

THE VILLAINS WHO FIGHT CHANGE

It is an ancient tale, going back to the dawn of time – a power struggle between those that drive change, and those that get in the way. All businesses need to innovate, but often “creativity” is confused with “innovation”.

Niek du Preez, chief executive officer of business engineers Indutech, presents a field guide to the innovation super-beings that you know very well – you meet them every day at the office.

Is one of them you?



Beenthere Boy

Beenthere Boy* has been there. He's done it all. He's seen everything, and new ideas are instantly recast as mere warm-ups of something he's seen that's failed before. A real killer of innovation, because he plays directly into risk-averse thinking, giving nay-sayers valuable ammunition to kill a promising project.

Strengths: Often has useful experience that can “reality check” proposals

Weaknesses: The “reality check” is only useful if the previous experience is actually relevant

Secret defence: Ensure that innovation projects are habitually documented so that you can use experience as an asset, not as a blunt instrument to resist change.



Mister Political

The most dangerous super-villain, because Mister Political seems like an innovation ally – until he sticks a knife in your back. Mister Political chooses projects to support based on his personal ambitions, and is not shy of swapping sides (“everyone knows I always said this was a bad idea”) the instant things seem to be going badly.

Most dangerous at the darkest point of a project just before success dawns.

Mister Political (continued)

Strengths: Often an influential figure in an organisation—Mister Political is master of climbing the corporate ladder

Weaknesses: Shooting down a good project can be just a way to get to the top

Secret defence: Projects are tested against the business strategy, with formal procedure governing implementation. Key decision points require active buy-in from leadership: Mister Political can't swap sides if his support is down in black and white.



Captain Cower

With lightning speed Captain Cower will come up with a thousand reasons why an innovative idea will not work, can not work, is not a priority, is too expensive, poses a risk to the business and why the current system is great, maybe “just needing a little tweaking”. Terminally risk-averse, Captain Cower instinctively pours cold water on innovation.

Strengths: Few, if any – sometimes suitable for a post in compliance or cost accounting

Weaknesses: Manifold – few companies become great successes through fear of change

Secret defence: The argument is “what innovation to do”, not “should we do innovation”. As part of business strategy, resources are set aside for innovation projects, innovation aligned to business objectives, and metrics set up to measure success.

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Ignoramo

Ignoramo is fearsome enemy of innovation, because he knows nothing about new technologies, business models or industry trends, and just can't see past right now. Ignoramo's greatest weapon is bogging down good ideas in irrelevant objections, ill-informed opinions and frustratingly obtuse questions.

Strengths: If you can convince Ignoramo, it means your story is thoroughly water tight, and clearly elucidated

Weaknesses: Exceptionally frustrating. Decisions that should take minutes can take months. Ignoramo can be a great ally, though, because once he's on board, he doesn't like to change his mind

Secret defence: Extracting and storing the most vital and relevant information accessibly means you can pull out supporting arguments quickly and easily.



Egotronmicon

With complete disregard for business sense or practical considerations, the powerful Egotronmicon stomps a trail of havoc through innovation projects, sending people off on wild goose chases, slamming doors on promising research, aggressively quelling healthy argument.

Egotronmicon (continued)

It's all about boosting his ego and showing everyone who's boss.

Strengths: When Egotronmicon champions a project, things get done, and obstacles are blasted out the way

Weaknesses: Getting things done is no good if they're the wrong things

Secret defence: Management identifies and supports innovation champions, and gives them autonomy and authority within their task. And then steps back and gives them room



Brania X

With a brain powered by nuclear fission and built out of fibre-optic nano-bots, Brania X is a non-stop source of great ideas. The problem is he is unable to take them through to tangible results. Brania X may seem like an innovation superhero, but actually just wastes resources on castles in the sky.

Strengths: Ideas. Great ideas. Lots of them. In the box. Out the box. Through the box. Without a box.

Weaknesses: It's about the long-term bottom line and competitive advantage, not being an ideas hamster.

Secret defence: Innovation teams that bring together complementary skills, using formal systems and tools that support taking ideas through to tangible innovation projects.success.



The Innovator

The Innovator doesn't leap large buildings in a single bound, but simply walks through the entrance foyer, down the hall and out the other side, because it's all about being smart and getting real results quickly, not flashy shows of brilliance. The Innovator sees opportunities, finds possible solutions, and turns them into reality. But this superhero's real strength is the secret mountain Innovation Lab, where a well-oiled innovation machine makes sure things happen, learnings are saved and shared, and every project is designed to make a difference to the business.