



Innovation in Ship Design

Chris B. McKesson

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What is innovation in ship design? Is it a capability that is inherent in all naval architects? Is it the result of the application of a certain set of tools, or of operation within a certain organizational structure? Can innovation be taught? Innovation is a creative act that results in a new and game-changing product. The emergence of an innovative product creates an asymmetric market. The emergence of an innovative weapon creates an asymmetric battlefield. It is clearly in the economic and military interest of the United States to be able to develop and deploy innovative products, including innovative ships. But the process of ship design is usually one of incremental development and slow evolution. Engineers are taught to develop their product by paying close attention to previous developments. This approach is viewed by some people as anti-innovative. And yet the author has made a career of innovation in ship design. How has this been possible? This dissertation will answer the four questions posed above. It will show what innovation in ship design is, and where innovative naval architecture lies in the taxonomy of human creative endeavor. It will then describe those human attributes which have been found to be essential to successful innovation. It will also describe some of the many tools that innovators use. Some of those tools are used unconsciously. Some of those tools are formal products supported by research institutes and teaching academies. Finally, given the fact that innovation in ship design is a component of engineering – which is a subject taught in Universities – and that it is facilitated by the use of tools – and tool use can be taught – the author will conclude that innovation itself can be taught. Whether it can be mastered will depend upon the individual, just as with most other creative skills.

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