Harnessing curiosity and collaboration for innovation

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Innovation is more than a buzzword; it is the engine of progress. In Jersey, we witness this spirit pulsing through our business community, quietly transforming the way we work and the value we deliver. As we mark this month's focus on innovation and entrepreneurship, it is timely to reflect on what it truly means to be 'cutting edge' in a world defined by rapid change.

A fundamental truth often overlooked is that standing still is not a neutral act. In today's environment, inertia is regression. The organisations that thrive are those that lean into change, challenge the status quo, and continually ask, 'What if we did this differently?' This mindset has been powerfully demonstrated through recent Better Business Grant applications, where we have seen organisations think beyond conventional productivity gains and invest in their people. From upskilling teams to reimagining workflows, applicants have shown that innovation is not always about the latest technology; often, it is about empowering people to think, act, and grow differently.

This principle is echoed in the stories of PayPal and Spotify - two global disruptors that originated outside the industries they ultimately transformed. PayPal, founded by technologists rather than bankers, revolutionised digital payments and forced the financial sector to rethink what was possible. Similarly, Spotify was not the product of the music industry, but of entrepreneurs who saw an opportunity to solve the challenges of piracy and access, ultimately reshaping how the world consumes music. These examples remind us that true innovation often comes from those willing to challenge established norms and bring fresh perspectives from outside the traditional boundaries.

Our recent visit to The Productivity Institute’s research conference in Manchester reinforced this lesson. While the mathematical models were complex, the underlying message was clear: productivity is not about doing more but about doing better. Achieving this requires curiosity, collaboration, and the courage to experiment and, crucially, to fail fast and try again. At The Hut Group, we saw a culture where recognition and belonging fuel motivation, and where automation is used not for its own sake, but to create space for people to thrive in more meaningful work. Manchester Metropolitan University further demonstrated the power of academia industry collaboration,highlighting the potential for shared data and expertise to address real-world challenges.

What truly struck me throughout these experiences was the diversity of roles we each played, strategist, connector, change-make, often simultaneously. This is the beauty of Jersey’s business community: close enough to collaborate, bold enough to experiment, and wise enough to learn from each other and from global best practice.

Supporting this, research consistently shows that innovation and entrepreneurship are key drivers of economic growth and resilience.

According to the OECD, firms that prioritise innovation are more likely to achieve sustained growth and adapt to disruption. McKinsey's 2025 survey found that top-performing organisations are 63% more likely to innovate at scale, often by building or acquiring new businesses outside their current industries. Team diversity and psychological safety are repeatedly cited as critical factors for high performance and breakthrough innovation.

This brings me to a concept championed by performance psychologist Jamil Qureshi: the 'rogue monkey'. In his words, every organisation needs individuals who are willing to challenge the way things have always been done, those who climb the metaphorical steps when others shy away. These 'rogue monkeys' are often the source of disruptive ideas and, when nurtured, can become top performers. As leaders, our role is to create environments where such individuals are encouraged, not constrained; where curiosity is valued above conformity, and where diversity of thought is seen as a strategic asset.

Looking ahead, Jersey's economic future will be shaped not just by external forces, but by the choices we make as a business community. The recent growth in productivity outside the finance sector hints at a quiet transformation already underway, a shift towards more dynamic, adaptive, and forward-thinking approaches. By embracing innovation and entrepreneurial mindsets, we can unlock new opportunities, strengthen our resilience, and ensure that Jersey remains competitive on the global stage. As we continue to nurture curiosity, empower 'rogue monkeys', and foster environments where diverse ideas can flourish, we lay the groundwork for sustainable growth and shared prosperity. The path forward is clear: innovation is not just an advantage; it is essential for Jersey’s continued success.