



## Innovation

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### Innovation Defined

Innovation is developing new ideas and putting them to work in support of established goals. These innovations may be major breakthroughs or small-scale improvements of existing products or processes.

Innovation differs from pure creativity in one important regard. It involves implementation as a second step after creating or recognizing a new idea, trend, product, or approach. Follow-through is a necessary component of innovation.

Successful innovation requires a willingness to accept uncertainty and potential failure, as well as the interpersonal skills needed to function in an atmosphere of healthy competition. Professionals who want to become more innovative must be able to clearly communicate their ideas, advocate for themselves, and respond to criticism.

### Impact

The ability to generate, manage, and promote innovation is an important part of driving growth and adapting to changing business conditions. An innovative business environment allows individuals at every level of the organization to generate or identify new ideas, select those that are most appropriate, and put them to work in support of business growth.

Skepticism, fear of disapproval, and a reluctance to examine new ideas that are unfamiliar will prevent people from innovating. Unclear lines of communication that prevent new ideas from reaching key stakeholders will also thwart innovation, as will timidity, lack of confidence, and an inability to gain buy-in from others.

### Techniques for Development

The following four elements are essential to fostering an innovative environment:

1. *Effective boundaries.* The what, when, and why of innovation must be established and articulated as a holistic strategy that will guide individuals in their thinking. Otherwise, innovation may develop in ways that are not useful to the organization. Freedom and the ability to work independently are also critical. "Stretch ideas," or breakthrough innovation thinking, must be supported, as well as incremental achievements. Providing time, space, and resources for exploring new ideas will enable people to gain confidence in their abilities as innovators and innovation managers.
2. *Productive competition.* Innovation is often heightened by productive competition (e.g., two teams working on different approaches to the same problem). Healthy competition spurs creativity and persistence, but it can be a double-edged sword. Successful innovation requires focus on shared goals, not individual achievements. Harmful conflicts and defensiveness must be guarded against.
3. *Collective thinking.* Individuals must approach innovation as a collective goal and reach beyond themselves for inspiration and ideas. This may involve networking, building collaborative team relationships, establish-



ing space for the exchange of ideas, and working in multidisciplinary groups. Innovation must be recognized as the result of many individuals' contributions, and rewards should be allocated accordingly.

4. *Logistical and analytic skills.* Project management, time management, and risk management skills are necessary for analyzing, selecting, and implementing the best ideas and approaches generated by innovation.

Individuals who want to expand their innovative capabilities must:

- Develop clear and persuasive communication skills.
- Exhibit creativity and a willingness to work independently.
- Demonstrate the ability to collaborate with diverse groups.

### Related Reading

- *How to Build a Culture of Originality* by Adam Grant, *Harvard Business Review*
- *The Innovator's Dilemma* by Clayton M. Christensen, *Business Book Summaries*
- *Make Waves* by Patti Johnson, *Business Book Summaries*
- *The Simple Rules of Disciplined Innovation* by Donald Sull, *McKinsey Quarterly*



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