



S I T  
Systematic Inventive Thinking



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# Harvard Business Review

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## Finding Your Innovation Sweet Spot

by Jacob Goldenberg, Roni Horowitz, Amnon Levav, and David Mazursky

**Most ideas for new products are uninspired or impractical. A systematic process based on five innovation patterns can generate ideas that are both ingenious and viable.**

[Excerpts from the article]

So how can product developers hit the innovation sweet spot - far enough from existing products to attract real interest, but close enough to fall within a company's existing positioning and capabilities? We've seen companies achieve very impressive results using a method we call systematic inventive thinking. It represents a complete overhaul of traditional brainstorming, replacing the creative free-for-all with a highly disciplined "inside the box" approach to idea generation. And, unlike most new product development methods, it starts with an existing product and its characteristics rather than with customers and their unmet needs. The method's main thrust: Don't just listen to the voice of your customers: listen to the voice of your product. In fact, this process, by drawing new product ideas out of current products - and tapping existing skills and technologies - reduces the chance that you will come up with ideas that are impractical to produce or market. And using systematic patterns, rather than the preconceptions of customers or marketers to generate ideas liberates your thought processes from the straitjacket of existing concepts and assumptions.

### Powerful Patterns

At the core of our process are the five innovation patterns. We have found that the patterns can help predict the emergence of new products before the appearance of signals indicating market demand. The five innovation patterns described in this article are at the heart of a creative process founded on the notion that function follows form.



### **The Discipline of Inventiveness**

To be sure, the traditional brainstorming session - breaking rules and freely following your imagination wherever it takes you - can yield highly innovative products. But for all its supposed openness, brainstorming can end up being surprisingly narrow-minded. The first step is to consider all ideas no matter how crazy. But then you have to trim what is sure to be a substantial list of ideas to a manageable number. So what do you do? Apply quick, common-sense judgment, which usually eliminates the ideas with the greatest potential novelty. By contrast, an innovation pattern typically generates a manageable number of ideas, each of which is given a preliminary plausibility check as part of the ideation process itself.

### **A Complementary Approach**

Most large firms have invented hundreds of successful new products over the years, and it would be presumptuous and unwise of us to say they should abandon the methods that have produced that output. Certainly, paying attention to your customers is crucial and allows you to gain vital information about market opportunities and the products that could capitalize on them. But a method that focuses on the product - What is essential? What can be rearranged, removed, or replicated in new ways? - can enhance a company's idea generation methods and vastly improved its development pipeline. Imposing the discipline of patterns may be just what's needed to guide product developers to the sweet spot of innovation.

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