework consisting of a cycle of four phases: Idea Generation, Assess Business Value, Design & Implement, Evaluate & Refine. It's a structured and consistent way to ensure innovation initiatives are feasible, pragmatic, move forward from being "ideas" to reality, can be measured and add value to end users, our customers, and our organisation.



THE VISION

From the definition 'change that adds value', and with the framework underlying all of our initiatives, we can zoom out, articulate and move towards our vision of a state where we are empowered to achieve "continuous improvement, at every level and in every department".

We're a tech business, but by definition, the tech we are expert in is reaching maturity. If we don't move forward, we'll go backwards fast. This is more relevant than ever before, as the rate of change increases and we embrace ML/AI, Blockchain, AR/VR, IoT, and Serverless Architecture to name a few emerging technologies

So a big focus of innovation is technology, but it's not everything. Our Innovation Program applies to all areas

including our Business Model and Processes across all departments and beyond.

Our first step has been to bring together an ES-wide Innovation Panel. This is the engine of innovation with representatives from each site, each Practice, as well as representation from Delivery, Sales, and Marketing. The panel members bring knowledge, context and aspirations from their part of the business to discuss priorities, design a strategy and help to implement those plans. Each is putting together their own practice committee to be their team to plan more locally, get feedback and help implement the initiatives.

A STARTING POINT

We've consulted widely and chosen to initiate the Enterprise Services-wide program by extending and expanding the three pillars of the program that were

effective in our Mobile practice. These were described in an earlier [post](#) and are summarised later in this article.

The first of those is the Incubator Wall, which is an agile style wall where ideas are written up on cards, posted and moved through the columns: Problems and Opportunities, Proposals, Development, and Showcase. It's a visible, open and collaborative space that gives everybody a voice and a chance to promote their ideas, or contribute to others'. The vision sits aside the columns to provide greater context and meaning – tying the idea to the organisation as a whole.

Ideas can range from demos and proofs of concept, reusable components to internal tools and applications to process changes. The wall is a great way to bootstrap the program, as it can be used to contribute to the program itself.



INNOVATION LAB

The Innovation Wall rolls into a major new initiative which is currently taking shape, an Innovation Lab. The Lab will supercharge the R&D capability of Enterprise Services, with a dedicated squad working on exciting experimental projects.

Various activities (including the Incubator) are the source of ideas. A review process assesses the business case: does the idea match our objectives? is it feasible and viable? are there alternatives? what is the cost? what are the benefits?

The Lab is being set up as an Innovation Tank – something like TV's Shark Tank but non-combative – so that it will be engaging, fun, draw attention to the program, and give the participants a chance to show off their wares and product ownership skills.

As with the Incubator, the types of projects will be demos of new tech or tech used in novel ways, proofs of concept for assessing viability of a concept with a technical or user-experience focus, reusable components as well as custom

tools and internal apps. They will allow us to hone new skills, explore new tech and techniques and demonstrate how technology can be used to solve user experiences.

With the Innovation Lab, Enterprise Services will continuously upgrade capability and develop new services. A few are described briefly here.

CONVONET

[As part of our 2016 Beyond Smartphone Hackathon](#), we developed a chatbot using Amazon Alexa that allows users to add products to online shopping carts using voice commands. The project, dubbed 'ConvoNet', allows users to use an Amazon Echo device to nominate items in an online catalogue, and have those items display in the shopping cart of a purpose-built iOS application. From here, users can ask the Echo to read the contents of the shopping cart back to them before placing their final order.

The end result is a product with mass market potential. By creating a seamless, integrated experience between the Amazon Echo and the user's smartphone, ConvoNet provides users with the option of engaging with the ordering service in whatever way suits them at a given point in time

Check out the [video](#).



PARCEL BOT

AusPost engaged MIT to develop a Virtual Reality proof of concept that would allow posties to view information about specific addresses to improve parcel delivery for planning and when out in the field. We built a Virtual Reality environment that mimicked the posties' routes, with house information overlaid in a style similar to AR. A Conversational UI is part of the experience, so that the user can interact with the environment intuitively – something that is awkward and difficult in a virtual environment or if you have your hands full with a parcel.

The VR environment was built in Unreal Engine and uses gaze-based navigation to create a 360° streetview. Looking at interactive points in the environment activates a 'heads up' display with information about the address, and gazing up into the sky at the UFO transports the user to another location within the environment. The Conversational UI was implemented with Amazon Alexa on the Echo and the use of Amazon IoT Platform.



Parcel Bot demonstrates how the new technologies of mixed reality, conversational UI and IoT platforms can be brought together to access big data on the cloud and deliver contextualised relevant insights when and where it matters.

Check out the [video](#).

ORTOBOT



Each year, MIT attends [a range of careers fairs](#), where we network with students and recent graduates and

encourage them to apply for positions in our team. Given that careers fairs are always busy, we wanted to develop an easy way to engage students giving them the information they're interested in and demonstrating who we are and what we do. We developed OrtoBot, a Facebook Messenger chatbot that covers our culture, projects, and offices, as well as sign up for ongoing updates about available positions and interesting events

The personality of the bot was key to keeping the user engaged in the conversation. Our aim was to have the bot reflect our workplace culture: fun, casual, and friendly, and this was supported by the use of graphic elements such as emojis and gifs, which referenced pop culture topics familiar to our target audience (university students).

TECH RADAR

We love technology. We love researching new stuff. The radar helps categorise and prioritise new tech. It lays out tech blips from the centre sector, 'adopt', toward the edge via 'trial', 'assess' and out to 'hold'. There's an internal website and physical posters at every site.

The real power comes when connections are made with the central 'Problems/Opportunities' radar. New opportunities are unearthed, and for existing opportunities, enabling tech identified. With a related opportunity and stakeholder, there is better focus during the research phase.

There are radars for every team, created by everyone in the team, and they're always being updated. Mobile has been using a radar for years, and content from the Cloud and Data and Analytics competencies is being drawn together across ES right now.

HACKATONS



Hackathons are always energising events. We've just held our first national Enterprise Services-wide hackathon. These events take place regularly. It's all hands on deck for a day with a challenge or theme to focus on.

Teams form around ideas, so people that wouldn't ordinarily work together have the opportunity to do so, building bonds that extend beyond the day. People develop new skills and great ideas are hatched, implemented AND tested in a short amount of time. Many of our demos, POCs and internal tools (such as ConvoNet described above) started life as a successful Hackthon project.

THE FUTURE

That's a quick summary of the voyage we're on. It's an exciting time, there's lots of activity, and I'm looking forward to updating on our progress and next steps in the near future.

SOME READING

Some inspirational reading to stoke your innovative thinking:

- [‘Darwin and the Demon’](#), Geoffrey Moore
- [‘Know Your Customers’ “Jobs to Be Done”](#), Clayton Christensen
- [The Creativity Formula](#) - Dr Amantha Imber

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