

# POINTERS ON INNOVATION<sup>1</sup>

**Four Categories of Solutions** (Example: “We’ve been manufacturing teabags but the market for tea has dropped. What else can we do with the teabags?”):

- Most *adaptive* mode: solutions directly answer the question and tend to retain the same size, shape, function (e.g., “Fill bags with dried soup”).
- Slightly less *adaptive* and slightly more *innovative*: new use but shape, function, and/or size tend to remain unchanged (e.g., “Fill bags with shoe polish for travelers”).
- More *innovative*: solutions tend to involve a shift in perspective but still attempt to answer the original question (“Cut and flatten the teabags and make parachutes for Barbie Dolls”).
- Most *innovative*: forget the problem statement, ask/answer a different question (e.g., “Sell the machinery for scrap metal and start a new business”).

## Targeted Innovation:

- **What can you afford to spend?** Innovative approaches are less tested, thus often less efficient in the short run; if the old way’s not working, it’s worth the investment.
- **What can you afford to lose?** Innovation is riskier, but you may lose everything if you *don’t* innovate.
- **How often have you gotten this fixed "once and for all" before?** After repeated "band-aid" attempts, innovation is usually needed.
- **Who has to like your solutions?** You need approval and cooperation. Either (a) match your approach with their preferences or (b) change their frame of reference.
- **How bad is it?** Some say if the ship is sinking they'll try anything; others hold on to what they know.
- **How good is it?** When things are going well there's little support for dramatic change. However, beware of complacency.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> From research publications by The Center for Creative Leadership, [www.ccl.org](http://www.ccl.org)

<sup>2</sup> In their book *Shaping Strategic Planning*, Pfeiffer et al. describe an experiment where frogs were placed in shallow pans of room-temperature water under which Bunsen burners gradually heated the water. Frogs have high adaptability to temperature changes; although they were free to jump out of the pans, they kept adapting to the gradual heating of the water until the heat was so intense they died.