



WHAT IT TAKES TO INNOVATE

The Four Pillars of Innovation are tried-and-true strategies that lead organizations to breakthrough results.

By Jon Kleinman

For all the ink spilled over innovation in recent years, it remains as inscrutable as ever—an urgent business imperative fixed on an ever-elusive goal. Sticking to the status quo is a major risk for any organization, as competitors, customer demands and market opportunities shift at breakneck speeds.

Those content to tread water eventually find themselves adrift amid new swirling currents.

Pursuing and implementing innovation is not only feasible but can be learned and mastered through rigor and dedication. To crack the formula, we studied clients that successfully grafted innovation into their organizations' DNA, uncovering four critical traits they all share.

Every leader should push to ensure their organization follows these Four Pillars of Innovation.

1. STRONG LEADERSHIP MANDATE

Great ideas can grow anywhere in an organization. Narrowly focusing on the opinions of leadership without tapping the rest of your organization could mean leaving great ideas to die on the vine. That is why the first pillar of innovation is a strong leadership mandate.

Executives need to send a strong, consistent message that innovation is vital to the success of the organization. That does not mean mere lip service at annual all-hands meetings. Leaders need to back up their ambitions with proper resourcing toward innovation initiatives and active engagement in those efforts.

2. INNOVATION INFRASTRUCTURE

With a mandate in place, a company needs to

build a dedicated infrastructure for innovation. This could manifest in a number of ways, from appointing a CIO or innovation team to dedicating a budget or war room for innovation work.

This new infrastructure may influence which skills your organization looks for in new hires. It could also augment how you measure ROI, stressing a more long-term and creative approach.

3. PROPRIETARY INNOVATION PROCESS

Without anywhere to go, a new, promising idea is sure to fizzle out. How do those ideas get captured? How are they vetted? Will you put dedicated resources around them?

There is no one-size-fits-all solution for nurturing innovation, and so your organization needs to find its own unique system for elevating ideas and moving them through the innovation pipeline. It is important to put a thoughtful process in place. Broadcast that system so all team members are encouraged to participate.

4. SUPPORTIVE CULTURE

The last pillar is both the most challenging and the most critical. Organizations must constantly cultivate a supportive culture that empowers team members to ideate without fear of criticism or failure. Innovation is inherently risky, uncomfortable and messy, yet many companies fear embarrassment and avoid failure at all costs. That must change if innovation is to flourish. **IQ**

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