

# Foster An Innovative Culture<sup>1</sup>

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Innovation. A word that everybody uses. A word that lights people up. A word that seems to have a magical quality. But what does the word really mean?

A search of numerous books, journal articles, and Internet sites yields a wide variation of viewpoints about innovation. Classifications of innovation types. Innovation models. Incremental innovation. Breakthrough innovation. Discontinuous innovation. Strategic innovation. And on and on.

Sifting through it all, *innovation is simply creating something new or transforming something old into something new*. New processes, products, technologies, or services. Dramatically changed or simply improved processes, products, technologies, or services. Often these new and/or improved efforts lead to the creation of new businesses.

When people think about innovation, they use words like “exciting,” “dramatic,” “creative,” “progressive.” But, more often, innovation is a strategy focused on improving a product or service to increase its customer value.



## Foster An Innovative Culture

There is no question that innovation is critically important in our increasingly competitive, global business world. Organizations that survive today are organizations that innovate. And, being successful at innovation means fostering an innovation culture.

So, how do you do that?

### Create A Customer-Focused Culture

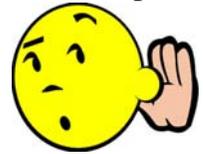


Self-motivated employees are at the heart of any successful organization. The degree to which an organization innovates is related to the degree of commitment and the intensity of the motivation of individual employees to deliver the very best to every customer—to *maximize customer value*. Focus everyone on building customer value. Get every employee to see his or her job as important to increasing the value of products and/or services offered to customers. A constant organization-wide focus on enhancing customer value opens the door to innovative new ideas and new ways of doing things. ***Create a customer-focused culture!***

<sup>1</sup> From: [http://www.arniedahlke.com/110630\\_Foster\\_An\\_Innovative\\_Culture.pdf](http://www.arniedahlke.com/110630_Foster_An_Innovative_Culture.pdf)  
Take a moment to explore Arnie's other Timely Tips at: <http://www.arniedahlke.com/timelytips.htm>

## Involve Your Customers

Hear what your customers have to say. Truly listen to them. Focus on their needs and respond with desired new products or services, rather than just doing business as usual. As you are developing new products and services, involve customers in the process. Customers are a valuable source of untapped knowledge and new ideas. Bring them in to look at what you are creating. They may see solutions to innovation problems that you don't see—they may have ideas to turn what you are developing into a product or service of even greater customer value than you initially anticipated. ***Involve your customers!***



## Promote An Organization-Wide Diversity Of Thought

From the top down, commit everyone to a diversity of thought. Encourage everyone to carry this commitment into every meeting. Challenge them to look at everything from multiple perspectives, celebrate new ideas, and find new talent when recruiting. Establish a climate of open communication and the collaboration and sharing of new ideas. Communicate a determined, passionate belief that any problems faced in the development and implementation of new ideas can be overcome. ***Commit everyone to a diversity of thought!***



## Encourage Everyone To Be Alert To Global Challenges

Pay attention to global challenges such as climate change, the lack of clean water, nation-wide epidemics, etc. Thinking about how to meet these challenges and solve the problems they cause can lead to new products and services. New business opportunities are there for the picking. As a company, be willing to form collaborative networks and innovation partnerships with other companies. In today's global economy, few single companies, regardless of size, possess all of the knowledge and resources needed to innovate on their own. ***Create an awareness of global challenges!***



## Tolerate Failure

Share the view with everyone in your organization that failure is a frequent by-product of innovation. Some failure is unavoidable—the ratio of failed innovation attempts to successful attempts is high. Counter the discouragement that failure often brings to people by building a climate in which failures are seen as opportunities to learn, to climb to even greater innovation heights. Make it clear that failure is an inescapable part of the innovation process. ***Tolerate failure!***



## Counter The Forces That Inhibit Innovation

There are several forces that will inhibit successful innovation. Be aware of them and take the steps needed to counter them.

### Lack Of Commitment

A commitment to innovation consists of a commitment to several things: a management commitment to change; an organizational focus on innovation; financial and physical resources; staffing; effective processes. The success of any innovation rests on a strong commitment to all of these. Too many organizations talk about innovation, but fail to commit themselves to what is needed to accomplish it. Beware ***Of A Lack Of Commitment!***



## Poor Planning And Implementation



Many innovation projects get started in organizations but fail to come to fruition because of poor planning or ineffective implementation. Innovation starts with ideas. Ideas are turned into detailed concepts. A well defined plan is developed to turn the concept into an innovative product or service. And, once that is accomplished, effective steps are set up to implement the innovation, along with the necessary support needed to do so. ***Avoid Poor Planning And Ineffective Implementation!***

## Short-Term Thinking

Innovation costs money. This frightens many organizations with an obsession with the *current* bottom line. They are overly focused on maximizing their profits *now*, giving less thought to the long-range future. They are short-term thinkers. They fail to see innovation as a long-term, potentially profitable investment in thier future. They simply reject an innovation or new idea because it will cost too much. ***Avoid Short-Term Thinking!***



## Blind to Opportunities



Many organizations are all wrapped up in their status quo—doing things as they have always done. After all, everything seems to be working quite well. Why change anything? They become complacent. As a result, they miss innovation opportunities. Meanwhile, their competitors see new opportunities in the marketplace and invest in developing new products and services, moving far ahead of them. ***Don't be blind to opportunities!***

## Some Final Thoughts

Over the last several decades, organizations around the world have focused on systematic strategies and techniques designed to increase productivity and improve processes.

A company that spends time and effort on such activities already has the foundation for developing an organization-wide, innovation mindset,

A truly innovative culture will be created when those same skills are applied to improving customer value through innovative improvement in existing products and services and to the development of uniquely new products and services.



**FOSTER AN INNOVATIVE CULTURE!**