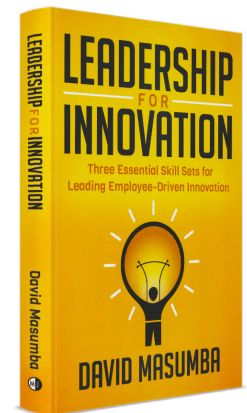


Leadership for Innovation

Three Essential Skill Sets for Leading
Employee-Driven Innovation

by **David Masumba**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Not long ago, innovation in organizations was perceived as the responsibility of specific functional units and professionals. That's no longer the case. Study after study has revealed that many organizations now view innovation as everyone's job, from senior leadership to the most junior employee. So what skill sets should senior executives, managers, and supervisors possess to lead and effectively systemize innovation across all functional units of the organization?

David Masumba, in *Leadership for Innovation*, draws from his many years of experience as an international consultant and from the body of research to guide us through steps to more innovative leadership practices. Masumba suggests three categories of innovation skill sets that are essential for leading employee-driven innovation: innovative thinking skills, innovation engagement skills, and innovation management skills. The culture of innovation does not occur naturally; it occurs only if a climate for innovation is created. Innovation is everybody's business.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- The importance of making innovation systemic in your company.
- To consider innovation as a criterion in hiring.
- Principles to carry the innovation message to all levels of the organization.
- How good questioning can reveal the next layer of innovation.

Innovative Thinking Skills

The conventional approach to innovation in organizations has been that innovation is the responsibility of specific functional units and professionals, yet studies have revealed in many cases, functional units responsible for innovation struggle to meet the organization's demands for innovation. Further, most innovative companies—such as Apple, Amazon, Google, Tesla, Microsoft, IBM, GE, 3M, Netflix, Samsung Group, Toyota, and Uber—require multiple pipelines to satisfy their innovation and growth demands. Also, innovative companies are usually at risk of losing their top creative talent.

This book defines leadership for innovation as leadership provided by individuals who possess particular creative skill sets and the ability to execute those skill sets to build a culture of innovation in which *every employee* across the organization is involved in driving innovation.

Innovative performance can be defined as an expression of innovative thinking skills and abilities in response to a need or problem in the particular context of an organization's functional activity.

Understanding Innovative Thinking Skills

A senior executive at IBM contributed to building a Life Sciences Unit at the company. Anne Robertson (*name changed) was in charge of a unit she had built from scratch to its current status of over two thousand employees. Robertson learned that her mother had developed complications during a health treatment when she reacted adversely to a particular medication. Although Anne's mother's records were updated to warn doctors not to repeat the treatment, just three days later, another doctor missed that warning and gave her the very same medicine. Robertson was shocked when she found out how common and widespread the problem was in US hospitals. According to reports, more than one hundred thousand people die every year in US hospitals because of medical errors such as incorrect medication, incorrect dosage, inefficient diagnostics, duplicated procedures, operations on the wrong side of the body, and so forth, and the problem has been going on for many years. Robertson started thinking about how IBM could solve the problem in an innovative way or in a way not seen on the market before. Today, IBM's Life Sciences Unit manufactures and supplies IT systems that are helping hospitals manage their patient data more effectively.

Anne's story illustrates the innovative thinking process. She could identify problems, needs, and challenges. Her thinking allowed her to turn the problems and needs into a

creative opportunity by generating solutions not seen on the market before.

Approaches to Development

What are the characteristics of innovative people? Opinions would usually range from innovative thinking being an in-born attribute to it being an attainable ability. Everyone has the potential to develop innovative thinking skills.

The power of imagination links associations and connections between unrelated things to generate ideas to solve a problem. With this understanding, leaders can urge workforces to be regularly engaged in the practice of interlacing and intertwining ideas from different areas or fields to solve a particular problem. Many inventions and innovations have been developed by connecting ideas from very different fields to solve a problem. For instance, ideas that were developed for computers have been used in cell phones. Products that were meant to solve a particular issue have serendipitously solved other problems.

Innovators As Leaders

Followers learn through emulation or imitation. Organizational leaders have to be seen contributing to the generation of innovative ideas and not just evangelizing innovation to their followers. Albert Schweitzer was a French-German theologian who died while serving as a missionary in the West-Central African country of Gabon at the age of ninety in 1965. Schweitzer repeatedly said, "Example is not the main thing in influencing others. It is the only thing." This quotation underscores why leadership role modeling is such a vital aspect when leading people.

Studies have revealed that one of the reasons why many innovative companies have been successful at innovation-led growth over a long period is because these companies—such as Alphabet, Apple, Amazon, Tesla, Microsoft, and GE—are driven by innovative leaders who have a strong passion for creative approaches and also have strong innovative thinking abilities. Such a reputation is a magnet for the attraction and retention of innovation talent who, in most cases, want to join a company or stick around longer so that they can learn unique skills on how to lead innovative companies from their leaders.

Innovative Engagement Skills

This innovation skill set involves the application of skills and abilities by organizational leaders to create and im-

plement organization-wide innovation-support initiatives aimed at specifically engaging and instilling innovation in the hearts and minds of workforces.

Communicating Innovative Engagement

Innovative leaders understand the need for communicating innovation throughout the organization. Information and inspiration are both necessary. Innovative leaders look for ways to relate to every type of audience.

Compare the speeches by two former US presidents, Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, at the Democratic National Convention in 2012. These two leaders delivered their speeches on different days; both were great speeches, but they had different styles. What is interesting about the speeches is how the two leaders rallied the huge audience at the venue and the viewers across the US to reelect President Obama. In his speech, Clinton made a case for President Obama by constantly quoting qualitative and quantitative data on what President Obama had achieved during his first four-year term. In his speech, he emphasized data about the economy using an informative style. In contrast, President Obama made the case for his reelection through the constant use of motivational catchphrases such as hope, change, aspirations, opportunity for all, the American dream, and the unwavering character of Americans.

Motivating Innovation

Many organizations will include or display on a poster a phrase such as “Innovation is our core value,” yet the majority of the leadership and the workforces do not even understand what innovation means in the context of the company’s nature of business.

Workforces should be able to form pictures or images from the company’s motivational messages. You should ensure that employees can create visual images from the creativity-motivating slogans. A study in Switzerland showed high productivity in managers who used a lot of visual illustration techniques to communicate various organizational activities to workforces compared with managers who did not use visual methods.

Motivation is not the same for everyone. Record the CEO’s innovation statements in video and audio formats. Introduce an innovation newsletter. Establish an “Innovation Day” where various activities are conducted as a way of indicating to workforces the importance that the company attaches to innovation performance. Arrange visitations or internships for staff to highly innovative companies. Each of

these serves as motivators across the organization.

Building a Culture of Innovation

By its nature, a culture of innovation is not easy to create in an organization. Leadership must broaden the perception of the idea within the organization. Innovation is a process that involves identifying a problem or need, generating a new approach that has not been seen on the market before, turning the idea into a solution to address the identified need, and then converting the solution into monetary value. This goes beyond new products. Marketing, customer service, and finance are just a few of the departments that will be impacted.

Companies that develop a culture of innovation find that an innovation in one department can impact another. One of PepsiCo’s plants developed a cost-saving process that involved collecting the rising steam from cookers using a new device that transformed the potato vapors back into water. That water was then used for cleaning equipment, washing potatoes, and irrigating lawns and shrubs. This process innovation saved the company about \$1 million annually.

Innovative Management Skills

In a nutshell, innovation management skills involve creating and implementing organization-wide innovation-support systems, such as innovation-support strategies, innovation policies, innovation procedures, innovation plans, innovation-development processes, and workforce innovation skill-development programs.

Planning for Innovation

Innovation-oriented planning is a process that involves creating formats for organizing and implementing the innovation-related functional activities required to achieve desired functional innovation goals that ultimately contribute to overall corporate innovation goals.

Great innovators have also been referred to as great visionaries. Envisioning is the ability to understand, predict, or picture key aspects of market (local or global) trends or patterns that affect the organization’s business trends.

At Procter & Gamble, innovation is seen as the cornerstone to develop the best possible products for consumers everywhere. Alan George Lafley ingrained innovation as a core practice and business strategy across all functional units and divisions. Lafley relates, “The problem at P&G in 2000 was not that we weren’t inventive. The problem with us was that we weren’t turning that invention into innovation that

created customers that benefitted customers, that created value for customers or a better experience for customers, and that's all I wanted to do." Lafley continued, "So, P&G innovations have become so successful and a part of people's daily lives, because the company innovates its brands with the customer in mind 100 percent of the time.

Innovation Performance Job Descriptions

One example of innovation management skills is the ability to create and implement innovation-performance job descriptions and job specifications. Larry Page and Serge Brin, founders of Google, continue to influence innovation across all structures of the company.

To ensure that innovation was enshrined and sustained as a culture, from the very beginning, Page and Brin initiated policies that were aimed at creating conditions that would continually advance and sustain innovation across Google. For instance, they had to hire proven corporate leaders with innovative abilities to ensure a radiant effect on the rest of the workforce. Google has a recruitment mechanism called "Spot the Innovators," which the company uses to look for people with a track record of innovation.

Innovation Challenge Questions

Innovation-challenge questions are pinpointing exploratory questions formulated to reveal specific organizational or community problems/needs or business opportunities requiring innovative solutions. In the context of innovation, questioning could be interpreted as a mental activity that involves showing curiosity, examining, and asking questions to explore an issue.

Simple questions that challenge standard practices by asking "Why?" or "Why not?" or "What if?" may lead to an organization's next breakthrough.

After arriving at Estée Lauder as the new CEO, Fabrizio Freda played the outsider. He spent six months on a "listening tour," zigzagging across Lauder's worldwide operations in 140 countries. In a statement to the media, Freda said he uses the power of listening to generate innovative ideas. "I strongly believe in the power of listening," says Freda. Listening, he says, helps him connect the dots. "The way my thinking and creativity goes is listening, connecting, and creating," Freda's curiosity and well-posed questions gave him insight across the company.

Formulating Innovation Goals

Goal setting is one of the most common and vital organizational practices. It is equally as critical when it comes to scaling innovation performance across functional units. Setting goals for functional-unit innovation contributes to inciting and motivating workforces to generate innovative ideas, and in turn, these ideas fuel the advancement of innovation across the organization.

Jeff Bezos, who won the Economist magazine's Innovation Award, has instilled a culture of innovation in his executives and employees across all functional units of Amazon. Leading by example in championing innovative thinking skills, Bezos ensures that every manager possesses creative thinking abilities, and he routinely checks innovation goals for his managers.

Making innovation systemic means that the top leadership of an organization must ensure that each functional unit plays a key role within the context of its operational activities to develop strategies and initiatives that lead to the continual flow of diverse, innovative ideas, ultimately resulting in growth in terms of product offerings, revenue, and market share. Innovation is everybody's business. Engaging and instilling innovation in the hearts and minds of workforces starts with the leaders.



Based in Walnut Creek, California, David Masumba is a workforce innovation trainer-consultant and author. David is the inventor of the upcoming simple kitchen device; the CT Holder. He is the Founder of Innovation Strategy Lab, an innovation training & consulting firm. David has more than 10 years of experience focusing on workforce innovation, also, referred to as employee-driven innovation.

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