

**It is true that innovation rhymes with transformation; but has NATO fully embraced this notion and placed the organisation in the best conditions to innovate? Addressed are a selection of questions and answers to topics on the minds of the Alliance staff.**



**Q The word "innovation" is frequently used in the Command. Why?**

**A** The focus on innovation is highly correlated with the state of our economies. Often greater during major economic troubles; especially after leaders in government and industry have applied all classical efficiency measures. One complementary and nonintuitive measure is to challenge the natural order of things by offering innovative approaches and solutions. This can call for a radical paradigm shift, shake certainties and disrupt equilibriums.

We hear stories of nearly bankrupt companies becoming a leader in their sector. Interestingly, most often to achieve leadership status, radical management measures have been chosen and innovation placed as a priority with leaders embracing the strategy. So, to address the question, I believe that everyone in the defence sector confronted with negative drivers has assessed that the status quo is no longer an option and that profound changes through innovative approaches must occur.

### **Q How can ACT better tackle innovation to benefit the Nations?**

**A** I believe that ACT has the ability to propose capability solutions to our armed forces that can improve performance, reduce risk, and/or offer significant savings. A demand from Nations is evident, for example: Smart Defence and Connected Forces Initiatives.

For ACT to better tackle innovation, an environment where experts are able to better connect and work together is required. Additionally, these experts should be able to operate outside institutional constraints and use practical means such as collaborative platforms to rapidly create the most favorable conditions and productive knowledge communities.

### **Q What are you proposing?**

**A** Based on successful industry models analysed by ACT, the Innovation Hub (IH) has been proposed. ACT Capability Engineering Division believes that the IH is a solid approach to boost innovation in the command. It should be viewed as a catalyst for innovation and its vision embraced: *"By bringing together all relevant stakeholders in an environment conducive to innovation and creativity, the ACT Innovation Hub will foster collaboration and lead the efforts in identifying and de-risking solutions to NATO's transformational challenges"*

This past June, a campaign to implement the optimal innovation model for ACT began. The first campaign consisted of live and online brainstorming around the topic of "the human environment capability shortfall" was deemed a great success. What could have taken months, took just three days. As an added value, a solid knowledge community for follow-on implementation of the ideas was established.

### **Q What is the next step for the ACT Innovation Hub?**

**A** The model will be tested for risk reduction before it will be made available within ACT. From the lessons learned, the IH should be fully operational by early 2013. IH work will not cease, however. In the fall of 2012, another transformational topic will be tackled by soliciting a very large scientific community in the field of autonomy and robotics.

### **Q Would you say that innovation is the way ahead but it has yet to happen in NATO?**

**A** No. Innovation has happened and happens every day in NATO, but we often neither see nor exploit it. For example, the Countering IEDs campaign was improved when the decision was made to place greater emphasis on "defeating the IED network" rather than on "defeating the device", and by focusing on doctrine and training instead of expensive material solutions. This was truly innovative and greatly helped our armed force in theatre.

Cloud computing is another innovative way NATO is tackling data management. Thanks to key leaders in industry, ACT has become an expert in the domain and is designing very cost-effective solutions. Let us not overlook the success the NATO Centre for Maritime

## Frequently Asked Questions about Innovation - ACT

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Research and Experimentation ([CMRE](#)) . More than a decade ago, CMRE made the strategic decision to concentrate on new ways to detect and identify submarines and sea mines using numerous intelligent autonomous underwater platforms. The idea was to offer higher detection and identification performance by "multi-view" sensing while reducing risk to our sailors at a substantial cost reduction. This vision is about to become a reality. In a few years, our navies will use and operate fleets of [AUV](#) s for their MCM and [operations](#) .  
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### **Q But how do you start the process of innovation?**

**A** Henry Ford is often quoted for having said: "If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses". Sadly, we often strive to produce expensive and complicated 'faster horses' in our own domain instead of looking at the problems differently.

It could be argued that innovation and its subsequent benefits occur when our certainties are challenged. Often unpleasant, but necessary, this challenge can be accomplished in three steps: observe, network, and experiment.

Innovation is often a matter of associating ideas, talking about it, trying them, and sometimes failing miserably. It is rarely an isolated "eureka" moment. We often do not see the impact that a revolution in other domains can have on ours. Robotics, modelling and simulation, biotechnologies, social networking or human sciences, to name a few, are impacting our societies every day.

### **Q So, who can innovate and how?**

**A** Everyone can innovate! It can be accomplished by creating a favourable environment and a spirit of appreciation for those who innovate. I am confident that the Innovation Hub will greatly help ACT.

It is also important to mention the role of leadership as an essential requirement. Having innovation "evangelists" at the top is key in setting the right mindset for innovation to happen. ACT Chief of Staff has recognized that our chain of command has a pivotal role in this process. So, be prepared. Change for the good of the Command is ahead.

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