

Enterprise Innovation and Creativity

by Francisco Teixeira e Melo

Growing your business! That is typically the ultimate desire of every CEO, be it in terms of volume, market share or profitability.

Sustainable growth is achieved through differentiation. It is about launching new and innovative products, fulfilling the consumer's (or customer's) unmet needs and desires, excelling in service and using never before thought of business models. In other words, it is about being creative in defining every single aspect of a business and being smart in developing and implementing those new ideas.

Innovative organizations have a clear guiding vision for their activities. This is not about knowing exactly where they are going to, it is rather an aspiration of what the company believes to be the best way forward, and an understanding of the underlying values and behaviours that support that. Innovation projects and improvement programmes usually fit with this innovation vision. I have said that they usually, and not always, fit with the vision because it is vital that a vision should not be written in stone! A fast changing world implies an evolving vision, alterations to which may be triggered by the results of projects carried out by a maverick operating outside the boundaries of that vision.

Innovations take many forms, from improvements in existing products and services to revolutionary new concepts. However, in all forms it implies changing and improving the existing reality.

To enable an organization to move forward and constantly lead with innovative concepts we need to allow a balance between the vision oriented initiatives, and radical new concepts. The emphasis should be placed on initiatives guided by the vision, without killing other ideas that may become a key differentiating factor. Ways of managing a creative organization include:

- The reduction of unnecessary controls
- The adoption of creativity friendly reward systems and new attitudes towards efficiency and failure
- The communication of the value of creative change
- Providing the appropriate resources!

It is about having company policies and structures that empower people, engaging all employees in the process, leading to systemic creativity. In short, lead to create possibility!

Breakthrough improvements require innovative thinking and specific ways and means of developing ideas through to action. It is important that the whole organization understands the dynamics of group creativity and creative problem solving, enabling ideas and new concepts to flow and mature, rather than stopping what's apparently not feasible today. It is possible to build feasibility into a new idea, but it is impossible to build newness into a feasible idea!

The Synecticsworld innovation framework has 3 key areas: creativity, action, and climate. Creativity is our ability to think differently, to make connections between unrelated worlds and often implies distance from our own reality.

Action is about productively guiding our creativity, using creative problem solving skills.

Climate is part of a company's culture. Corporate culture, as it is often referred to in business literature, also includes a company's heritage, its structures, technology, and so on. It is about how talented we are in working collaboratively, in a supporting environment. Climate is probably the most complex of the 3 key areas. The company's values and behaviours set the expectations for the organisational environment, and therefore will influence the climate. Everything we do has an influence on climate and we must all take the responsibility for our own actions.

When these 3 areas are balanced you increase the odds of innovation in an organization. Building an inventive organization is a continuous process that starts right at the top and reaches every single colleague. It implies training people in creative tools and techniques, having less and more efficient meetings, getting leaders to understand the dynamics of creative leadership, fostering a supportive and collaborative climate, and setting up open channels of communication throughout the organisation.

By paying careful attention to these factors, and ensuring they are put into action you can create a business in which entrepreneurial stars flourish, mavericks find their space and, more importantly, the vast majority will feel better at work and are therefore much more likely to contribute to new initiatives. In this way a basis for sustainable growth can be created through innovation.

Francisco led the Synecticsworld business in Portugal.