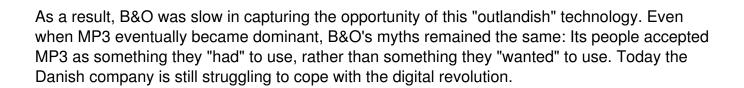
You probably think that the barriers to innovation are negative elements of your organization — that is, the wrong people, behaviors, and processes. But the most subtle and pernicious barriers to innovation may be the seemingly positive myths about what has made your organization successful.

Every organization has myths about who are the great leaders, what are the behaviors to admire and imitate, what business you are in, what customers want, what are the best skills to run a process. Whenever someone proposes an idea, it is explicitly or implicitly screened with the myths. Unfortunately, the competitive landscape changes, but the myths don't.

Consider Bang & Olufsen, the Danish manufacturer of music players and speakers. Its people have believed that its success depended on achieving the ultimate pureness of sound, creating beautiful objects, delighting users through great physical product interfaces, and thinking of music as a home experience. As a result, it has viewed architects and industrial designers as the best interpreters of customers' aspirations.

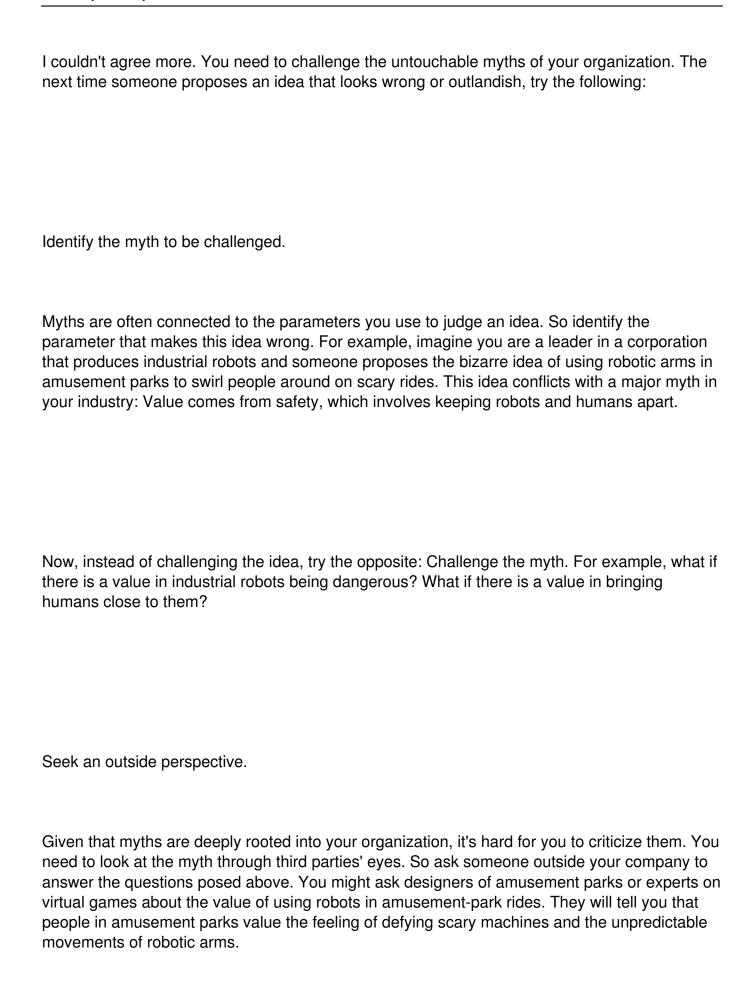
These myths impeded Band & Olufsen from reacting to the rise of MP3 digital encoding. MP3 technology has radically changed the world of music by making music more accessible, shareable, and embedded in the net. But MP3 conflicted with B&O's beliefs because it downgraded the quality of sound, replaced nice speakers with small headphones and computers, made the digital sphere more relevant than the physical objects, and made listening to music a dynamic on-the-go experience rather than a static at-home experience.



Myths are pernicious barriers to innovation because they are so deeply and silently embedded in an organization that they almost hypnotize it. I've been recently inspired by I miti del nostro tempo (The Myths of Our Time), a book by the Italian philosopher Umberto Galimberti. He says that "myths are ideas that own and govern us by means that are not logical but psychological, and therefore are rooted in the depths of our soul. These are ideas that we have mythologized because they give no problems, they facilitate judgment; in a word, they reassure us."

Galimberti talks of individuals. But the same dynamics happen in organizations.

What's the remedy? Galimberti's advice is that because "myths prevent us from deeply understanding the world ... we must therefore put our myths under critical scrutiny..."



Fuente: HBR Blog Network, by Roberto Verganti