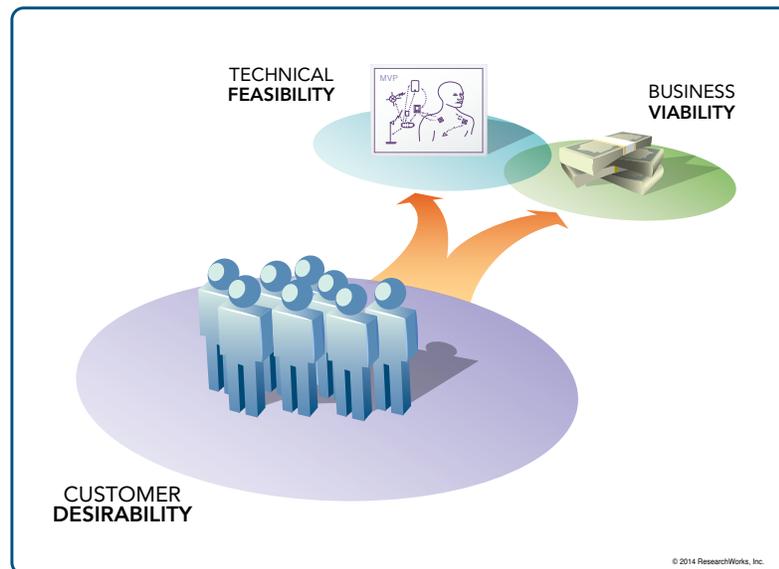


How to Get to Breakthrough Innovation: Desirability First!

Breakthrough innovation, like great marketing, starts by thinking about people, not products. Avoid immediately jumping to possible solutions, as so many do. That shortsighted, out-of-order thinking obscures breakthrough ideas you can't afford to miss. Better, begin by putting *people* front and center.



First identify what is desirable: What do people want? What problems are they trying to solve? What needs are not met? What aspirations and hidden desires can you uncover? Start by observing people in the situations you care about. Then listen to them both with methods that promote convergent thinking, like focus groups, and those that invite divergent thinking, like interviews with people at the extremes of the behaviors or situations you're interested in.

While doing so, keep framing the problem in terms of people, not technology. For example, ask the wide-open question: "How can we make it as easy as possible for people who can't breathe well at night to get more air?" This generates much greater creative exploration than the limiting question: "What is the optimal medical device for pushing air into people's lungs while they sleep?"

Once you understand the universe of what is desirable within a "people" context, then look at what is feasible from a technical perspective, and what will be financially viable.

When you next do white space/green field/blue sky product innovation, start by establishing the "people first" rule, and then focus on determining the desirability universe. You'll emerge with better, fresher ideas - and much greater chances of a real breakthrough.

Note: This issue is rooted in the three lenses of Human-Centered Design (HCD), popularized by IDEO and brought to my attention by innovation guru Doug Solomon. Their free toolkit for non-profits is here.



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