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### Ten easy-to-implement rules to boost innovation from within - Part 3: Recruit beyond obvious circles

*In this series of 10 short essays, I will provide ten easy rules for you to adopt to instill innovation at the core of your company in Singapore or the rest of Asia. These rules are bold and will surely contravene inherited teachings and convictions.*

#### 3. Recruit Beyond Obvious Circles

Put two French guys in a room full of people. Chances are, by the end of the evening, these two will be in the corner, talking to each other in French. Don't specifically blame them, we all do it. We seek comfort. Yet, many CEOs (or their HR departments) recruit their colleagues from the same business schools, the same "alumni circles", the same nationality, and often, the same race. What do you think you get in the end? A very safe ecosystem, which includes people with the same mindset and vision. By recruiting within our comfort zone, we recruit people who are very much alike. If we are alike, we will like each other, giving way to a safe job and a safe journey.

That may work when you look for a life partner. It does not work inside the boardroom. Diversity is one of the fastest roads to innovation in small and large enterprises. There are some corporate roles where it will be hard to recruit beyond the obvious profile: our dear accountants will rarely come from an anthropologist background, but there are many other corporate functions where the obvious choice is the wrong choice.

In 2007, Pepsi Co. astonished the media by bringing an Indian woman to lead Pepsi to new horizons. Did Pepsi make an innocent move by placing Indra Nooyi as new CEO? Was it because nobody else was able to do it, or was this a well-calculated plan to have a fairly young, bold, Indian, female as new CEO of one of the world's largest MNCs? Did I hear "young-bold-Indian-female"? This probably sounds like the "anti-Christ" description of Wall Street's "obvious circles".

Check your team. If you aim to be a company that lives and breathes innovation you should have people from different backgrounds and nationalities in it: a molecular engineer, an English literature graduate, a retired navy pilot, a failed entrepreneur, etc. At Solidiance we have

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about 60+ full-time staff, and nearly 20 different nationalities. Part of our humble success comes from building and managing a very diverse team.

However, don't force diversity. Don't try to build a dream team for the sake of it and good CSR - PR. The point is simple: don't close your door to someone who does not fit your CV mould or your company's typical ideal profile. The Cirque du Soleil was not built by recruiting typical clowns and acrobats; but it has nonetheless succeeded to become a billion dollar global business.

It is no coincidence if today's most innovative countries are also the most cosmopolitan. A melting pot of origins, cultures, perspectives, will ultimately create a melting pot of good ideas. I know it is a hot debate at the moment, but Singapore has been able to reinvent itself several times thanks to the different waves of new people coming to populate the island nation. In a company, diversity churns exchanges, exchanges churn debates, debates churn ideas, and ideas churn innovation.

Conclusion: Focus on DNA, not just GPA.

Next, we will look at: "Give Your Employees Room to Breathe If You Want Them to Grow".

Check out the first easy-to-implement rule here : <http://bit.ly/l8vihr> and the second easy-to-implement rule here : <http://bit.ly/JdsNq0>

#### Damien Duhamel



Damien Duhamel is the Managing Partner of Asia Pacific, Solidiance

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