

What Does It Take to Lead Innovation?

Does your organization stifle creativity even as leaders push for innovation? Have well-meaning efforts to become "more innovative" stalled or fallen short?

In a new white paper, "[Becoming a Leader Who Fosters Innovation](#)," CCL's David Horth and Jonathan Vehar argue that actively pursuing innovation requires considerable resources and deliberate focus — and that innovation leadership is often missing.

In the paper, Horth and Vehar create a picture (and to-do lists) for leaders who seek innovation but have been frustrated by lack of results. They draw on recent studies, best practices and hidden gems, as well as their own research and experience working with individual leaders and client organizations. They share:

- The differences between innovation thinking and business thinking — and how leaders need to manage the tension between them. Leaders and organizations that are able to switch between these two modes of thinking will find a powerful antidote to complexity and an engine that can help them thrive — even during uncertain times.
- Two myths of innovation ... No. 1: Individual Creativity Can Be Mandated and Managed. No. 2: Simply Unleashing Creative Talent Can Help You Navigate Complexity.
- Three essential building blocks of innovation leadership — **the tool set, the skill set and the mind-set**. A collection of tools and techniques are needed to generate new options, implement them in the organization, communicate direction, create alignment and cause commitment. Innovation leaders also need a framework that allows them to use their knowledge and abilities to accomplish their goals. The mind-set is the fundamental operating system of the creative thinker and distinguishes those leaders who enable creative thinking and innovation from those who shut it down.

Horth and Vehar also offer specific actions you can take to help your organization develop innovation leadership, including:

- Create a mandate for change, backed by a strategy that embraces innovation. If you are not senior enough to create the mandate, gather peers around you who share your passion for innovation and collectively approach those who can create the mandate, or scale it back to a level where you have authority to make it happen. Use the [IBM 2010 CEO Study](#), [IBM 2011 Creative Leadership Studies](#), [2012 Capgemini Innovation Leadership Study](#) and other evidence to get their attention.
- Model what it will take individually and collectively for the organization to become more innovative. It is particularly important for senior leaders to walk the talk. Make managing the tension between business thinking and innovative thinking a priority.
- **Communicate challenging strategic issues throughout the organization.** Use them as vehicles for promoting collaboration and seeking creative ideas.
- Create highly diverse teams to address strategic issues. Help them overcome limiting

differences so diversity becomes a source of novel ideas.

- Give people access to creative methods and experiences. Even those with creative potential get stuck. Readily available tools, methods and experiences help them reframe and think differently about challenges and opportunities.
- Design and build systems to nurture innovation. Look for low-cost ways to test and prototype new solutions.
- Champion ideas that don't quite fit, and network with your peers to find a home for them. Actively break down barriers to innovation, including internal politics and destructive criticism, as well as hurdles, gates and other unnecessary systems.

Read the full white paper: "[Becoming a Leader Who Fosters Innovation.](#)"