Dr. Peter C. Wilton teaches strategy, innovation, and marketing in the Haas School of Business at the Haas School of Business, University of California, Berkeley. He is the Faculty Director of the Berkeley ExecEd program, Marketing Strategy in the Digital Age. He spoke with ExecEd on sustaining and reframing strategies for innovation.

ExecEd: You mentioned reframing, you mentioned disruption. Let's pause for a second. Give us the definitions again.

Peter Wilton: Sure. Sustaining innovation, so there's a spectrum of innovation that ranges from sustaining to disruptive or reframing. These are slightly different terms but let me explain them. Sustaining innovation is really any attempt to incrementally improve something that already exists. To be an organization that is already successful and have a goal of being 5% or 10% better or more efficient next year. It's continuous improvement, it's incremental, but it's fundamentally based on something that is already in existence in the market.

Disruptive or reframing innovation is something that doesn't exist. It's a new approach to creating value for the organization's customers. It's something that was previously unrecognized or something that the incumbents considered impossible to do and when it's launched, when it's introduced. Because it's new, it always involves educating the customer about what those possibilities are and how to take advantage of them.

We have this difference between sustaining and disruptive. The classic term disruptive as advanced by Professor Christensen at Harvard suggests that new innovation always takes place in a low-cost form. I like to use the term reframing because reframing is a broader term. It's not necessarily confined to low-cost innovation. It could be launched at an existing segment of customers which are willing to pay quite a lot of money but it fundamentally reframes how people think about the providers of value and what the options are in a market.