

25 Questions for the Innovative Company

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“Sometime over the next decade your company or organization will be challenged to change in a way for which it has no precedent.” – Gary Hamel in The Future of Management

Most companies and organizations claim creativity and innovation hold the keys to future success. As a business forecaster, futurist and change management professional, I agree. Most companies, however, only pay lip service to the notions of creativity and innovation. If you can’t successfully answer a majority of these 25 questions, your company probably isn’t doing enough to create an innovative culture:

1. How does your company define innovation?
2. Is your focused more on “innovative” projects or creating an innovative culture?
3. What is the role of senior leadership and managers? Do managers think of themselves as innovators? If not, why not?
4. Does innovation suffer because senior executives require “ironclad” assurances of success?
5. If asked, which current management practice does the most to stifle or kill creativity and innovation within the organization?
6. If failure is recognized as a necessary component of risk, how does your company deal with failure?
7. Is “innovation” listed in most employees’ job description? If not, why not?
8. How are employees encouraged or incented to be creative and innovative?
9. Who in the company is responsible for focusing on “what the organization doesn’t know?”
10. Who in the organization owns the “white space”?
11. Who in the company is responsible for throwing the organization off-balance?
12. Does your company have a system for challenging deeply held beliefs?
13. How does your company ensure discomfoting information isn’t ignored?
14. What’s the “tomorrow problem” your company needs to begin working on today?
15. What’s the “can’t do” that needs to become the “can do”?
16. Where is an area where short-term profitability might need to be sacrificed in order to achieve long-term success?
17. How does your company “sanction the unsanctioned”? Are employees granted free time or “dabble-time” to work on innovative projects of their own choosing?
18. How easy is it for an employee to get “experimental funding”? If there is a procedure for such funding, what is the dollar limit?
19. Are new ideas allowed to openly compete for support? If so, how does this procedure work?
20. Has your company ever conducted a “post-mortem” on a company that failed to innovate fast enough? (e.g. Blockbuster, Borders, Kodak, etc.)
21. Have they ever been asked to conduct a pre-mortem on your own company?



22. Does your company have a regular speaker series?
23. How does the organization ensure outside voices are heard?
24. How easy is it for your customers to contribute ideas?
25. How does the company know it isn't over-investing in "what is" at the expense of "what could be"?