



Innovation?

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The Wall Street Journal in a recent article said that “The term ‘Innovation’ is losing its meaning,” but then noted that 4 in 10 companies had chief innovation officers, with a particular focus on Hyatt Hotels, which had named its first chief innovation officer, Jeff Semenchuk, in August 2011. Innovation is the “Holy Grail” of industry, the magic bullet that will cure all. What really is innovation and how can it be managed, if at all?

Let’s think for a moment what innovation have we seen in the hotel industry. A few examples come to mind: the atrium hotel, the

all-suites hotel, color TV, cable TV, flat screen TV, the customer service guarantee, the “Heavenly Bed”, Internet access, WiFi hot spots, and the use of iPads to check in hotel guests at the airport. I’m sure that each of you can come up with a list of your own. What do these examples have in common? Frequently disruptive, but satisfying a customer need.

Can innovation be managed or is simply the luck of the draw? I would suggest that there are some processes that work better in industry; that is, developing new products or services that pay off. The author has had good experience with two processes: listening to customers in focus groups and listening to employees in idea generation sessions.

What has worked for you? Please let me know what management processes have produced new products that have paid off for you.

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