

50 Ways to Foster a Culture of Innovation

As your organization continues rebounding from the financial meltdown, here are 50 ways to ensure that it becomes increasingly conducive to ongoing innovation. Commit to a few of these today and make some magic. Your next step?

1. Remember that innovation requires no fixed rules or templates — only guiding principles. Creating a more innovative culture is an **organic** and creative act.
2. Wherever you can, whenever you can, always drive fear out of the workplace. Fear is “Public Enemy #1” of an innovative culture.
3. Have more **fun**. If you’re not having fun (or at least enjoying the process) something is off.
4. Always question authority, especially the authority of your own longstanding beliefs.
5. Make new mistakes.
6. As far as the future is concerned, don’t speculate on what might happen, but imagine what you can make happen.
7. Increase the visual stimuli of your organization’s physical space. Replace gray and white walls with color. Add inspiring photos and art, especially visuals that inspire people to think differently. Reconfigure space whenever possible.
8. Help people broaden their perspective by creating **diverse teams** and rotating employees into new projects — especially ones they are **fascinated** by.
9. Ask questions about everything. After asking questions, ask different questions. After asking different questions, ask them in a different way.
10. Ensure a high level of personal freedom and trust. Provide more **time** for people to pursue new ideas and innovations.
11. Encourage everyone to communicate. Provide user-friendly systems to make this happen.
12. Instead of seeing **creativity training** as a way to pour knowledge into people’s heads, see it as a way to grind new glasses for people so they can see the world in a different



way.

13. Learn to tolerate ambiguity and cope with soft data. It is impossible to get all the facts about anything. “Not everything that counts can be counted. Not everything that can be counted counts,” said Einstein.
14. Embrace and **celebrate failure**. 50 to 70 per cent of all new product innovations fail at even the most successful companies. The main difference between companies who succeed at innovation and those who don’t isn’t their rate of success — it’s the fact that successful companies have a LOT of ideas, pilots, and product innovations in the pipeline.
15. Notice innovation efforts. Nurture them wherever they crop up. Reward them.
16. When you’re promoting innovation in-house, always promote the benefits of a new idea or project, not the features.
17. Don’t focus so much on taking risks, per se, but on taking the risks OUT of big and bold ideas.
18. Encourage people to get out of their offices and silos. Encourage people to meet informally, one-on-one, and in small groups.
19. Think long term. Since the average successful “spin-off” takes about 7.5 years, the commitment to innovation initiatives need to be well beyond “next quarter.”
20. Create a portfolio of opportunities: short-term, long-term, incremental, and discontinuous. Just like an investment portfolio, balance is critical.
21. Involve as many people as you can in the development of your innovation initiative so you get upfront buy-in. This is the “go-slow now to go-fast later” approach.
22. Improve the way **brainstorming sessions** and meetings are facilitated in your organization. Create higher standards and practices.
23. Make sure people are working on the **right issues**. Identify specific business challenges to focus on. Be able to frame these issues as questions that start with the words, “How can we?”
24. Communicate, communicate, communicate, communicate, communicate and then communicate again. Deliver each important message at least six times.



25. Select and install [idea management software](#) for your intranet. (Or, if you've got an intranet and certain directories available to everyone, set up your own idea depository/database and make it as interactive as you want).
26. Don't focus on growth. Growth is a product of successful innovation. Focus on the process of becoming adept at taking ideas from the generation stage to the marketplace.
27. Make customers your innovation partners, while realizing that customers are often limited to incremental innovations, not breakthrough ones.
28. Understand that the best innovations are initiated by individuals acting on their own at the periphery of your organization. Don't make your innovation processes so rigid that they get in the way of informal and spontaneous innovation efforts. Build flexibility into your design. Think "self-organizing" innovation, not "command and control" innovation.
29. Find new ways to capture learnings throughout your organization and new ways to share these learnings with everyone. Use real-life stories to transfer the learnings.
30. Stimulate interaction between segments of the company that traditionally don't connect or collaborate with each other.
31. Develop a process of trying out new concepts quickly and on the cheap. Learn quickly what's working and what's not.
32. Avoid analysis paralysis. Chaotic action is preferable to orderly inaction.
33. Before reaching closure on any course of action, seek alternatives. Make it a discipline to seek the idea after the "best" idea emerges.
34. Know that attacking costs as a root problem solves nothing. Unreasonable costs are almost always a sign of more profound problems (e.g. inefficient structures, processes or training).
35. A great source of new ideas are people that are new to the company. Get new hires together and tap their brainpower and imagination.
36. Get customer feedback before committing resources to a product's development.
37. Seek diversity of viewpoints. Get people together across functions. A diversity of views



sparks more than conflict — it sparks innovation.

38. Invite outside partners early on when exploring new opportunities. Find ways for your company to partner with others and actively share ideas, technologies, and other capabilities.
39. Avoid extreme time pressures.
40. Don't make the center of your efforts to help people be more creative a physical "creativity center." Fold your innovation resources into your business units.
41. Don't make innovation the responsibility of a few. Make innovation the responsibility of each and every employee with performance goals for each and every functional area.
42. Give your people specific, compelling, and measurable innovation goals.
43. Try to get as much buy-in and support from [senior leadership](#) as you can while realizing that true change NEVER starts at the top. How often does the revolution start with the King?
44. Realize that "resource allocation" is the last bastion of Soviet-style central planning. Think of new innovation opportunities as "resource attractors."
45. Pay particular attention to [alignment](#). Ensure that the interests and actions of all employees are directed toward key company goals, so that any employee will recognize and respond positively to a potentially useful idea.
46. Reward collective, not only individual successes, but also maintain clear individual accountabilities and keep innovation heroes visible.
47. Do your best to ensure that linear processes give way to networks of collaboration.
48. Remove whatever [organizational obstacles](#) are in the way of people communicating bold, new ideas to top management.
49. Systematize. Find problems (not only with products, but with processes, customer service, and business models) and solve them.
50. Drive authority downwards. Make decisions quickly at the lowest level possible.