

Fostering Engineering Innovation in a Time of Uncertainty



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Google, Apple, Microsoft, Amazon – what’s common between these billion-dollar companies? If we look closely, we see that their fortunes were an outcome of making innovation a part of their central business strategy.

Google started as a search engine. Amazon was an online book store. Microsoft’s first product was a version of the programming language BASIC for the Altair 8800 “microcomputer”. These organizations were successful with their initial product offerings.

However, would they hold the behemoth’s status had they not been laser-focused on building breakthroughs and coming up with strategies that provided greater value at cost, redefined channels, built new markets and new business models? Disruption has become the new normal.

Organizations globally are looking at ways and means to transform their business, improve their customer experience, identify new markets, and create competitive differentiation. To stay ahead of the curve, organizations must assume disruption to be a constant and then take concrete steps to foster innovation as a part of the company strategy. In addition, they must foster innovative strategies, identify and eliminate obstacles, manage risk, craft the optimal metrics, and set the right measurement expectations.

Organizations that follow this path can remain innovative and profitable in the face of disruption.

But what is needed for innovation to happen?

Innovation comes from “minds”...the minds of the most valuable assets that any organization has—its people.

To build innovation into a strategy, organizations need to distill the innovation mindset in their people. What does this mindset consist of?

The Ability to Identify and Seize New Opportunities

Innovation happens when the workforce is geared to look for and identify new opportunities. This can only happen when employees start with the mindset that things can be done differently.

If something is “broken”, how can it be fixed? Does this present an opportunity? Is there an opportunity blind spot? Can something be done better?

Similar to an entrepreneurial mindset, this way of thinking helps employees become more solution-driven in their approach. It consequently makes them growth-oriented by helping them internalize that in every adversity lies an opportunity.



“We cannot solve our problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.” – **Albert Einstein**

The Willingness to Think Outside the Box

Developing the ability to identify opportunities is one face of the coin. How to make it work is the most important part. To achieve this, organizations have to help their employees build their capacity to think, be it strategically or creatively, to come up with working solutions.

This demands the capability to objectively think through the problem and the solution, identify the risks involved, and then take the calculated risks needed to achieve the business goals.



“A goal without a plan is just a wish.” – **Antoine de Saint-Exupery**

Develop Entrepreneurial Mindsets

One of the most coveted traits of successful entrepreneurs is their capability to think outside the box. Thinking outside the box is a mindset that asks you to treat each difficulty, hurdle, challenge, and failure as an opportunity to grow. This mindset, called the growth mindset, is a set of beliefs that intelligence can be fostered, leadership can be developed, and talent can be nurtured.

Helping employees develop a growth mindset helps organizations remain agile in the face of change by helping them look at difficult situations as a challenge. It encourages people to experiment with ideas to scale these issues by leveraging their strengths. Where they find themselves falling short, employees are then self-motivated to improve and employ all the strategies they know, old and new, to solve a problem and consequently boost innovation.

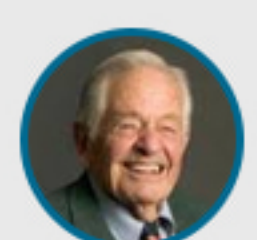


“Train your brain to think more clearly. The mind is everything. What you think, you become.” – **Jack Ma**

Create Better Solutions

Organizations need to increase their capacity to create and deliver great solutions to improve their innovation game. Given that an organization is not an amorphous concept, its capacity to create better solutions is directly proportional to its employees’ capacity to innovate. It is therefore imperative to help employees identify where they are on the solution graph, which skills they need to work on to improve their thinking prowess, and how they can boost collaboration and creativity in themselves and their team members—which in turn will enable them to develop game-changing, creative solutions in a faster or less expensive manner.

To navigate this path successfully, employees must develop the capability to establish action-oriented and clear goals. These goals can be in the form of project plans, work allocations, follow up meetings, project status reports, expected stage-level outcomes, etc. that will help them move from point A to point B.



“Without goals, and plans to reach them, you are like a ship that has set sail with no destination.” – **Fitzhugh Dodson**

Develop a Sense of Urgency

Innovation does not take place when we procrastinate. That’s the perfect recipe for a dish called “missed opportunities”. To increase their capacity to innovate, organizations need to ensure that they secure the complete commitment of their employees, which comes from having a strong sense of urgency. This urgency emerges from accountability and ownership of tasks and a problem-solving approach to achieving goals.

A sense of urgency does not mean business work. Instead, it means developing the innate capabilities to prioritize, categorize, and optimize workflows to ensure maximum productivity and timeliness.

What’s interesting about all these traits mentioned above is that these are power-skills, skills deemed essential for organizations to successfully navigate the ever-changing business landscape of today.

These are all behavioral skills that need constant reaffirming so they become second nature to your employees. Companies need to use proven, data-driven channels such as personality assessments and behavioral skill tests to evaluate the exact skill requirements of employees. Once that is done, connect your employees with the right coaches to help them hone and improve these skills to keep the wheels of innovation churning in the face of disruption.

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