

“ESSENTIAL READING IN AN AGE OF DISRUPTION”

DAVID REAY, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT

BE LESS ZOMBIE

HOW GREAT COMPANIES CREATE DYNAMIC INNOVATION,
FEARLESS LEADERSHIP AND PASSIONATE PEOPLE



ELVIN TURNER

ILLUSTRATED BY RICHARD JOHNSTON

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“Essential reading in an age of disruption.”

David Reay, Senior Vice President, Sony Music Entertainment

“This is an invaluable step-by-step guide to sparking, scaling and sustaining a culture of bold innovation.”

Ash Taylor, Global Brand & Marketing Director at LEGOLAND

“Packed full of practical tips to boost your company’s lifespan.”

Ash Schofield, CEO, giffgaff

“At a game company like Electronic Arts, we’re no strangers to zombies - both in the games we produce and in our daily battles against the many disruptive forces trying to make us obsolete. It’s the same everywhere. Most leaders struggle to get the innovation performance they need. This is the practical playbook they’ve been waiting for.”

Andy Billings, Vice President Profitable Creativity, Electronic Arts

“A book of some brilliance. Everyone with an interest in pursuing sustainable, profitable relevance should read it. Compelling, fiendishly clever and full of practical ideas and tools delivered with great skill. The implications for business are vast!”

Jo Wade, Specialist Account Manager, Oncology, Pfizer UK

“In business a lot is talked about entrepreneurial spirit without giving it the oxygen to develop and thrive. Very often the difficulty is where to start. *Be Less Zombie* is an excellent and practical guide for any leaders trying to turn on higher levels of innovation in their organisation.”

Denis O’ Flynn, former Managing Director, Pernod Ricard UK

“This book is packed with vital knowledge and essential strategies that you can adopt and apply immediately to help create an innovation mindset within any team or organisation. Written in an engaging and impactful way it puts theories into practice, sharing new tools and insights based on a decade of innovation experiments conducted inside Fortune 500 companies of all shapes and sizes.”

Chris Parles, Senior Fellow and Programme Director of Music & Branding at University for the Creative Arts Business School

“Innovation begins and ends with the right leadership and culture. It’s so refreshing to see more of the innovation ‘how’ codified with practical examples and tools.”

Gareth Hussey, Chief Marketing Officer, Tesco Mobile



“The definitive leadership guide to simplifying, mobilising and humanising innovation.”

Teresa Kotlicka, People & Culture, Sony Music Entertainment

“In the struggle all organisations face to drive innovation, this book defines the rallying cry you need to bring everyone together and provides an excellent handbook with the essential tools to make it happen.”

Alan W. Brown, Professor in Digital Economy, University of Exeter, UK

“An indispensable read that unashamedly kicks wide-open the door to real-world innovation. Engaging, accessible and with lots of invaluable tips and insights for leaders at all levels on how to create a culture and climate in which innovation thrives. A great wake-up call for all zombies ... now there are no excuses!”

David Riley, Business Psychologist

“*Be Less Zombie* is a practical guide for equipping leaders and managers trying to turn on higher levels of innovation in their business.”

Samantha Seal, Talent Strategist and Director, on the wing Ltd.

“A leader’s lifeline for evoking, embedding and living an innovation culture.”

Laura Ellis, Head of Talent Management, EMEA, Ogilvy

“A must-read for anyone – in any business sector, at any career level – who is passionate about the serious business of innovation. A practical guide to curating a culture of innovation and navigating against the headwinds of organisational status quo.”

Simon Collins, Senior Vice President, Mastercard

“At last a book that gives permission to create, collaborate and innovate. Elvin Turner intelligently challenges the status quo with a sprinkling of very good humour. Essential reading.”

Lee Widdows, Associate Head of Fashion, University for the Creative Arts

“*Be Less Zombie* is more than a book, it is a toolkit for any senior executive who wants to drive positive change in their business. Turner gives you everything you need to create and deliver your own innovation agenda within the limits of your budget and ideas.”

Ben Sullivan, UK/IRL Managing Director, bibliotheca



Be Less Zombie

**How Great Companies
Create Dynamic Innovation,
Fearless Leadership
and Passionate People**



Elvin Turner



Illustrated by Richard Johnston





This edition first published 2020
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John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, United Kingdom

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Turner, Elvin, author.

Title: Be less zombie : how great companies create dynamic innovation,
fearless leadership and passionate people / Elvin Turner.

Description: [Hoboken, NJ] : Wiley-Capstone, 2020. | Includes index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019057699 (print) | LCCN 2019057700 (ebook) | ISBN
9780857088208 (paperback) | ISBN 9780857088246 (adobe pdf) | ISBN
9780857088239 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Organizational change. | Leadership.

Classification: LCC HD58.8 .T876 2020 (print) | LCC HD58.8 (ebook) | DDC
658.4/063—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019057699>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019057700>

Cover concept: Jacqueline Turner

Cover Design: Wiley

Cover Images: Zombies © Big_Ryan/Getty Images, Collection of people © Imagewell/Shutterstock,
Business women © Nevena Radonja/Shutterstock, Business man © msan10/Getty Images

Set in 12/16pt AGaramondPro by SPi Global, Chennai, India

Printed in Great Britain by TJ International Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall, UK

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elvin Turner is an award-winning leadership advisor and associate professor of innovation, entrepreneurship and marketing.

Elvin has coached hundreds of innovation and performance programmes around the world, helping leaders, managers and teams overcome the many barriers that they face when trying to develop breakthrough ideas and turn them into action.

Elvin's work spans consulting, coaching and facilitation in the areas of strategy, innovation and leadership development.

His clients include some of the world's leading organisations in the financial, technology, music, pharmaceutical, drinks and publishing industries. His experience extends from working with new and disruptive technology start-ups, through to seasoned leadership teams inside conservative, global institutions.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book has been a collaboration with many people. I'm so thankful to everyone who has been on the ride and especially want to call out the following people:

Richard Johnston, my ever-patient and ingenious collaborator.

Jean Gomes, who set me off on the innovation track many years ago.

Simon Pratt for his continuous flow of best-selling author insight, encouragement, friendship and spiritual bulldoggedness.

Nigel Wilkinson for keeping my hands held up.

Carol Herzig for encouragement and wisdom.

Phil Tennant for helping me realise that this book was actually two books (watch this space!)

Lionel Medley for reminding me about nerds.

Tony Ryce-Kelly for talking some sense into me on many occasions.

Mark Swain, Emily Charles and Mary Cole at Henley Business School for taking the first risk with the Unicorns vs Zombies programme.

Jim Sears and Dr Ben Shenoy for insightful course corrections.

Mel Toms for being my school-run sounding board.

All who contributed to the content of the book, in order of appearance: Ben Sullivan, Managing Director, Bibliotheca UK; Andy Billings, Vice President of Profitable Creativity at Electronic Arts;



Mark Bjornsgaard of System-Two; Professor Alan Brown of Exeter University; Lee Widdows, Associate Head of School (Fashion/Fashion Business) at the University of the Creative Arts; Chris Parles, Programme Director Music and Branding at the University of Creative Arts; Ashley Schofield, CEO of giffgaff; Gemma Metheringham, Creative Director of Label/Mix; Matt Madden, author of *99 Ways to Tell a Story*; Denis O'Flynn, former Managing Director of Pernod Ricard UK; Bridget Gardner, Head of Employee Capability, Pernod Ricard UK; Patrick Venning of Breakwater Marketing; Rafael Orta, Chief Product Officer at moneysupermarket.com; Harvey Wade, Managing Director of Innovate 21; Alex Osterwalder, Co-founder of Strategyzer; David Reay, Senior Vice President at Sony Music Entertainment; Teresa Kotlicka, talent and culture advisor at Sony Music Entertainment; Emily Bollon, Founder of Motivation by Music; Jo Twistleton; Becky Allen, President of Decca Records; Dr Alice Cook; Simon Walsh; Bob Dickman; Malcolm Hassan; David Riley; Jennifer Robison of Gallup; and Fiona Conway, Director of Retail Customer Operations at Santander Bank.

The many experts and pioneers who have directly and indirectly influenced the content of this book and direction of my thinking, including Alan Klement, Arthur Burk, Eric Ries, Professor Clay Christensen, Bill Johnson, Steve Blank, Kathy Sierra, Professor Rita McGrath, Doug Sundheim and Robert Quinn.

The continual cry of members of Guildford Community Church: 'There's more!'

The editorial and production teams at Wiley.

And my incredible family: Jackie, for your endless sparkle; Daisy, for your inspirational cake fuel; Luke for your chirpy banter; and Leilani for your 'home-from-school' hugs.

Thank you all, so much.

Elvin Turner



For Jesus





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INTRODUCTION: UNICORNS VS ZOMBIES

It was a perfect day to meet zombies.

Inside the idyllic rural campus of England's prestigious Henley Business School, 40 executives were jostling for position along a line that I had marked out on the floor:

'More unicorn' at one end, a term that's come to mean a hot, most-wanted, \$1bn innovation powerhouse.

'More zombie' at the other, meaning a decaying monolith staggering into the future.

The task: Stand in the place on that spectrum that best describes your organisation.

There were a lot of self-declared zombies out that day.

But the truth is there are a lot of zombies out *every* day. Research shows that company lifespans are shrinking fast.¹ But it's not just companies. The experience of working inside an off-kilter company can be deadly for the people inside, too. Simply being at work is now the fifth biggest killer in the United States because of the illnesses that stem from rising workplace stress.²

So what's driving this zombie advance?

Clinging to What Kills Us

Imagine standing on the edge of a chasm that is widening before your eyes. Your side of the chasm is crumbling fast. Getting to the other side is your only chance of survival. There is a rope in your hand that you could use to swing across. But fear stops you from jumping and keeps you rooted to the spot, gripping on to that rope for dear life. Meanwhile, the ground crumbles beneath your feet. The wider the

¹<https://www.cnbc.com/2017/08/24/technology-killing-off-corporations-average-lifespan-of-company-under-20-years.html>

²"Dying for a Pay Check", Jeffrey Pfeffer, Harper Business, p38



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chasm yawns, the riskier the swing, the greater the fear, the less likely that you'll leap.

A little Indiana Jones, maybe. But that 'holding on' instinct, that false sense of security of hanging on to what we know, sets off a chain reaction of subtle and painful demise inside many organisations: declining margins; efficiency initiatives that mean more work for fewer people; an exhausted and disengaged workforce that is continually putting out fires; sales teams who would rather lead with discounts than push the new, longer lead-time solutions; and less appetite and resourcing for innovation which is ultimately what gets us across the chasm.

Over the last 25 years I've seen variations of this scenario play out inside companies of all shapes and sizes. But I've also observed two factors that can make a huge difference to the inevitability of innovation and high performance showing up:

1. Move Some Different Needles

We get what we measure, and we measure what we value. So what are we overvaluing that opens the doors to zombieism?

In most companies, a minor business model tremor creates a standard, anxiety-driven knee-jerk response: 'Grab the cash while you can.'

'The prevailing mindset inside most boardrooms is "We love money,"' says Ben Sullivan, Managing Director of bibliotheca UK, a library technology company. 'It's too easy to say "yes" to this quarter's numbers at the expense of developing the ideas that the future needs. No-one ever frames it in such black-and-white terms, but deep down, the dopamine hit of a short-term cash injection usually feels too good to resist.'

Yet the twenty-first-century rate of change means that business model tremors are now an everyday occurrence. The short-term,



cash-grabbing response is often triggered by the anxiety of having nothing in the new product pipeline. And it is anxiety's sibling, fear, that stops companies from backing the more risky ideas that the future pipelines need. It's a circular paradox resulting in companies that are literally scaring themselves to death.

Organisations need to put in place counterbalances to resist the short-term, control freakism that shuts down any appetite for innovation that ventures beyond the status quo.

'Incremental improvement guarantees obsolescence over time, especially in fast changing industries,' says Joi Ito, the former Director of the MIT Media Lab.

We need some new dials and needles in our corporate dashboards. Ones that compel us to make the decisions that our future needs us to make today; those specifically relating to better performance around innovation and change.

2. Demystify the 'How' of Innovation

'Don't tell me why, don't tell me what, just tell me *how* to get innovation moving in this place,' is how I was once greeted by a frustrated CEO who was smarting from a recent, failed innovation initiative.

It's the underlying narrative inside most organisations that I meet. More specifically, whilst organisations tend to want more overall innovation, their greatest need is a bigger bag of bolder ideas that could become tomorrow's cash cows. So where are they hiding?

Well, if we define culture as 'what is ordinary', we can't realistically expect many 'extraordinary' ideas to emerge and thrive from business-as-usual operations. 'Extraordinary' creates an understandably allergic reaction from the status quo. It's a life form likely to mess with our repeatable, predictable ways of working.

(An interesting anagram of Be Less Zombie is 'blob seizes me'. It's how I imagine a bold idea feels when it encounters corporate bureaucracy.)



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It's not surprising that the bold ideas cupboard is pretty empty in most organisations.



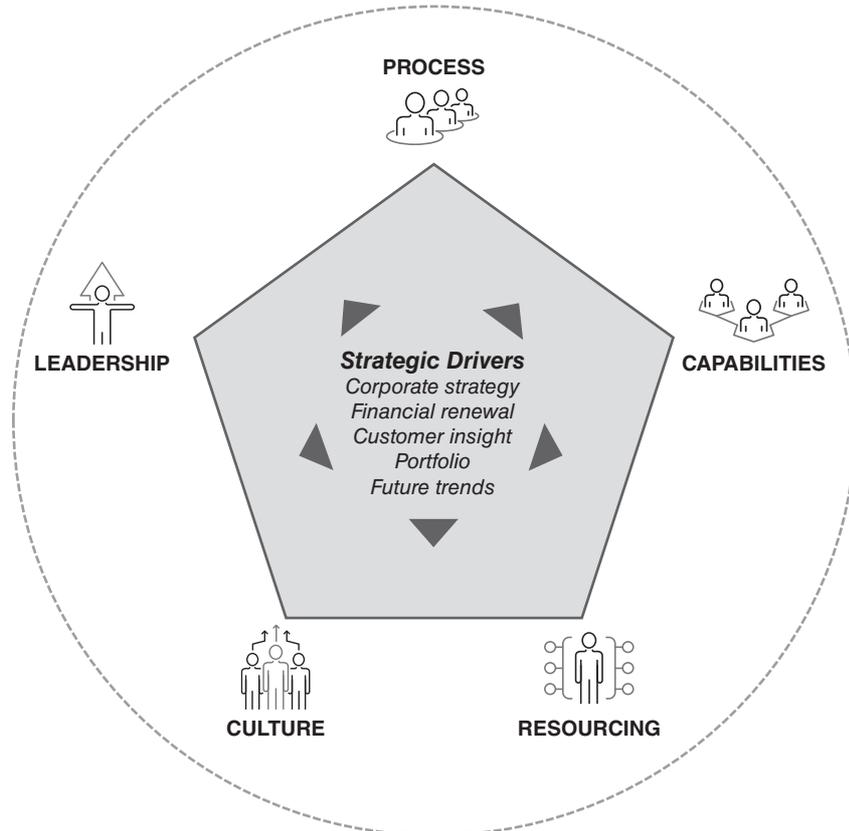
Hmmm ... Looks like we'll need to discount our way out of this one again, Winston.

Innovation has a reputation for being a black art, but it's really not. Yet because so few companies have designed a deliberate system for repeatable innovation, its ad hoc nature causes it to fail, or at best deliver more of the same.

After coaching hundreds of innovation projects around the world and mixed with my own research and that of other experts, I've discovered that bolder innovation becomes a more inevitable and repeatable outcome when teams and organisations focus on six areas, each of which has a simple 'turn-on' path.



'TURN IT ON' INNOVATION STRATEGY FRAMEWORK



Turn It On framework © Elvin Turner

Innovation Strategy Ad hoc innovators tend to be continually frustrated. A clear innovation strategy, on the other hand, galvanises the whole business behind it.

Process A clear, efficient and effective innovation process that everyone understands. Give everyone a roadmap for their ideas.

**Introduction: Unicorns vs Zombies****xxv**

Capabilities Deliberately acquiring and developing the capabilities needed to deliver today whilst discovering and designing tomorrow.

Resourcing Dynamically allocating sufficient and appropriate resources to incremental and disruptive growth initiatives. With the right process in place, this often results in significantly reduced resource wastage in innovation.

Culture Calibrating the culture and climate to the innovation outcome, rather than one-blob-fits-all. Incremental ideas are generally tweaks, working with relatively well-known cause and effect dynamics. It's predictable and feels safe, so metrics around certainty of outcome are appropriate. Bold ideas, on the other hand, have high failure rates, so they need a context which gives them a higher chance of making it out of the building alive than status quo operations usually afford.

Leadership Equipping and incentivising senior managers to orchestrate appropriate levels of innovation and entrepreneurship.

When these six elements combine to become a deliberate innovation system, companies give themselves the greatest possible chance of thriving today and showing up in the future.

Turn it on, then turn it up My aim with this book is to help you succeed where most companies fail: to turn on innovation and to keep it turned on with proven tools that you can tailor for your context. Establish foundations, get some quick wins, build confidence ... and *then* turn up the scale and sophistication as and when you need them.



What's more, every organisation is unique. Whilst the tools I'm sharing are universally applicable, beyond a certain point in your journey towards greater innovation performance, only you can know what's right for your specific context. This book helps you *turn on* innovation, but beyond a certain point only you can *turn it up*.

What works for Apple is unlikely to work in exactly the same way for you. Discovering and developing your unique innovation DNA is a pathway towards competitive advantage that few companies deliberately pursue.

Not for Geeks Finally, this is not a book for innovation geeks. It's for everyday business people who need practical tools, ideas, workshop formats and coaching tips to turn on innovation. So I've deliberately written this in short, sharp chapters with practical advice that you can try out immediately. (Sorry fellow geeks, not much innovation jargon in here – I hope.)

This book is based on what I've learned from companies that are recalibrating themselves to pursue sustainable, profitable relevance.

They are creating healthier organisations, happier people and more hopeful futures.

They are being less zombie.

More agility. More energy. More genius.

Why do some companies always seem to have the best ideas, the most engaged people and the most profitable growth?

Based on 10 years of research, *Be Less Zombie* goes behind the scenes of some of the world's most innovative companies and decodes the tools, hacks and approaches that help their managers systematically spark ingenuity, agility, and profitable creativity at scale.

Be Less Zombie is a pragmatic 'how-to' guide for any team or organisation that needs to adapt its culture, processes, leadership and decision-making for an age of increasingly unpredictable and rapid change.

Elvin Turner is an award-winning advisor to global corporations, government bodies, not-for-profit organisations, and start-ups around the world.

'A must-read for anyone - in any business sector, at any career level - who is passionate about the serious business of innovation. A practical guide to curating a culture of innovation and navigating against the headwinds of organizational status quo.'

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Cover Design: Wiley
Cover Images: Zombies © Big_Ryan/Getty Images,
Collection of people © Imagewell/Shutterstock,
Business women © Nevena Radonja/Shutterstock,
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 Also available
as an e-book

USA \$22.00 / CAN \$26.00 / UK £12.99



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