

Stop Talking – Start Creating

How to introduce innovation culture in your organization

Innovations have become a priority on top management's agenda. In response to intensified competition and global price pressure, organizations are continuously searching for new means to developing innovation capability. Innovations are a MUST – you either innovate or you disappear. The focus is too often on tangible assets like process or strategy. But intangible aspects, such as innovation skills or mindset, mostly receive too little attention.

by Stefan Posch and Jarno Poskela

Everyone speaks about it

The key question is how to establish a playful discovery attitude in an efficiency culture so that the organization can simultaneously be both: innovative and efficient. We believe that innovation culture is an indirect indicator and, therefore, less a prerequisite but rather the result of targeted interventions, that aim at develop thinking and acting in the right direction.

People have to add innovation skills to their efficiency skills to create a well-balanced innovation culture. The skills needed are, for example, the abilities to challenge old assumptions, to create novel ideas, or to evaluate new ideas. People also have to train how to switch easily between these two different types of thinking and acting. The ability to change contexts, and the playful discovery of new opportunities and ideas will be a key competence of organizations in the future.

Innovativeness skill

There are two powerful approaches of creating innovative thinking and acting. Both start with concrete challenges and enable the creation of fast and clearly visible results. However, the most important of all is to pick the low hanging fruit when starting an innovation journey.

Innovation workshop bucket

A successful approach is for the management team to agree on a bucket of creative problem solving workshops that have to be deployed within a certain time period (e. g. 12 workshops within a year). The essence of the agreement is that the workshop bucket has to be used up. Every project leader may nominate challenges or problems that should be processed. We sometimes start with a kick-off meeting in which the team collects potential topics or challenges that could be creatively addressed throughout the year. The workshops are prepared together with a facilitator experienced in creative problem solving. These innovative meetings fulfill several goals. From a content perspective immediate quick wins are targeted such as:

- Creating a better understanding of the situation, the »real problem« and its boundary conditions.

- Creating fresh ideas, due to the applied process, used methods, mixed participation.

From an individual and organizational learning/change management perspective:

- Participants learn to switch into a different mindset and role.
- Participants learn about the effectiveness of the used creativity methods and tools on concrete business topics.
- Participants become ambassadors for this approach.

As a »by-product«, these workshops deliver hands-on pragmatic success stories about innovative behavior of the participants and the organization.

The **Philips Consumer Lifestyle Creativity and Innovation Center in Klagenfurt** has used a bucket of more than 20 creative problems solving workshops in two years in order to strengthen their innovation culture. The program leader, **Dr. Roland Waldner**, made sure that, besides the problem owners themselves, members from different departments participated.



Why did you organize a whole series of hands-on creative problem solving workshops?

Roland Waldner: Bringing people with different skills and experience together in one room for a day or two, and developing ideas together is the most successful way of creating new ideas.

How have you benefited from these?

Roland Waldner: The more often people participate in these workshops, the more open they become. They learn how to fail and how to succeed – how to work together and understand each other. At the end, this becomes a part of daily behavior – it becomes innovation culture!

What hints can you give organizations that consider doing creative problem solving workshops?

Roland Waldner: If you have not done it before, use external expertise in preparing and facilitating these workshops. At the same time, find some people internally who would like to facilitate: Learning by doing is the motto! This has to be supported by management. And do it step by step – don't try to solve everything within the first workshop!

What is your credo?

Roland Waldner: You have to love the process of innovation and then the results come almost by themselves. ►

Innovation group

In an ideal situation, every employee and manager already owns the necessary mindset and skills. Since the reality in many organizations is far from this, they have ended up establishing innovation groups that focus on activating innovativeness among employees. The innovation group is a dispersed activator team, consisting of people coming from different units and functions. Their main task is to activate their colleagues to be more innovative, not to create innovations themselves. Unlike a traditional, centralized innovation unit, this group works on a part-time basis,

focusing on every type of innovation (not just products and technologies) and supporting other members of the organization in the innovation work.

However, a creative personality only, does not guarantee success in the innovation group work. Thus, the selection process of group members, the definition of tasks and roles, as well as the training are important. By sharing insights in their work and hands-on coaching, the innovation group further creates innovative thinking and acting at different levels. Some of the typical tasks are illustrated in the following table:

Typical tasks of innovation groups

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Act as top management's right hand in innovation topics 2 Support and coach individuals who have an idea 3 Organize the collection and evaluation of ideas 4 Support the development of ideas 5 Transmit ideas between different functions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6 Run and activate usage of idea management systems 7 Help in creative problem solving 8 Develop a front-end of innovation process 9 Make plans developing innovativeness further 10 Organize and facilitate opportunity recognition |
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Neste Oil, the world's largest producer of renewable diesel, have done systematic work to develop their innovation capability. We asked **Pirjo Kuuppo**, the Innovation Coordinator of **Neste Oil**, to share her thoughts about their innovation group.



Why did you establish the innovation group in Neste Oil?

Pirjo Kuuppo: We wanted to manage the innovation work in our company in a systematic way. The basic building blocks in our approach are the innovation group representing different functions and geographical sites, trained innovation facilitators, who are running innovation workshops and meetings, as well as the well-functioning front-end of innovation process, including the idea management system.

How have you benefitted from the innovation group so far?

Pirjo Kuuppo: We have really found it useful to have an innovation group, which includes participants from different functions and units. It enhances networking and collaboration with Neste Oil. The members advocate the innovative culture on their own sites and bring their input to the idea development. They also facilitate different kinds of workshops, which we find very valuable in our innovation work. ●