Innovation Rock Stars
How to innovate like John and Paul
In the 10 years the Beatles were together, they released 217 songs, the vast majority of which were credited to Lennon and McCartney. Their output was incredibly prolific, diverse, and original. They had an enormous influence on music—and the wider culture. And to this day, they remain the best-selling band of all-time, with over 600 million records sold.

By any definition, John and Paul were outstanding innovators.

So what can we learn from them? In their incredibly productive partnership, John and Paul embodied three critical principles...principles that we can apply in the context of innovation workshops.
Principle 1:

The Power of Pairs

The vast majority of Beatles songs weren’t written by John, Paul, George and Ringo. They were written by John and Paul. Why is that? What is it about teams of two that makes them so productive so often? Perhaps it is because on a team of two, there is no place to hide.

“The decisive characteristic of the Dyad is that each of the two must actually accomplish something, and that in the case of failure only the other remains – not a supra-individual force, as prevails in a group even of three. Precisely the fact that each of the two knows that he can depend upon the other and on nobody else, gives the dyad... a special consecration.”

– Georg Simmel
Collaboration

When we look more closely at the working relationship between John and Paul, we begin to see that their partnership seemed to have two dynamics. On the one hand, they often worked in close collaboration on the same song. They’d trade lyrics back and forth, playing off one another, building upon the other’s inspiration.

On the other hand, John and Paul were also great rivals. They thrived on competition. Often one of them would write a song more or less as an individual effort, which would invariably prompt a creative response from the other. When Lennon wrote Strawberry Fields, McCartney, not to be outdone, responded with Penny Lane. They were constantly one-upping each other.

Creative pairs can be collaborative, competitive, or, as is the case with John and Paul, both.
The third principle is that of creative tension, or complementarity, or what we call Chaos and Cosmos. In most creative pairs, one tends to bring a sense of spontaneity while the other provides a sense of order.

John was always the more intuitive and disruptive member of the Lennon-McCartney duo. Paul was always the more methodical and rational one. That’s not to say that John was completely undisciplined and Paul was totally rigid. They each had elements of both Chaos and Cosmos. But it was precisely their complementarity that helped John and Paul accomplish what they did.
At M Health, we facilitate innovation workshops modeled on the relationship between John and Paul. First, there’s the pairing of workshop participants so as to take full advantage of the principles that helped make John and Paul such successful collaborators. Pairing can be based on a survey of work-style preferences that can take place prior to the workshop, or it can take place on the day of the workshop. Next, it’s critical to carefully frame the goal and deliverables of the workshop. Then the real fun begins. Pairs are presented with inspiration in the form of an Insight Palette. These will be used to stimulate the ideation that lies at the heart of the workshop. Finally, a process of refining the most promising ideas can take place after the workshop ends.
Bigger, Better, Brighter

For most companies in most industries, innovation is a top priority. Every year they spend billions pursuing it. The problem is, innovation is expensive, unpredictable and just plain hard. It can be a black box, where big money goes in, and genuine innovation only sometimes comes out. But by applying the John and Paul principles, you can shake up the black box and produce more and better ideas, more reliably and more efficiently.
Let's pair up

John Surie
jsurie@m-health.com

Steve Martino
smartino@m-health.com

217 Church Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106
215 925 5400

26 York Street
Mayfair
London
W1U 6PZ
+44 207 129 1396

www.m-health.com
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