

Nurture YOUR GO-GETTERS!

PHILIP K. MAMMEN (VICE PRESIDENT – HUMAN RESOURCES, TATA ELXSI LTD.)
LISTS OUT THE BILLBOARD ESSENTIALS ON FOSTERING INNOVATION



In today's knowledge economy, creativity and innovation have taken on an important role in organisations. The imperative to change and develop creative or innovative processes has become critical to remain competitive. Although organisations might agree that innovation is important to gain a competitive edge, they run into challenges of time, current organisational structure, funding and lack of support from managers.

For many organisations, innovation will require deep-rooted changes — a changed mindset, prioritising short-term and long-term goals, leadership style,

etc. Innovation can only flourish in a “fear-free zone” that has a culture which promotes customer focus and advocacy, constructive questioning and curiosity, and individual initiative. Experimentation must be encouraged as a primary means for learning and advancing ideas to the next level.

FIVE FACTORS THAT SEEM TO PLAY A MAJOR ROLE IN FOSTERING INNOVATION

- Making innovation a strategic business priority.
- Demonstrating commitment from leaders, including encouraging ex-

- perimentation in the organisation.
- Creating a culture that supports innovation, including encouraging people to think in terms of why, why not and what if.
- Aligning an organisation's systems and processes.
- Collaborating broadly, from informal networks to clearly defined teams in the organisation.

LEADER BEHAVIOUR PROMOTES CREATIVITY

Leaders play a large role in directing the creative efforts of employees. A key principle that leaders must first understand is that creativity of employees is motivated intrinsically rather than extrinsically. For example, rewarding an employee with another challenging opportunity rather than just a cash bonus will help facilitate creativity. Creativity thrives with challenge and problem solving. One of the manager's main roles should be to clear hurdles that get in the way of creative people pursuing a challenging task, instilling passion and involving employees in the whole creative process.

HIRING THE RIGHT TALENT FOR INNOVATION

We need to bring in people who will challenge the way things are done currently. Hire people with diverse background, different perspective, diversity



of thought, and people who are willing to embrace change.

CORE VALUES FOR INNOVATION

We need to foster a culture of innovation to ensure that creative efforts can take shape in new forms – solutions, products, market expansion to ways of doing business. Managers can pave the way by creating an innovative environment that instils freedom and trust, and celebrates successes and failures. To help teams succeed, we need to recognise that employees or teams will need different kinds of support at various stages on innovation. Teams developing a new idea may be hampered by too much process management, while those on the final stages may benefit from process improvement and standardisation. We need to be clear on what we mean by

ORGANISATIONS AND EMPLOYEES REQUIRE FIVE CORE VALUES FOR INNOVATION

- Curiosity and the ability to question the status quo.
- Risk-taking and a willingness to learn from one's failures.
- Openness; organisations working in silos tend to be less innovative than otherwise.
- Patience and tenacity, and the sense of giving an idea a chance to grow.
- Trust is key.

innovation and why it is important to the survival of the organisation. An environment where employees feel safe broaching ideas, trying new things, taking risks, and failing is imperative to fostering a culture of innovation. Trust is the key for building such a culture. Many people are scared to discuss their ideas openly because they feel it might fail and might be ridiculed by others. We need to demonstrate that ideas and concepts can be generated by one group, while another can work on the prototype and another can take it forward for implementation. Together we need to make innovation happen. An organisation should continuously innovate. Incremental innovations help in keeping customers happy and enable organisations to remain competitive as well as efficient.