

INNOVATING AT IDEO

Blogpost by Susanne Justesen, INNOVERSITY RESEARCH on August 17, 2006

Last week I had the pleasure of participating in an innovation session facilitated by IDEO, one of the most admired (especially by me) design and innovation companies in the world. I knew quite a lot about IDEO before this session, through books, journals and the media in general. Just as I had the pleasure of featuring Paul Bennett from IDEO at the INNOVATING WITH DIVERSITY conference last year.

But I had never seen IDEO in action, so of course this was an opportunity I had been looking forward to attend, with great anticipation. And I was not to be disappointed!

I was invited to the workshop by Ron Volpe, Director of Global Supply Chain Innovation at Kraft Food, so that I could observe in the workshop, and make use of these observations in my ph.d. work. I met Ron last year at INNOVATING WITH DIVERSITY in Copenhagen, and even had the pleasure of organizing an event at Copenhagen Business School where Ron presented his Kraft Food approach to supply chain innovation, a truly great case in February.

The innovation session at IDEO was organized by Ron Volpe together with Target, in order to explore how Kraft and Target might find new ways to work together and improve their supply chain collaboration; through the identification and development of collaborative strategies and initiatives to engage in an open innovation process between Kraft Food and Target. The 35 people - most of them executives - from Kraft and Target had 2 days to do so. And boy, they truly did!

I can of course not share with you the results of the innovation session, but what I can share is some of the fascinating analogous observations we were sent out to do on the first day of the workshop. After having identified the primary opportunities for innovation at the intersection between Kraft and Target, we were split up into smaller teams, who were each sent off to different places and sights around the Bay Area, to see what we could learn through analogous observations of people and organisations facing different, yet similar, supply chain challenges.

My group went off to a small private zoo in San Jose, where we met the woman in charge of all purchases of food and medicine supplies for the zoo animals, to learn first hand how she dealt with the logistics around that. We spent two hours at the zoo, learning everything from the use of dietary cards for each animal, to looking at storage facilities, to the preparation of food, to the shopping at the local Vietnamese market for vegetables and greens, and to the ordering of supplies and medication. It really was a fascinating peak into a totally different world, but the surprising thing was how much we could actually benefit directly from the observations and insights in our own process, and how the learnings could be used and applied in the remainder of the workshop.

The other groups went to totally different places, one went to a Levis store in San Francisco, to learn from their approach to customization, where they were each to buy their own pair of jeans to experience the customization themselves. Another group visited Stanford Blood Bank, to learn from how they deal with freshness. Another group went to visit Sephora, for the ultimate shopping experience. Yet another group went to visit and interview a housewife about how she manages to store food worth 9 months of supply for her entire family. And many more interesting experiences. So as you can probably imagine, hearing about - and seeing - what each group brought home in terms of learnings and insights from their observation, was quite an interesting mental journey.

But so was the rest of the two days..... am still not through my 32 pages of observation notes from workshop yet ;-D