

Introduction

- The radical transformation of 21st century organizations is nothing less than a modern-day industrial revolution wherein innovation now plays a critical role in determining organizational success (Cascio & Aguinis, 2008, 2019). **Innovations leaders** are change agents (Rogers, 1995) who promote the manifestation of new ideas in a work context by creating a supportive climate for creativity and managing the innovation process (Basadur, 2004).
- What can I do to become an innovation leader in my organization?** This is a crucial question because organizations able to implement new ideas successfully pull ahead of the competition (Rogers, 1995).
- For example, Disney's animation studio Pixar relies on cutting-edge technology and creative collaboration to gain a competitive advantage. Pixar films (e.g., Finding Nemo, Finding Dory, Toy Story 3) are among the 50 highest-grossing films of all time with Toy Story 3 earning \$1.06 billion in 2010 (Mendelson, 2017), making it the third highest-grossing animated film in history.
- On the flip side of the coin, leading companies unable or unwilling to innovate face obsolescence (i.e., Kodak, Motorola)
- The secret to Pixar's success is the innovation leadership of its founders. Edwin Catmull and Alvy Ray Smith created an environment that promotes the process of transforming creative ideas into a successful final product. As Catmull described it (Hill, Brandeau, Truelove, & Lineback, 2014, p. 10):



For 20 years, I pursued a dream of making the first computer-animated film. To be honest, after that goal was realized—when we finished Toy Story—I was a bit lost. But then I realized the most exciting thing I had ever done was to help create the unique environment that allowed that film to be made. My new goal became . . . to build a studio that had the depth, robustness, and will to keep searching for the hard truths that preserve the confluence of forces necessary to create magic.

- During the experience of producing Toy Story, Catmull discovered the critical role of leadership in creating an organization that fostered and enabled innovation. He understood that **innovation could not be compelled or commanded but only enabled**, and leaders play a critical role in making this happen.
- The core of Pixar's creative success is founded on the establishment of a safe work environment in which all employees are able to wholly contribute to the organization. **What can managers do to become innovation leaders? More specifically, what do innovation leaders do to encourage employee behaviors that result in innovation?**

Creativity and Innovation

- Creativity** is the generation of novel and useful ideas or solutions to problems (Amabile, 1983; Sternberg, 1988; Weisberg, 1988). On the other hand, innovation is the actual implementation and execution of creative ideas (Amabile, Conti, Coon, Lazenby, & Herron, 1996).
- As noted by LePine and Van Dyne (1998, p. 865): "Innovation begins with recognition and generation of novel ideas or solutions that challenge past practices and standard operating procedures." And innovation does not take place in the absence of creativity. Leaders must therefore first stage organizational contexts that promote creativity.
- There are two factors that lead to creativity and then innovation: employee voice and knowledge sharing.

Voice

- Voice is discretionary, self-initiated extra-role behavior aimed at improving the organizational environment through the communication of ideas, suggestions, or concerns about work-related issues (Morrison, 2011).
- Voice is a critical antecedent of creativity and innovation because it improves group decision making and organizational learning (Enz & Schwenk, 1991), while also promoting a superior detection of errors (Morrison & Milliken, 2000).
- Voice also allows employees to experience work as exciting and inherently interesting (i.e., intrinsic motivation; Ryan & Deci, 2000), which is directly related to risk taking—a determinant of creative behavior (Amabile, Goldfarb, & Brackfield, 1990; Hennessey & Amabile, 1988; Woodman, Sawyer, & Griffin, 1993).
- When voice is not encouraged, employees are fearful of penalization for questioning authority, speaking up at the wrong moment, or simply rocking the boat (Aguinis et al., 2016; Burris, 2012; Chan, 2006; Grant, Gino, & Hofmann, 2011; Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001).
- Ensuing concerns about when to speak up—or if employees will find it worthwhile to speak up at all—should be of concern to leaders interested in promoting a psychologically safe environment ripe for creative thinking (Aguinis et al., 2016).

Knowledge sharing

- A second key success factor that leads to creativity and innovation is knowledge sharing, which is the means by which employees get the most out of the accumulated knowledge in the organization.
- Accumulated knowledge contributes to creativity and innovation, and involves organizational culture and identity, policies, routines, systems, and also other employees (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005; Damodaran & Olphert, 2000; Davenport & Prusak, 1998).
- Through the use of accumulated knowledge, knowledge sharing is positively related to ideas on, for example, how to decrease production costs and improve team as well as firm performance (Collins & Smith, 2006; Hansen, 2002; Mesmer-Magnus & DeChurch, 2009). Arthur and Huntley (2005) examined how knowledge generated through a gain-sharing productivity improvement program had a positive effect on organizational performance.
- In their study of an auto parts manufacturing plant with approximately 1,300 workers, the implementation of a suggestion-based gain-sharing program from employees led to an 8% reduction in unit costs.
- As additional and compelling empirical evidence, in a comprehensive meta-analysis, Mesmer-Magnus and DeChurch (2009) synthesized 72 independent studies involving 4,795 groups comprising a total of 17,279 individuals. Results from this meta-analysis revealed that knowledge sharing positively predicted team performance, cohesion, member satisfaction, and knowledge integration.

Implementation Guidelines

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Develop the right group norms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage employee trust. Praise the willingness of experts to help other employees. Boost reinforcement of information sharing among all team members. Create a culture that encourages knowledge sharing. Build up norms that encourage politeness and respectful sharing of ideas. Promote team extraversion to share experiences and knowledge among communication partners.
Design teams strategically	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design smaller groups and encourage them to be self-managed. Adopt fair practices, such as rotating leadership and peer evaluations to decrease the power distance among employees. Directly ask new team members for input and encourage them to speak up as valuable team members. Promote overt leader behavior to get more employee ideas "on the table." Rely on both formal mechanisms (e.g., suggestion systems) and espoused openness to input (e.g., an "open door" policy), but also on show through your behavior that you explicitly welcome voice. Train yourself in both the delivery and receipt of upward information, practice non-defensive listening and communicate the rationale for (non)action in response to voice. Support team cohesiveness by avoiding constant changes in team composition.
Manage interactions with those outside the team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage your team members to share their knowledge and ideas with those outside the team. Encourage employees to demonstrate trust in their interactions. Train for and assess trustworthy behavior through evaluation procedures or by investing in processes to create a shared vision and language for trust to flourish. Collaborate across organizational boundaries, physical barriers, and hierarchical levels. Enhance employees' awareness of others' expertise. Support employee networking (e.g., affinity groups, LinkedIn, etc.)
Show support as a leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Signal support for your team. Focus on sharing "lessons learned" instead of "mistakes made." Promote social learning. Establish ethical models to both support and motivate employees. Create a climate for innovation in which employees are encouraged to propose suggestions and voice their opinion. Employ ethical leadership practices and encourage managers at all levels to do the same.
Display organizational support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage universal support for managers and employees throughout the entire organization. Promote structures low in bureaucracy and design formal mechanisms to facilitate upward communication. Ask directly for ideas and suggestions from employees. Acknowledge the value of and implement recommendations made by employees at all organization levels. Maintain regular encounters between employees and skip-level leaders to reduce anxiety among employees. Do not only declare an "open door" policy but regularly make time to walk through that open door. Listen more than talk and respond in ways that reduce employees' concerns about breaching written or unwritten rules. Take steps to enhance organizational identification along with personal control (e.g., redesign jobs to increase autonomy).
Use performance management effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use performance management systems to promote voice and knowledge sharing. Implement performance management systems that have a heavy developmental component. Design and revise already-in-place performance management systems with the specific goal of promoting voice and knowledge sharing. Use performance management systems to encourage employees to establish relationships that span departmental and organizational boundaries, physical barriers, or hierarchical levels. Incorporate the behaviors found to influence voice and knowledge sharing into feedback instruments. Institute open communication and feedback from all levels (e.g., 360-degree) to promote voice and knowledge sharing. Create incentives (e.g., promotion, bonus, higher salary) to facilitate knowledge sharing and also help build a supportive culture. Use performance management systems to formally quantify knowledge sharing behaviors