



Patterns of Discontinuity – Past, Present and Future

Every sector goes through periods of relative calm when innovation is about doing what you do better. But these are punctuated by disruptions where the rules of the game get rewritten – for example by the emergence of a new technology or by external market changes. The trouble is that firms are pretty good at the first kind of innovation management but less so at the second – with the result that when discontinuous change happens not all firms survive the transition. At the same time many new entrants see that the rules of the game have changed and that they now have a chance to join the sector.

In this activity think about your firm (or one with which you are familiar) and the sector in which it operates. Looking back over the past fifty years or so, try and plot where there has been major disruption or discontinuity and what caused it. What response did existing firms have to make to ensure they survived and continued in the sector?

Having looked backwards, try and project forwards over the next fifty years and think of factors – perhaps only on the horizon at the moment – which might disrupt the sector. What will firms need to do to ensure they survive and develop with the change rather than being left behind by it?

You will probably have to talk to people about this and read some background to the firm. Try and capture the key points of your research in a short summary. You might want to use the framework below.

Looking back – what disruptions occurred and why?	What did survivors do to adapt and stay in the game?	Looking forward what disruptions might occur and why?	What should survivors do to stay in the game?