

# 5 KEY TACTICS

# TO NURTURE AN INNOVATION STRATEGY FOR YOUR BUSINESS



# TABLE OF CONTENTS



<b>Before You Start: Assess Your Current Culture .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1. Tap The Creative Potential You Have Now .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2. Encourage Diverse Perspectives .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>3. Leverage Employee Mistakes .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>4. Innovate With Experiential Learning .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>5. Speed Up The Process With A Mentor .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Follow Up: Mark Your Progress For The Future ...</b>	<b>13</b>



## ***Why Cultivate a Culture of Innovation?***

The best predictor of a company's ability to innovate is its corporate culture, according to research on 759 companies in 17 major markets. Still, many organizations consider innovation to be an "extra", a non-essential to business success. They might also believe that innovations come from only a few creative people in the C-suite, not from a company as a whole. These misperceptions prevent organizations from evolving into more competitive players in the marketplace.

Innovation training is as essential and imperative as other internal business practices, like technical or leadership training. Innovation as a working approach can be integrated within a corporate culture by developing an innovation strategy, a framework that cultivates creative thinking and problem solving among employees company-wide.



TAKE 20 MINUTES  
TO ASSESS YOUR  
CURRENT CULTURE

## *How innovative is your culture now? (You'll know before you finish lunch)*

We've all heard of how innovative the cultures of Google, Apple, and Facebook are. Not as commonly known is how Adobe fosters innovation by funding employee experimentation; Squarespace makes sure employees' voices are not stifled by management; and Zappos hires primarily according to cultural fit.

These companies understand the more difficult to measure building blocks such as values and behaviors are often overlooked, despite the fact that "soft skills" or "employee issues" can have the greatest impact on workplace culture and ultimately a company's competitive edge.



Before improving anything (business culture, growth, efficiencies, etc.) we need to establish a baseline to mark where we are now, and measure in the future how much we have improved. What many organizations don't know is that innovation in business culture is measurable. An innovative culture is built upon a foundation of six interlocking blocks: values, behavior, climate, resources, processes, and success. Companies often focus on some of building block but not others, creating an unstable foundation for true innovation.

There are many assessment options available, providing varying degrees of depth and specificity. Some assessments use methodologies established as far back as fifty years ago, supported by math formulas. Some base their approach on ten critical dimensions of innovation, others on six fundamental building blocks. Many assessments survey how an organization manages innovation, rather than how its culture fosters innovation.

From our decades of experience helping companies develop cultures of innovation, we have seen the best results come from thorough, deep-dive assessments that are customized specifically to your organization. Apollo Professional Development offers a research-based diagnostic of innovation in culture that clearly and concisely identifies your cultural challenges and strengths in the present, with a view of how the results can support your organization's growth in the long-term.



Apollo Professional  
Development

A photograph of a man in a light blue shirt standing at the front of a room, presenting to a group of people seated at tables. A large whiteboard with a red grid is visible behind him. The scene is dimly lit, suggesting an indoor meeting or training session.

TAKE 20 MINUTES  
TO ASSESS YOUR  
CURRENT CULTURE



# 1 TAP THE CREATIVE CAPITAL YOU HAVE NOW

## *All you have to do is ask*

Innovators don't complicate matters. They simplify problems at the start by breaking them down to their essential factors. Apply this approach to your workplace culture and you'll find that small changes can produce big results. For example, have an immediate challenge, or looking for new ideas? Ask your employees for help. It's as simple as that.

Hierarchical organizational models have their strengths, but they also have a key weakness regarding innovation: heard. the execs at the top can become insular and stagnant. Top executives often don't access the creative capital

throughout their organization. Your employees have a wealth of creativity waiting to be tapped. Identify a specific challenge, and send out an internal survey to generate solutions, or host workshops to brainstorm. You can make it a company-wide competition with rewards.

Not all the ideas will be usable, but what's not might stimulate better ideas. The worst case scenario is that company morale gains a boost from everyone feeling their voices



***Hiring employees with cross-industry experience can invite new strategies learned from other sectors. On the other hand, hiring with less of a focus on background and more of a focus on creative problem solving abilities can produce unexpected, and progressive results.***

# Learn from other's experience



It's difficult to predict where a good idea will originate. Sometimes the less experienced employee can view the problem with a fresher perspective than the long-time executive who is used to doing business as it has been done for years.

Sometimes it's the other way around and experience offers the more insightful solutions. Internal processes can either deter or support innovation. How can your processes encourage diverse ideas? Anonymity helps. The use

of questionnaires protects the anonymity of employees so they feel comfortable being honest. Similarly, innovative cultures often use a step-by-step process in which all ideas, no matter how impractical, are welcomed and considered at the very beginning. After all, sometimes bad ideas stimulate good ones. The key is creating a diverse team that can work in a safe atmosphere where all parties communicate openly with mutual respect.

## 2 ENCOURAGE DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES



# 3

## LEVERAGE EMPLOYEE MISTAKES

Action

## *Mistakes are learning opportunities*

---

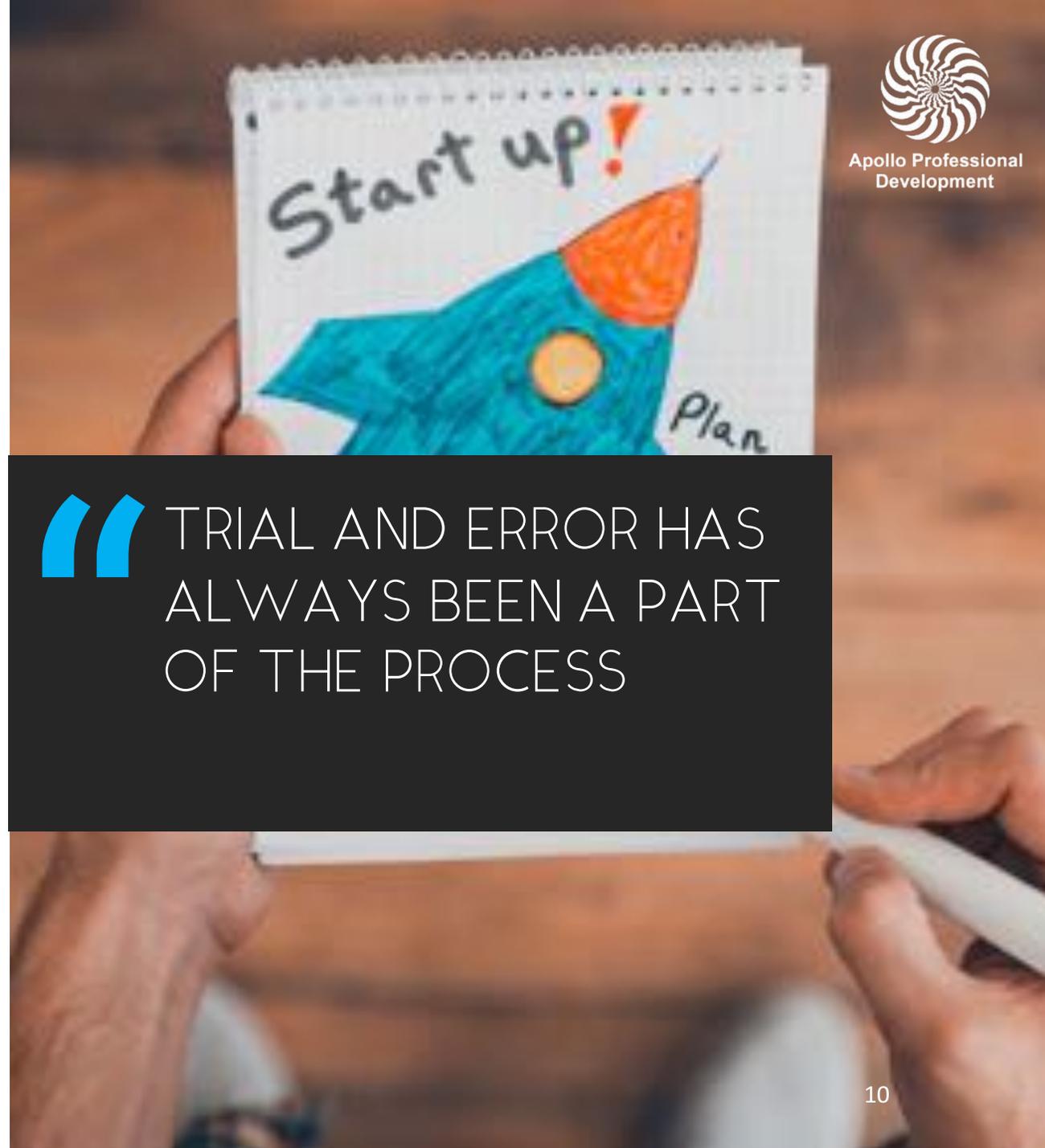
It's one thing to hold employees to high standards; it's another to hold a narrow definition of failure and punish for it. Nothing kills creativity in the workplace more than employees working just to avoid being fired.

Remember: you are investing in innovation for future pay offs. Adopt an attitude more forgiving of mistakes and more willing to provide employees with a liberal buffer of time and progress.

Projects aimed at innovation need their own set of success markers other than ROI, adherence to timeline, or results in hard data.

Rather, look for soft results, such as the team learning to better communicate with customers, or more effectively organize segments. These skills are difficult to quantify, but are vital to producing tangible results. To keep track of improved soft skills, create benchmarks by surveying lessons learned and value created through after a team project, such as learning to better streamline internal processes or creating new approaches to external partnerships. In the interest of fostering innovation tools and strategies, these are valuable returns.

Feeling conservative? Keep the stakes low at first, so you can give your employees room for trial and error. Discovering innovations takes time, effort, and “mistakes.” How many inventions and new business practices came right out of the oven in perfect form? Trial and error has always been part of the process.



Apollo Professional  
Development

“ TRIAL AND ERROR HAS ALWAYS BEEN A PART OF THE PROCESS



Apollo Professional  
Development

# 4 INNOVATE WITH EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

## *Learn while doing*

Just as musicians grow by learning one song at a time, innovators develop their abilities by testing new strategies project by project. Using a project as a vehicle to develop innovative processes is a form of experiential learning. Experiential learning is a simple yet radical shift in employee training:

*Bringing learning out of the classroom and onto the job by leveraging the power of work experience.*

Several factors might identify candidates for an innovation beta-project. Size: projects that are small, or the easiest to control.

Importance: projects that have been on the backburner because they're not critical, but worthwhile to explore. Teams: if size or importance don't identify a project candidate, it may be better to start with an already well-organized team.

In addition, innovation consulting can speed up the process. A consultant can help you identify the right kinds of projects for innovative experimentation. They can also guide the project and share tested techniques used to prioritize processes and goals.

# Make use of a consultant

---

One of the easiest ways companies can accelerate improvements in their corporate culture is by working with a mentor or consultant. Placing a capable and experienced consultant on the project can reduce the process lead times by 25-75%.

Mentors can act as short cuts to speed the process while ensuring quality. They can bring to the table years of experience spanning industry sectors, garnering along the way a long list of usable practices. Mentors can help you avoid pitfalls, clarify your needs, and provide you with options you didn't know existed.

Don't reinvent the wheel.

Use innovation tools already tested by innovation consultants.

Partnering with a consultant to host efforts such as immersive innovation workshops can advance employee skill sets in innovation more efficiently than if you had started from scratch going at it alone.

Ultimately, there is no ideal consultant. The ideal consultant is a team, an agency comprised of multiple innovation consultants to get the best arrangement of new ideas. The ideal consultant team is knowledgeable, interactive, flexible and personalized, allowing its experience to be applied directly to a project your organization can continue to support after the partnership ends.



Apollo Professional  
Development



5 SPEED UP THE  
PROCESS WITH A  
MENTOR



## **FOLLOW UP:**

# MARK YOUR PROGRESS FOR THE FUTURE

How far have you come? Before you begin to formalize an internal process to fully integrate innovation in your culture, score your progress to maximize the potentials of successful efforts. Innovation does not exist in a vacuum; it is part of an ecosystem of socioeconomic, market, and business forces challenging the innovation's success. Scoring your success should be done while considering these dynamic factors.

Crucially important to the longevity of innovation as a culture is the ability to guide the process with a formalized but flexible system of management. Managing innovation within an organization is difficult. There are many kinds of innovation and several levels to the scope of an innovation. One must recognize the different innovation management and governance structures to find the kinds that best fits with your company. Ultimately, the system must be formal enough to fuel innovation without being so constricting that it suffocates employee creativity.



# THANK YOU FOR READING

The old model of business positions top execs as the “idea people.” As a result, it is easy for a company to plateau in its successes and stagnate in its efforts to adapt and excel in the changing market.

The new model of business understands that innovation as a culture is what keeps a company progressive. And the good news is that businesses can become more innovative by employing simple tactics that foster innovation company-wide. Our guide is meant to help you begin the journey today.

For more about how you can nurture a culture of innovation, tell us what challenges you are facing.

[We're here to help you innovate](#)