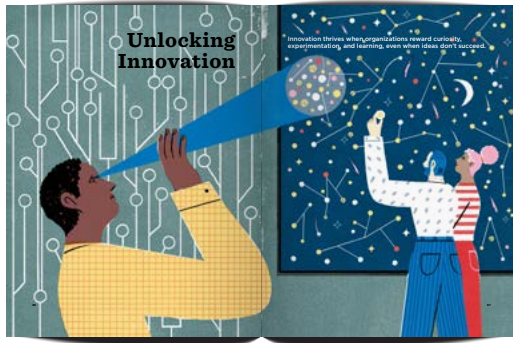




UNLOCKING INNOVATION

Research Summary

Organizations need innovation to keep up with changes and uncertainty in the workplace (as well as new, abstract technology like AI), but they also don't want to give up the structures that ensure control, alignment, and risk management across employees. Direct leaders are often the first point where employee ideas are either encouraged or quietly shut down. How you explain decisions and offer feedback determines whether employees continue sharing ideas or withdraw their voices.

Takeaway: Innovation happens in a predictable three-step process: Think, Share, Act. With the right approach, innovation and control are not mutually exclusive. Finding a balance between organizational risk management and employee autonomy is the key to ongoing innovation.

Our research offers important insights about the relationship between innovation and control in the workplace:

- When leaders create systems of control as preventative or protective measures, they may be inadvertently preventing employee innovation by limiting creative thinking and action.
- Rather than a single breakthrough, innovation is a process where employees think creatively, share ideas, and act on those ideas.
- Recognizing employees along each step of the innovation process, even if ideas don't move forward, leads to more innovation.

When employees can be innovative at work, there are increased odds of:

14x

High levels of trust
in the organization

16x

Organizations
adapt quickly when
challenges arise

14x

Improved processes
that saved the
company money

Direct leaders play an important role in unlocking innovation:

16x

Employees are 16x more likely to share ideas if their direct leaders provide feedback regarding their ideas

9x

Employees have a 9x increased odds of acting on an idea if their direct leader encouraged them to keep trying to innovate even when an idea didn't work

13x

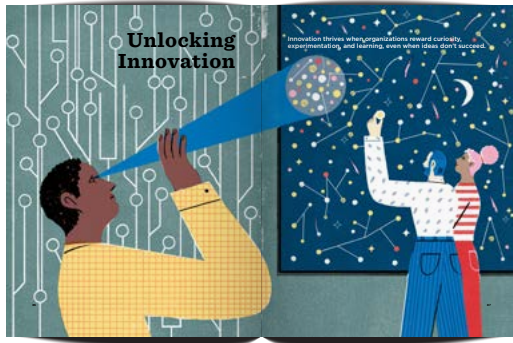
Employees are 13x more likely to be innovative when their direct leaders take the time to listen when they share ideas to change something at work

21x

Employees are 21x more likely to be innovative when they are recognized for thinking creatively, sharing ideas, and acting on new ideas



→ Get all the data and insights
on Unlocking Innovation in the
Global Culture Report



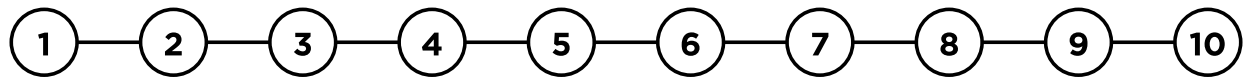
UNLOCKING INNOVATION

Leadership Self-Assessment

On the next page, there are five pairs of statements describing contrasting leadership behaviors related to Unlocking Innovation. Select the number within each range that best reflects how your employees would rank your day-to-day leadership behaviors.

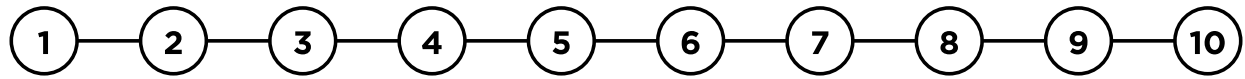
If your employees would strongly agree with the statement on the left, select a number closer to 1. If they would strongly agree with the statement on the right, select a number closer to 10. Select the number that best represents their overall perception of your day-to-day leadership behavior.

Unlocking Innovation Leadership Self-Assessment



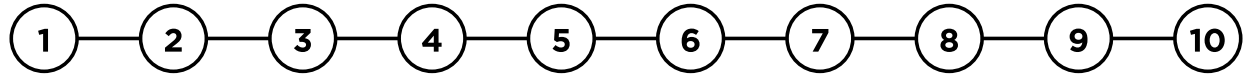
Discourages employees from questioning existing processes or proposing alternatives

Encourages employees to think creatively and challenge existing ways of working



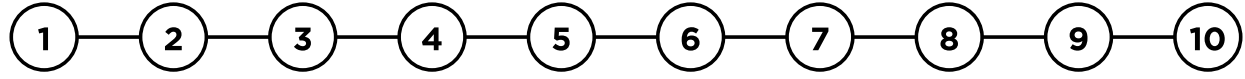
Provides few opportunities or channels for employees to share ideas

Creates regular opportunities and clear channels for employees to share ideas



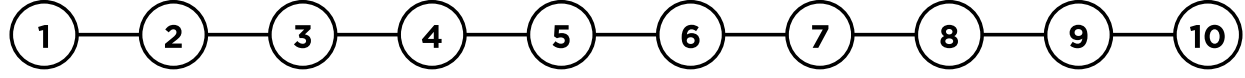
Ignores employee suggestions or fails to follow up on ideas received

Listens carefully to employee ideas and provides thoughtful feedback



Focuses on blame when new ideas do not work out

Treats setbacks as learning opportunities and encourages ongoing experimentation



Rewards only successful outcomes

Recognizes employees for thinking, sharing, and acting on ideas throughout the innovation process

INTERPRETING YOUR RESULTS

After completing the assessment, add all five numbers to get your total score out of 50. Your score reflects how your direct reports are likely to experience your leadership behaviors.

45—50 | Role Model

You consistently demonstrate behaviors that help employees grow, feel valued, trust leadership, and contribute ideas. Your challenge is to sustain your strengths and help others develop similar capabilities.

25—34 | Opportunity for Growth

Employees may experience mixed signals. Your intentions may be positive, but your day-to-day actions may not consistently reinforce the desired behavior. Focused attention in this area can significantly improve the employee experience.

35—44 | Strong Foundation

Employees likely experience you positively in this area most of the time. However, certain situations, competing priorities, or inconsistencies may prevent these behaviors from becoming a defining leadership strength.

< 25 | Immediate Development Priority

Employees may frequently experience behaviors that limit engagement, trust, innovation, or development. Improving in this area is likely to have a meaningful impact on team performance, wellbeing, and culture.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Which of my scores most closely reflect the leader I aspire to be?

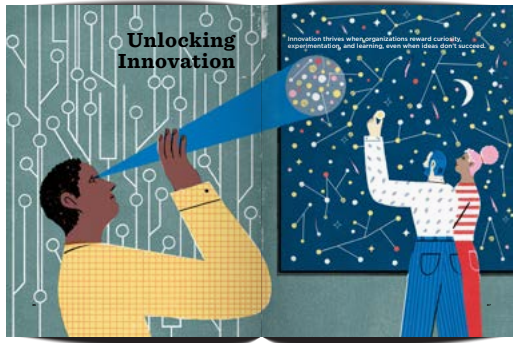
Which specific behaviors contribute to those strengths?

Which area received my lowest score? Which daily leadership behaviors might explain that result?

Which leadership behavior would my team most want me to improve?

What makes that behavior important to them?

What is one behavior I could stop, start, or strengthen over the next 30 days that would have the greatest positive impact on my team's sense of innovation?



UNLOCKING INNOVATION

Exercise 1: Start/Stop/Strengthen

What might you **START** doing to unlock more innovation on your team? What should you **STOP** doing so you can truly amplify your team's potential? How might you **STRENGTHEN** areas where there is opportunity to be even more effective? Think through each of these and make a plan for how you will take action this month, this quarter, and this year.

START: Giving employees time individually, and as a team, to brainstorm new ideas. Schedule time on the clock for innovative thinking and collaboration with peers. Add regular check-in meetings to the calendar or reserve designated time slots for innovation.

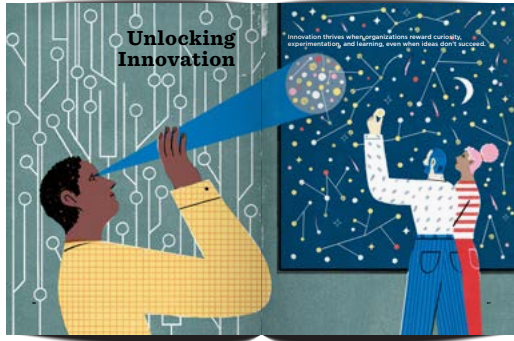
START: Developing processes and channels to share employee ideas. Ensure employees know what channels exist and how to add ideas to them. Provide ways for peers to add to or give constructive feedback on the ideas by allowing comments or having regular sharing meetings.

STOP: Rejecting employee ideas without offering sufficient feedback. This will make them less likely to share openly in the future. Instead, encourage employees to share their ideas and discuss them as a team. If an idea is not feasible, explain why and explore other options.

STOP: Blaming employees when an idea doesn't work. Innovation thrives when support is present for the duration of the process. Help employees learn from mistakes, protect employee wellbeing rather than assigning blame, and recognize employees for trying, even if their ideas fail.

STRENGTHEN: Employee knowledge of tools and resources available to help facilitate innovation. Ensure employees know which digital tools, company programs, and outside resources are available to help them think, share, and act on new ideas. Recognize those who find new ways of using tools to innovate.

STRENGTHEN: Support for employee innovation. Have open and honest communication and offer feedback and recognition regularly throughout the innovation process, not just at the beginning or end. Give employees active guidance, flexibility, and autonomy to think creatively, and opportunities to share new ideas.



UNLOCKING INNOVATION

Exercise 2: Guided Reflection

**When reviewing the process of innovation
in your workplace, ask yourself:**

Think

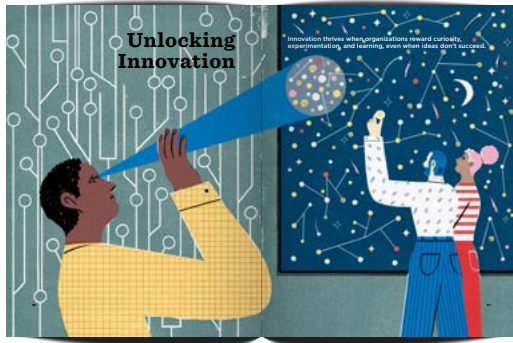
Do I give employees creative freedom?

Share

Do I offer reliable and helpful support? Am I someone employees can trust with their ideas? Do I make it easy for employees to collaborate on ideas?

Act

Do I empower employees to try out their new ideas?
Do I recognize employees for their innovation?



UNLOCKING INNOVATION

Exercise 3: Put It Into Practice

Review this scenario during your next team meeting. As you work through the discussion questions, make sure your team knows that you welcome their thoughts. Take notes so you can reflect on their feedback, make a plan, and then follow up. This demonstrates trust and accountability. After the meeting, set aside some time to work through the Leader Self-Reflection questions on your own.

New demands, new processes, new technologies: Caroline's team has experienced a lot of change in a short amount of time. Performance has remained steady and morale seems to be on the rise, but change is the new normal at the company and to stay competitive, everyone needs to be innovating. Caroline realizes that with all the new demands and changes, Mark and the team have gone quiet and are no longer sharing ideas with her like they used to. She knows from past experience that they are all committed workers, always full of insights on how to improve products and processes. What obstacles are preventing open communication?

TEAM DISCUSSION

What steps can Caroline take to reignite conversation and collaboration with her team?

How can Caroline unlock innovation without compromising performance and efficiency?

How can Caroline encourage effort during the entire innovation process, not just reward Mark and other team members at the end?

What other steps could Caroline take to reward results without discouraging effort and experimentation?

LEADER SELF-REFLECTION

In your organization, what are the most common barriers to innovation and what are three things you could do to remove them?

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When it comes to innovation, how can you reward results without discouraging effort and experimentation?

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How do you handle failures with your team? How do you turn them into learning opportunities instead of setbacks that discourage innovation?

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