

Creativity and Innovation in Organizational Leadership

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Abstract. This paper explores the significant role of leadership in both the creativity and innovation processes of an organization. It is a proven fact that culture and technology enhance leadership effectiveness in most organizations because leadership represents the catalyst that drives organizational creativity and innovation. So, for an organization to accomplish constant innovation, leaders must create a conducive learning environment that promotes a deep-rooted culture of experimentation thereby encouraging creativity and innovation (Agbor, 2008). However, creativity and innovation in organizations depend on how leaders promote and manage diversity by developing an effective leadership structure that could sustain the entire process of innovation. Since most innovation projects are said to fail 90% of the time, developing effective innovation teams within an organization is critical. So, apart from outlining the various attributes of a successful innovator within an organization and their characteristics, our major focus will be on the key lessons learned during the process of innovation and creativity, overcoming the several myths and wrong assumptions that are associated with them, knowing what the structure of scientific revolutions entail in making innovation works and the spiritual contexts of creativity and innovation.

Keywords: Creativity, Innovation, Leadership effectiveness, Learning environment, Organization, Revolution and Leaders

Introduction

The importance of a strong and visionary leadership during innovations cannot be underestimated. However, it remains a known fact that the organizational structure, culture, strategy, and other management tools enhance effectiveness and competitive advantage to organizations (Agbor, 2008). So, leaders must drive and control deliberate changes in structure, culture, and process in order to transform them into creative, effective, and productive ones. Therefore, successful innovative leaders remain the sole catalyst that creates and manages the environment, organizational structure, and strategies that will encourage and sustain effectiveness, innovation, and success in every organization.

Schein (2010) says that leaders are the ones who develop the culture of their organizations. For example, when IBM had to change its culture in order to renew the organization, it brought in a new CEO, Lou Gerstner. Similarly, it took Jack Welch, the new CEO to change the culture of General Electric to help it become highly innovative and successful. Culture change will not occur without the involvement, commitment, and active support of leaders who repeatedly work to convince organizational members of the benefits and the need for an organizational culture change (Cameron & Quinn, 2011).

This shared and collaborative leadership encourages and promotes innovation and creativity because for an organization to become innovative and successful, it must benefit from the creativity of all its members. So, organizational success is all about growth and innovation.

Davila, Epstein, and Shelton (2013) opined that the very best innovators have developed a deep-rooted culture of innovation where they construct the right mix of behaviours to foster both value creation via creativity and value capture via disciplined commercialization.

Leadership plays a pivotal role in the core design, operation, and culture of innovation and embracing a strict adherence to the seven basic innovation rules is essential. From the spiritual angle to innovation, Oster (2011) posits that the foundation of Christian innovation is the acknowledgement that God truly exists and that he is an important element in our daily lives. God is the real innovator and all creation is his. Furthermore, innovation represents a way of life, almost a religion and the truth is that God created, God creates, God is creating, and God will create. Berkun (2010) defines myth as something more satisfying to people than the truth. So, overcoming those myths and wrong assumptions about the dynamics of innovations are essential. Therefore, there exists the structure of scientific revolutions from the normal science with a paradigm and a dedication to solving puzzles followed by serious anomalies, which lead to a crisis until reaching the final resolution to the crisis using a new paradigm (Kuhn, 2012).

Davila et al. (2013) equally explained how most companies fail because they do not understand the causal linkages between various parts of innovation. Hence, most companies possess no silver bullet for innovation as no formula or structure for innovation works for every organization.

The concept of ambidextrous organization exists where there is a special mix of efforts towards efficiency and innovation using exploration and exploitation that depends solely on the characteristics of structure, culture, and leadership. Moreover, creativity and innovation in organizations depend on how leaders encourage and manage diversity as well as develop an effective leadership structure that can sustain the whole innovation process (Van Velsor et al.). Creativity is not an accident but a consequence of our intention to be creative through learning of the creative thinking strategies using either the linear or intuitive thinkertoys techniques (Michalko, 2006).

Making Innovation Work

Often times, the solution to a problem lies within the problem itself. So, identifying worthwhile business problems and converting them into specific challenge using linear and intuitive thinkertoys techniques do help. Some of the problem-solving techniques mentioned in Michalko's book are think bubbles, scamper, idea box, idea grid, future fruit, brute think, ideatoons, chilling out, dreamscape, brainstorming, murder board, and raw creativity. Therefore, nature doesn't care if patterns are creative or destructive because creativity is not about chance but rather choice. Otherwise, using thinkertoys train us on how to get ideas and it does not render the creative experience but only suggest it. Thinkertoys involves the linear techniques that allows us to manipulate information using the left brain to generate new ideas, while intuitive thinkertoys allow us to tap into our unconsciousness using the right brain and find the ideas that we already have.

Innovation remains a survival issue for many organizations and knowing that timing is everything when choosing the right innovation strategy in business is key. Some people work under the misconception that innovation is always about making something afresh or new. Therefore, how do leaders create the environment that would facilitate and encourage employee creativity in the development of new products, services, or idea?

Innovative leaders can nurture creative followership in a friendly culture by:

- a. Focusing on behaviours to change culture and attitudes of followers.
- b. Meeting employees where they are at and with what they need.
- c. Introducing metrics and motivators to drive creative behaviours.
- d. Encouraging social learning systems through networks and connections.

However, employee creativity and innovation are essential to business's success and leaders can also improve creativity in their followers by:

- i. Maintaining an open dialogue between employees and top management.

- ii. Organizing brainstorming sessions, e.g. IBM adopted this very well.
- iii. Engaging employees by encouraging them to share creative ideas.
- iv. Remaining flexible and forgiving.
- v. Keeping track of company innovations (Michalko, 2006).

Having a clear direction from the top of the organization permeates throughout the organization to motivate, support, and reward the activities that encourages creativity as well as the innovation themselves. That is why there must be collaboration between the leadership and followership of organizations to promote creativity as a matter of choice, not by luck.

Davila, Epstein, and Shelton (2013) define antibodies as an organization's natural response to change. Innovation antibodies are people who see the negative side in any change and do their best to make sure that it never takes place. They despise change and wreck innovations. During innovation processes, while incremental changes can be tolerated well, breakthroughs and radical innovations are perceived as disruptive to the way things usually work. If left unchecked, organizational antibodies grow strong and eventually overwhelm the proposed breakthrough innovations. So, properly used metrics and motivators can be used to mitigate against innovation antibodies in organizations.

Furthermore, to achieve innovation success, a company must overcome the "antibodies" that inevitably attack and defeat innovations. Typically, the more radical the innovation and the more it challenges the status quo, the more antibodies emerge and the stronger they are. Nevertheless, fostering a culture of risk taking and learning that requires careful attention to metrics and rewards mitigates against innovation antibodies and preventing them requires learning systems and activities that allows organization to differentiate good change from bad change because learning is one of the most important elements in combating organizational antibodies (Davila et al., 2013).

Lindegard (2013) in his article proffers some practical solutions that could help mitigate against innovation antibodies, some of which are:

- a. Making people backers rather than blockers by keeping them more involved in the entire innovation process.
- b. Staying below the radar at all times.
- c. Having frameworks and processes in place.
- d. Providing high autonomy and freedom for innovation to thrive.

Therefore, embracing the power of experimentation through rigorous trial and error spurs innovation (Lerner, 2012). Thus, engaging in the power of experimentation helps neutralize innovation antibodies and every experiment that results in failures are not really a failed one but one that often lead to more innovative ideas and concepts (Thomke, 2003). Otherwise, without measures and incentives, organizational antibodies are released, then resisting innovation and blocking organizational change

Every successful innovative person in an organization must follow these seven rules of innovation:

- i. Technology and business model changes define innovation.
- ii. Innovation strategy links innovation to business objectives.
- iii. How you innovate determines what you innovate.
- iv. Metrics and motivators drive innovative behaviour.
- v. Mitigate organizational antibodies or prepare to fail.
- vi. Manage the inherent tension between creativity and commercialization.
- vii. Leadership plays a vital role in the design, operation, and culture of innovation (Davila et al., 2013).

For example, innovation only occurs if it's an attitude that runs through a company's culture. Most companies that succeed at innovation such as Apple, General Electric and Google have their own innovation DNA that exists independent of their innovation managers. So

professionalizing innovation as an attitude that organically run through the culture of an organization is fundamental.

The three keys to a successful innovation according to Drucker (1993) are:

a. **Work:** Innovation is work that requires knowledge and great ingenuity. It is a by-product of sustained efforts. Having a good idea isn't good enough, you have to turn the idea into results and have to test the ideas against the real world.

b. **Strength:** Successful innovators need to be in touch with potential opportunities by playing to their strengths and also needed to beware of the curse of knowledge.

Pfeiffer and Sutton (2000) called it the knowing-doing gap. So, avoiding the side gap that exists between knowing how to do something and actually being able or willing to do it is vital.

c. **Impact:** Successful innovators have an impact by changing the way they do things or the way they think. They both impact the society and the economy.

Another major challenge in understanding innovation is the confusion between the concept of creativity and innovation itself. Innovation starts with creativity and then moves into the process of actively innovating.

Choosing the Right Type of Innovation

Berkun (2010) asserts that there is a method for innovation and by definition, innovation is a charge into the unknown. The very best innovators develop a growing culture where success is all about growth and innovation. Davila, Epstein, and Shelton (2013) posit that innovation is more than changing technologies to create products and services that are better, cheaper, and faster but it thrives on business model innovations. However, not all innovations are created equally and they do not entail the same risks or provide similar rewards. The three major types of innovation are:

i. **Incremental:** Incremental innovation leads to small improvements to existing products and business processes. It is like an exercise in problem-solving with a clear goal but a puzzle to solve is how to get there. It is the most prevalent type of innovation in most companies but the problem with incremental innovation is that it represents a constrained creativity that could serve as a trap and lead a company to die.

ii. **Semi-radical:** This can provide crucial changes to the competitive environment that an incremental innovation cannot. Semi-radical innovations involve substantial change to either the business model or the technology of an organization but not to both. Managing simultaneously both the business model and technology components of the semi-radical innovation remains one of the major challenges for organizations.

iii. **Radical:** This is a significant change that simultaneously affects both the business model and technology of a company. Radical innovations usually bring fundamental changes to the competitive environment in an industry. It could be a tough idea to sell and highly risky. For example, Microsoft and Apple have adopted radical innovations in the past that have yielded them bountiful results (Davila et al., 2013).

Scriptural Context of Innovation

According to Oster (2011) who said that innovation is Christian when it is aligned with God's purposes and methods since creativity is a form of worship that is expressed in art to glorify God. Genesis 1:1 serves as the basic foundation as God created both heaven and earth. Everything is and should be open for innovation.

Kuyper (2011) describes how Jesus radiates the glory of God with his many innovative acts.

Jesus intentionally passed on his innovative messages and methods to his disciples with the expected results of miracles, signs and wonders, all to the glory of God. The book of 2nd Corinthians 5:17 says that *"therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things*

have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” So, every person is creative and innovative because the capacity to be so was designed into them by God of creation. God developed us as co-creators with the ability and motivation to innovate. However, our sin nature fractured our relationship with God but the common grace of Christ shed on the cross saves us from the cause of sin and death.

Furthermore, the most defining moment of innovation is Christ’s resurrection from the dead as stated in Mark 16:1-8. He came to the earth, suffer, and ultimately face a brutal execution but destroy the power of sin and death through God innovative acts of resurrection. That is the reason why all Christians must be creator in Christ as a result of common grace (Kuyper, 2011).

God has chosen his character to mankind through his historical and contemporary innovation and calls all Christians to innovate. So, in Christian innovations, why we innovate largely determines what and how we innovate (Oster, 2011).

Innovation and Diversity

Diversity fosters creativity as we need to generate the best ideas from people at all levels in the organization and incorporate them into the business practice. Most business cases for cultural diversity and innovation are intrinsically linked to a company’s innovation strategy. At all times, a diverse and inclusive workforce is necessary to drive innovation, foster creativity, and guide business strategies. However, the interplay between diversity and innovation in organizational settings is a complex, and at times challenging one. Diversity represents a policy and legal perspectives across the six demographic strands of age, gender, race & ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, religion and beliefs. Innovation on the other hand is the generation and introduction of new ideas which often lead to the development of new products and services, processes, and systems in all areas of business activity. Most times, innovation could be subjective in relation to diversity (Agbor, 2008).

Diversity lies at the very heart of an organization’s ability to innovate. Therefore, leaders should endeavour to encourage creativity and innovation by creating a conducive environment for cultural diversity to thrive. Where there is true diversity in an organization, then it becomes easier for innovative solutions to take place. Nevertheless, the presence of dissimilar mindsets in the workforce enhances creativity, flexibility, problem-solving, and innovation. The most difficult roadblock to creativity is overcoming the organizational culture that mitigates against innovation.

Characteristics of a Person Who Successfully Leads Innovation in an Organization

According to an article written by Premuzic-Chamorro (2013), he said that what makes an idea innovative and what makes an innovative idea valuable look synonymous. Some researchers suggest that radical innovation confers sustainable competitive edge but it is very risky like Apple’s iPhone 5 compared with the original iPhone. Most often, creative people tend to be better at spotting problems rather than solving them with a lot of passion, opening to new experiences, and being curious. Otherwise, creativity alone is not sufficient for innovation but development and execution of an idea is key. Otherwise, the key difference between innovation and creativity lie in execution.

So, imbibing entrepreneurial spirit involves the process by which creative ideas become useful innovations. The major key characteristics of a person who successfully leads innovation in an organization are:

- a. Formal Education and Training: Most successful innovators are not dropout geniuses, but well-trained experts in their field. They consistently embrace learning.
- b. Having an opportunistic mindset that helps them identify gaps in the market as opportunities lies at the heart of entrepreneurship and innovation.

c. Persistence and Pro-activity: Effective innovators are more driven, resilient, and energetic than their peers. They are proactive, very persistent and never give up. A perfect example is the late Steve Jobs of Apple Inc.

d. Healthy Dose of Prudence: A person who successfully leads innovation in his organization is more organized, cautious and risk-averse than the general population. However, due to high level of risk and uncertainty, he always exhibits a high level of prudence.

e. Social Capital: Serial innovators value relationships by using their connections and networks to mobilize resources and build both internal and external strong alliances (Premuzic-Chamorro, 2013).

Even when people possess these five key characteristics, real innovation is unlikely to occur in the absence of a meaningful mission or clear long-term vision.

Key Attributes

The best way to build an innovative, vibrant and effective organization is to diffuse leadership and empower everyone through training and coaching so that they can become creative and effective leaders themselves (Gardner, 2000).

Some of the key attributes that he or she consistently exhibits for employees, subcontractors, and customers to eagerly participate in the ideation and development of new products, services, or ideas are

- i. Possession of low level of anxiety.
- ii. They have sound emotional stability.
- iii. They are action-oriented.
- iv. They possess confidence through learning, innovating, and changing that requires exploration of the unknown. So, they have strong confidence in their ability to succeed at all times even in the midst of uncertainty and fear.
- v. They are very open and transparent.
- vi. They are risk tolerant, culturally agile and promote diversity.

All these attributes are properly built into their organizational culture where they will discover and exploit new opportunities that will put them ahead of competition. Therefore, successful innovative person in organizations trust themselves enough to trust others, communicate to learn, collaborate and discover.

Moreover, leaders can encourage creativity and innovation in their organization by:

- a. Recognizing the role of the leaders in encouraging creativity.
- b. Valuing creativity themselves by being enthusiastic about encouraging new developments.
- c. Treating organizations as living systems filled with the innovative dynamics and potentials that exists in all of the people.
- d. Stimulating the process of creativity and innovation (Michalko, 2006).

Organizations will attain the full commitment and contribution of its entire workforce when it recognizes and removes barriers to diversity. Anyway, where there is true diversity in the organization, it becomes easier for innovative solutions to take place.

Conclusion

God still remains the only creative force in the universe. If you want to be creative, you must create things but if you want to be innovative, you must make things for other people.

The dynamics of innovation is not about knowing but doing and learning the best lessons. Innovation can be understood as a process and an outcome which embodies ideas, conversion of ideas, and diffusion that creates an economic impact (Berkun, 2010).

Burton, Obel, and DeSanctis (2011) say that successful ambidextrous organizations adopt both the exploitative and explorative strategic dimensions by vigorously pursuing both

the organizational goals of efficiency and effectiveness with innovations. Hence, leveraging on key attributes of leadership, structure and culture allow organizations to build efficiencies today and new creative designs for tomorrow.

Berkun (2010) admonished us about overcoming several myths that are associated with innovation coupled with what the structure of scientific revolutions by Kuhn (2012) portends. In all, innovation and creativity is from God and it is progressive.

Having a deep understanding about the significance of the structure of scientific revolutions from the role of history, to the nature and route of normal science, puzzle-solving, the priority of paradigms leading to anomalies and emergence of scientific discoveries help people to innovate. The response to crisis and how different revolutions change the world view and made progress possible through series of innovations bring about tacit knowledge, intuition, exemplars, incommensurability, and the nature of science. Normal science disrupts the status quo through scientific revolutions that culminated in innovations (Kuhn, 2012).

Therefore, in organizational leadership, a culture of experimentation must be catalytic and function as the foundation of a continuous process through which new and unforeseen ideas bubble to the surface for consideration.

Successful innovation leaders cast a vision that is extraordinarily expansive and unreasonable and they keep dogma in abeyance (Oster, 2011).

Finally, if a CEO overemphasizes innovation, it can spell disaster for the whole organization. So, successfully executing improvements to innovation is relatively straightforward through smart execution and adherence to the seven basic innovation rules. Therefore, leadership, particularly the CEO's leadership represents the critical difference in creating and sustaining successful innovation and without a strong leadership support, innovation in organization will forever remain a pipedream (Davila et al., 2013).

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