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## Booklover--Bellow and "The Dean's December"

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the journal-publishing world more and more publishers are copying PLoS and creating Gold OA services. I wonder how many of these publishers realize that they are beginning to develop a database of a kind they never had before, a record of authors and their works and all the online activity that takes place when an author submits an article to a journal. It may be time to bring in database marketing experts to assess how that data is being stored, what other fields of information it would be useful to collect, and what new products and services could be derived from that database.

### Investing in Capabilities

There is a moral to this story and that is: Don't just invest in your core business; invest in capabilities. Over time it may become more apparent what other uses these capabilities can

be put to. The corollary to this is that the common strategy to outsource everything that is not central to the business should be reviewed. Outsourcing may push away capabilities that will come to surprise us all in the years ahead. Now that we are seeing more and more publishers sending their production work to companies in India, I wonder how many of the executives of these companies recall that the first steps toward digital publishing strategies were taken by the very production departments that have now been outsourced. Should IT work be handled in-house or by vendors? That is a question whose answer varies day to day. When you outsource your software platform today, are you failing to invest in a capability you may need tomorrow?

There are no easy answers to how to spur innovation in an organization, but we have to be determined to look for innovation in unlikely places. Innovations are not always the work of the smartest people in the room; they

are not always prophetic in nature or grand in scope. Sometimes they are simply as clever as using a PDF to drive print-on-demand or capturing user names as **Sam Meyerson** did so many years ago. They spring from all corners of an organization and are no respecters of job title or rank. The innovative organization is simply one that makes things and then reflects on them. Rock stars need not apply. 🌱

### Endnotes

1. **Clayton M. Christensen**, *The Innovator's Dilemma: When New Technologies Cause Great Firms to Fail* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 1997).
2. **Clayton M. Christensen, Erik A. Roth, and Scott D. Anthony**, *Seeing What's Next: Using Theories of Innovation to Predict Industry Change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2004).

## Booklover — Bellow and “The Dean’s December”

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“People can lose their lives in libraries. They ought to be warned.” **Saul Bellow** quoted in **Steven Gilbar’s** *The Reader’s Quotation Book: A Literary Companion* published in 1990. I am one of those people who should have been warned. I have lost a good part of my life in libraries. It is one of my favorite places to be. Even when I travel, I will seek out a library. But I didn’t check **Saul Bellow’s** *The Dean’s December* out from a library, I found it in a used bookstore. It has been sitting on the “to read” pile along with a few other Nobelists for awhile. Not sure what prompted me to pick this one from that pile, but I soon understood.

**Saul Bellow**, a Canadian/American of Jewish descent, won the **Nobel Prize for Literature** in 1976 on the heels of his literary success for the novel “**Humboldt’s Gift**.” The Nobel Committee described his writing as “the mixture of rich picaresque novel and subtle analysis of our culture, of entertaining adventure, drastic and tragic episodes in quick succession interspersed with philosophic conversation, all developed by a commentator with a witty tongue and penetrating insight into the outer and inner complications that drive us to act, or prevent us from acting, and that can be called the dilemma of our age.” *The Dean’s December* was **Bellow’s** first book published (1982) after receiving the honor and embodies all of this description for me. (It probably is a stretch for a picaresque novel defined as: “Of or relating to a genre of usually satiric

prose fiction originating in Spain and depicting in realistic, often humorous detail the adventures of a roguish hero of low social degree living by his or her wits in a corrupt society.”)

The year that **Bellow** received his Nobel award was the same year I began my research career at the **Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC)**. During my career at MUSC, I have had the added bonus of meeting people from numerous ethnic backgrounds and learning about their perspectives, their food, their culture, and their difficulty of living so far from their families. In *The Dean’s December*, the character **Albert Corde** is a Dean at a **Chicago University**, and the story is centered around a December when he and his Romanian-born astrophysicist wife, **Minnia**, need to return to Bucharest, Romania to deal with the crisis surrounding **Minnia’s** dying mother. I have been a part of this story with too many of my friends, listening to their heartache as relatives were sick or dying. I almost put the book down, but **Bellow’s** word craft quickly engaged me and I was following him to Romania in the bitter of December. By Chapter 4...

“Each of the long days in Minna’s room was a succession of curious states. The first was the state of rising, pulling on your Chicago socks and sweaters (good cashmere, but thinning at the heels and elbows), assembling a dean who was less and less a dean within. The room was

dark, the cold mortifying. The toilet, located in a small cell apart from the bathroom, was Gothic. The toilet paper was rough. A long aeruginous pipe only gave an empty croak when you pulled the chain. No water above. You poured from one of the buckets into the bowl. Corde himself took charge and filled them when the water was running.... All this was like old times in the States, before the age of full convenience. It took you back.

On the dining room table, Turkish coffee was ready in a long-handled brass pitcher, lots of chicory, together with boiled milk, grilled bread in place of toast, brown marmalade with shreds of orange in it — ersatz, but the best that conscientious Tanti Gigi could furnish.... Kindly acquaintances did the errands. Aged women rose at four to stand in line for a few eggs, a small ration of sausages, three or four spotted pears. Corde had seen the shops and the produce, the gloomy queues — brown, gray, black, mud colors, and an atmosphere of compulsory exercise in the prison yard. The kindly ladies were certainly buying on the black market.... Corde ate grapes and tangerines and other black market luxuries. From time to time he was served meat. It was the general opinion of the ladies that there should be good things in the house of death. Especially for people from the blessed world outside, foreigners who took steaks and tangerines for granted....”

December in Romania in the house of the dying is depressing. Yet **Bellow’s** words make you want to stay until the dead were buried, December had passed, the appointment for the telescope on Mount Palomar was set for Minna, and “The weather was bright, keen blue, an afternoon of January thaw.” 🌱

