Whatever we're trying isn't working. After so many quarters of treading water, everyone is impatient for growth. Management teams can't count indefinitely on the indulgence of boards and shareholders. And marketing campaigns, product adjustments, and social-media initiatives aren't doing the job. Sure, there are success stories, but all too many companies managing to beat the curve seem to be doing so in ways that seem almost accidental or as side effects of government programs. Little of it feels stable and solid. In aggregate, corporate profits are at record highs; in particular, almost all of it is going to banks and bankers.

Organizations have retrenched from top to bottom, all available (and SarbOx-compliant, of course) accounting tricks have been played, and CEOs continue looking for places to cut costs, as though there were any costs left to cut. We need to move forward—that's where the growth is—and trimming what you already have is hardly the way to get there. Paring back your existing structures, trying to keep everything running a little more efficiently, won't take you to new places, no matter how often the CEO praises "innovative thinking."

It's a shame that *out-of-the-box thinking* is such a groan-inducing cliché (for more on those, see Jim Krohe's page 36 essay on business language); it remains a useful concept. Too many CEOs, and companies, are trapped inside—well, if not a box, or a paradigm, or nine dots, then a pattern.

Fortunately, *TCB Review* is on the case. In this issue, economist Bart van Ark looks to the next innovation boom, Stephen Denny and Steven Feinberg offer fresh approaches to sticky problems, Vadim Liberman urges executives to rethink the oft-lamented skills gap, and Paul B. Brown—who, with the Spring 2011 issue, begins a column titled "The New Normal"—argues that innovation is easier when you don't know the rules.

In documentary films, hardcover books, and government investigations, we're still trying to figure out what went wrong in the financial meltdown. But knowing more—what's a credit default swap again?—won't necessarily help us move forward.

CEOs have lost their appetite for risk exactly when it's most needed. Sure, there's uncertainty out there, more than ever before, and the rate of change keeps picking up speed. In 2011, it'll be faster. The piles of cash on which companies are sitting, waiting for demand to pick up, can be put to better use—for the sake of both the company and the economy, national and global.

At the least, your people could use some breathing room. The strain on today's workplaces—with everyone working someone else's job as well as her own—dates to before the 2008 crash. Big companies downsized—staff, projections, goals, expectations—back in 2001 and never restored departments to full strength. Managers have long since adjusted to doing more with little or nothing, and CEOs stopped promising mass rehirings some time ago.

Is this stripped-down business world the new normal? Let's all hope not. Only a few years ago, strategists saw blue oceans everywhere. Those oceans are still out there. Jump in—the water's fine.

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