



WHITE PAPER

Innovation and Growth: What Must Be in Your DNA

What is it that makes one company great at innovation and growth, while others fall short time and time again? We believe there is something different in the genes, in the substance, of companies who succeed. And, after years of working with clients in the most innovation-driven industries, we believe that companies can take specific steps to develop that difference so it becomes a thriving part of their organizational DNA.

Innovation and growth both take a company and its people on a journey to somewhere they had not previously been. Whether innovation and growth are based on new products or process, a new market opportunity, or a major company-wide shift with more dramatic impact, there's commonality. All involve change.

For decades, companies have been undergoing major change at ever-increasing speed, powered in part by the need to compete differently, as well as advancements in technology, mobile communications and more. Yet, many still look at change through the same lens as yesterday, not fully considering the full impact of multiple changes, both simple and transformative, on their people nor preparing well enough. That underlying approach to change hasn't kept pace and leaders aren't getting the results they want on an ongoing basis.

There are opportunities for leaders to look at change differently — to overhaul the approach to it and the mindset about it — and to build an environment where change isn't something to just push through before the next shift happens. We believe the opportunity is in creating an environment where change is so embedded in the organization's DNA that people go far beyond accepting and "managing" change. They initiate it. They lead it. It becomes second nature. They know it is at the core of all they do and they feel safe and inspired because of it.

7 Factors for a Thriving Innovation and Growth Culture

The question becomes, how do you create a change agile organization. How do you make change agility your competitive advantage?

1. Develop change leaders, not just change managers

First, organizations must get better at addressing and embracing change on 3 levels: strategic, process and interpersonal. It takes a different mindset and a different skillset to do so than to solely manage change. Managing change, as most use the term, typically occurs at the process level. Change managers primarily focus on executing on what someone else has handed them — whether that’s a new strategy, a new way of doing things, a new technology or something else. It’s not transformative. It is focused on the tactic, even if it’s in support of something that could be transformational.

On the other hand, change leaders are creating a vision for the change within their part of the organization, even if change is directed from somewhere else. They’re engaging in conversations about it, setting up an environment where people buy into the reason for change, as well as creating ways to talk about the facts and emotions of change.

2. Ensure senior leaders have the change leader’s mindset.

By the time the change initiative is fully launched, many executives are already moving on to the next change or putting out the latest fire. Lasting change and change agility aren’t built over the course of a short-term project. They won’t just magically become part of the culture.

Creating ideal conditions for ongoing innovation and growth requires senior leaders to adopt the change leader’s mindset. Thinking about change, its implications, how to create commitment, how to integrate this change with all the others in the organization as part of how they think about the running the business are key elements of this mindset. They must be comfortable with it, welcome it, and initiate it. They must be accessible and

approachable, interested in new ideas and new ways while they ensure people feel supported, led and heard. Senior leaders must be aware of the impacts of change, consistent in the way they approach it, and committed to developing healthy communications and relationships with their teams.

Secure leaders are truly open to new ideas and they create the environment where people initiate change, even embrace it. Leaders comfortable with change lays the foundation. They're tied to success of the organization rather than just the tactics of execution. But, it does take both the vision and the execution to get the job done — so we'll talk in a moment about how to ensure you have the right mix of talent to drive positive results over time.

3. Build trust with every interaction

Change is by nature uncertain. It requires more than leadership skills to take people through the unknown. People must trust you if they're going to follow you when you're asking them to leave what's comfortable and follow you into the uncertain. If there's trust, they'll take the leap with you — and they'll become more adept at tackling change along the way.

Change leaders are comfortable with the discomfort that comes along with change. And they help others get comfortable with the uncomfortable. They treat it as a course of business while creating space for others to work through it in a way that's not threatening. As such, change leaders think about the impact of their words and actions on building or diminishing trust.

4. Communicate well

A key element of trust is about creating environments and opportunities for

healthy, effective conversation to take place. Traditional change management may scratch the surface of the interpersonal level, but what people often experience is a one-way communication plan where changes and tactics are communicated out to the organization.

Trust is built most effectively in interactions at the one-on-one level. It builds in discussions about business operations and strategy, goals, performance, and every day work life. For that to happen, change leaders must do the following:

- Let people most impacted by change know they are important and valued
- Be comfortable with facts and emotions
- Use positive language to welcome change, create dialogue, and inform about what's ahead
- Listen to people first, instead of simply pushing out a message and “dictating” how you want them to react and execute
- Continue to listen to their ideas, beliefs and concerns
- Be involved with their people, guiding teams to accomplish the desired results, rather than keeping employees at arms-length

5. Define the what. Engage in the how.

People often fear change because too many times it's been pushed on them or “done to them”, with little or no opportunity for their involvement or voice. While some changes are non-negotiable change leaders help people feel comfortable and heard when they may have little control. And, whenever possible, they involve people in creating and ensuring the change goes well. This includes creating an environment where they

involve people in developing and implementing ways to improve products, services, processes, and the business success overall.

6. Welcome change and look for opportunities

With that in mind, change leaders welcome opportunities and ideas for change that'll help them innovate in the marketplace, improve internal processes, and drive growth. They welcome people at all levels in the organization to challenge their thinking and productively push the business in new directions. And, they help others to do the same. Change is natural to them. As such, change leaders look for opportunities to:

- Improve what they do on an individual and team or department level
- Adapt and anticipate external forces necessitating change
- Evolve processes and products
- Dramatically transform their businesses and industries

7. Hire people with the right mix of abilities, skills and interests

When leaders think of innovation, they often focus on identifying visionaries in their functional areas or those that are proven strategic thinkers. Building a culture with the right change agile DNA that drives and thrives on innovation needs people who are naturally curious and continual learners as well as those engaged in solving interesting issues. However, organizations also need people who are great at and enjoy execution. And, all people need to be valued as important contributors to the company's success regardless of their specific roles.

Wrapping up

With these 7 factors in mind, we believe excelling at innovation and/or rapid growth is about creating a culture where people are comfortable with change – and far beyond. It’s about creating a workforce that is in the driver’s seat, creating the new, proactively changing to take charge. This is even more important in industries where innovation counts most. It’s the difference between adapting to change and knowing that change is your lifeline, a core part of who you are and your industry. It’s about developing the skills and mindset to be great at using change as an asset, a way to excel, the way to stay ahead of the curve and perform well in the marketplace.

To learn more about how we help companies develop change agility as part of their organizational DNA, please contact us or check out our website at www.nextbridgeconsulting.com.

NextBridge partners with you to create and execute pragmatic, sustainable business solutions focused on building your organization and culture, developing talent and navigating change.

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