Olaf-land is dwarf country. It is one of the countries in dwarf-world and it distinguishes itself from the other countries by a social approach: Each dwarf counts. These are not only political words, but it is done and monitored in reality. In this story a specific company in Olaf-land is discussed: Bookmark.

The problem at Bookmark is described in the country newspaper as follows:

*Bookmark is a company that makes sample books. These books, for instance, consist of different types of leaves in the country. These books are also made for other dwarf countries. Recently several orders were returned by the costumers due to the fact that there were (too many) mistakes in the sample books delivered. That has led to a lot of extra (no pay) work for Bookmark, while they already were into problems. Several dwarf workers were ill (some already for a long time). Approximately 20 dwarfs are working at the company of which approximately half of these workers used to work at a social workshop, but due to government policy it was stimulated that these dwarfs would get an ordinary job outside that workshop: Participate as much as possible in dwarf society (and that includes an ordinary job). The company asked for help in the newspaper and Dwarf University offered help by asking a bachelor student to do his bachelor project at Bookmark.*

As Bookmark was in severe problems they asked the bachelor student to come up with possible solutions as soon as possible. In order to get these solutions the student used different creativity techniques, among them synectics: a fantasy analogy. He imagined that the company was part of the human world. Dwarf countries are on earth, but are completely not noticed by humans. On the other hand dwarfs can observe the human society. Among the different solutions arising from this creativity technique were the following:
- Skip the social approach, for instance, by firing all the dwarfs that used to work at the social workshop.
- Introduce a performance system (our student dwarf had to study further because the abbreviation KPI was not explained in the literature he read).
- Introduce a total quality system.
- Use innovative approaches in order to cope with the mixture of dwarf workers.

Specifically the first ‘possible’ solution mentioned caused a tremendous amount of arousal in the company. And even worse it caused arousal at the dwarf university as well. “Do they really do that in the human world?” “Yes”. “That is horrible.” But also the second and third approach mentioned proved after a little study not to fit in Olaf-land: These approaches only address (very partially) the culture of Olaf-land. The last one seemed to be promising. The student discussed with his Dwarf university supervisor. The reaction of the supervisor was clear: “You jumped to conclusions. In a design approach (and you are in such an approach):
You want to MAKE a solution (advice) for Bookmark. What did you learn about such an approach?"

Although our dwarf student was after the reaction of the supervisor for a moment flabbergasted, he soon started to think about the reaction of the supervisor. “As far as I know the first step is to get the problem clear and at the moment it is not completely clear. The second step is to perform an analysis/diagnosis of the problem at hand.” The supervisor was happy with the reaction of the student. They talked together with Bookmark and the explanation was accepted by the management. The problem became the number of mistakes in sample books and how to reduce them. Boundary conditions were introduced in such a way that solutions like discussed before (but unacceptable) would not become solutions any more.

The student observed the production process for approximately one week (at busy and not so busy hours). He tried to vary conditions, as far as the real life situation allowed. He found four specific points in the process were the (vast) majority of the mistakes took place.

Being careful now he consulted his supervisors again before going to the next step. He told he needed a set of requirements provided by Bookmark (but maybe also by the University and by himself) and then again he thought he could make the step to the creativity techniques in order to come up with solutions.

Allow a facilitator was the advice. The company and you might have framed yourself by the start of the process. Try other techniques: Like enlarging the search space. But if you still like it, use the fantasy analogy again.

A couple of days later the student sent the following dwarf-mail message to the supervisor: We have decided on a solution. It is so simple. Again it comes from the human world. The ordinary descriptions of production processes and production management are more than fifty old (like Taylor, I have to read more if this is a correct reference). Make simple, but precise sheets for those four specific points. NO innovation at all needed. Stick to the old stuff!! The supervisor gave a short answer by mail: Go ahead, good work. But you also provided me already with a question for your bachelor thesis presentation. Is it correct: NO innovation needed?

P.S. This short story is based on parts of a bachelor thesis of Eelco Starreveld (June 2010) in order to receive a bachelor in technology management. Of course, parts of the story are fictive, but hopefully recognizable for supervisors and in Olaf-land.