

To innovate is to create and implement something new and different. Innovation is a fresh approach to solving a problem and application of the solution. Innovation is both thinking and doing. Innovation is follow through, the commercialization of a good idea.

Innovation is vital because it's the only way you can reliably achieve profitable growth. And profitable growth is the chief objective of every CEO. You've got to have profit. That goes without saying. But profit is not enough. You also need growth. In a dynamic competitive landscape, the company that's not growing is on its way to irrelevance.

There are really only two ways to grow. One, you can grab a bigger slice of the pie by stealing business from the competition. It's fun if you can do it. But it's not easy. Two, you can grow the pie. Innovation in products and services may do both. Innovative products and services can grow the market. They can grow the pie. And innovative products and services can also snare your competitor's customers and enlarge your piece of the pie.

In addition, process innovation can grow your profitability because it means you're running your business more effectively. Less time. Less scrap. Less friction. Less cash consumed. More cash remaining. More to the bottom line. That's wealth. And it's the job of the CEO to create wealth. It's the job of the CEO to drive innovation. Your CEO cares deeply about innovation. So should you.

Above all, innovation requires expertise

We can all cite accidental discoveries that have launched groundbreaking innovations. But if we're serious about innovation, we can't wait for accidents. We have to be intentional about it, and that means we need experts.

Experts have the ability to see anomalies that others don't. They see similarities others miss. They see connections that are invisible to non-experts. They see patterns. And it's those patterns and connections that are the basis of innovation. Innovation comes from the connections experts see between patterns. The first step to becoming intentional about innovation is to understand experts and the nature of expertise.

- **Experts are passionate about their discipline.** They are more than highly interested. They are more than hobbyists. Experts are focused, obsessive, and single-minded in a way that's nearly incomprehensible to the non-expert. They are driven to study, think, experiment, and to develop their own unique point of view that is the result of their own work. Ownership is important to them. They cultivate their passion and fiercely guard their expertise because they've invested so much in it. They own it. In fact, that largely explains why they are so passionate. Their passion builds as their expertise builds.
- **Experts have a vast amount of experience.** The passion of experts leads them to spend more quality time working in their discipline. The 10,000 hour rule was identified in research years ago and popularized more recently by Malcolm Gladwell. The point is that, although there are ways to accelerate and enhance the value of experience, there is really no way to get around the sizable investment in time required to develop expertise. A true

expert in any recognized discipline – chess player, diesel mechanic, or physician – has paid their dues.

- **The nature of an expert's experience is different.** It's not just that experts have more experience, there's a qualitative difference in their experience. They practice differently. It's more focused, more intentional, more mindful. It leads the expert musician player to play the same four bars of difficult music over and over and over again until it's more than perfect, until it's natural. As martial artist Bruce Lee said, "I fear not the man who has practiced 10,000 kicks once, but I fear the man who has practiced one kick 10,000 times."
- **An expert's motives are different.** They are achievement-oriented, but the way they define achievement is different from others. More than anything else, they are motivated by being an expert. They love to have answers that others don't. They love to be in demand for what they know. That's not to say that experts don't have other motivators. They may value autonomy, money, power, security, or affiliation, for instance. But above all, they long to breathe the rare air that only true experts breathe when they reach the pinnacle of their profession.

To drive innovation, we also need to understand the nature of expertise so we can nurture it in our organizations. Our knowledge of expertise will help us to better develop and engage deep experts.

- **Deep expertise is rare.** Most everyone has some level of expertise in one thing or another. There are a lot of expert wannabees. But the truth is, there are very, very few true experts. Deep experts stand head and shoulders above others in their command of their discipline. They have the passion, experience, and motivation discussed above, and that combination has created something truly special.

Never underestimate what it takes to develop authentic deep expertise or the value it provides. The contribution of a true expert may be worth the combined contribution of 20 others who are merely competent.

- **Expertise changes the way problems are solved.** Many are prone to think that experts find the best solutions because they're analytical and use a disciplined approach to problem solving. No. At the risk of spouting what should be self-evident, the best problem solvers are simply those who know the most about the subject. Pure and simple. Experts know the most. Their experience has provided them with many stored patterns that are the source of their intuition. It's non-experts who typically resort to analysis and structured problem solving. Intelligence can be thought of as the ability to recognize patterns and to draw inferences and make predictions based on those patterns. That's what experts do.
- **Expertise is transparent to the expert.** Experts typically have a high degree of unconscious competence. They don't know everything they know. They just know. They often can't explain how they see solutions that others miss. The answers just appear, almost magically.

Their stored mental models and patterns are incredibly rich, and focused practice has carved deep neural networks that enable solutions to spring forth clearly and unobstructed.

- **For the most part, deep expertise is tacit.** Because it's transparent to the expert, it's virtually impossible for the expert to articulate. Imagine you pose a problem to an expert and ask them to speak aloud as they solve the problem so you can understand how they reach a solution. Forget it. As quickly as you can describe the problem, the expert's brain is scanning (probably subconsciously) patterns stored from experience and identifying a preferred solution. But since the request was to articulate the thought process, the expert will attempt to explain the intuited solution by implying some analysis or decision-making process that might sound good but that totally fails to capture what's really happened in the brain.

This phenomenon presents a real dilemma to those of us who would like to capture and document and disseminate expertise. If your organization develops the capability to transform the tacit to the explicit, you're on your way to building a capacity for innovation.

- **Multiplying expertise is difficult.** Because expertise is rare and largely defines one's value to an organization, asking an expert to share expertise represents a threat of sorts. If I share my expertise, won't it reduce my value? Now, many experts do rise above this and may even fail to recognize it, but the threat is there nonetheless and may complicate the transfer of expertise.

Remember that experts are motivated by being an expert. Recognition for expertise is fertilizer for the ego, and many experts have outsized egos. Those egos can be a huge problem. Egos confound teamwork, listening, teaching, cooperation, fairness, understanding, sharing, negotiation, humor, and relationships in general. When you try to multiply expertise in your organization, you'll face all these obstacles and more.

Support the expert career path

If deep experts are the drivers of innovation, we need to understand how their expertise is developed, how their careers are built. Career support is an engagement driver, a driver that most organizations fail to fully leverage. Those organizations that do define career paths and provide career support often focus on the generalist path. Few provide sufficient definition, branding, and support for the technical career path. But it's your pool of technical specialists that provides the talent most likely to drive innovation in your organization. It's important to support the careers of technical talent, in particular, high potential specialists.

- **Build depth in the discipline.** Unlike generalists who typically have a variety of roles in their careers, experts normally stay within a narrowly defined discipline and career track. They may take one or two short assignments outside of their function over the course of their career, but this is relatively rare for deep experts.

The roles of deep experts are narrower and the positions are also stickier. Experts move between roles less frequently than do generalists. Even those who are on a fast track for advancement will stay in their roles for longer time periods as a specialist. The high potential generalist may be moving to a new position every two or three years, often making a lateral move. High potential specialists may stay in a position for four or five years. The reason for this has less to do with the length of learning curves than it has to do with availability of roles within a function. But specialists still need to be aggressively developed in jobs just as generalists do.

To accomplish this, it pays to get creative and introduce a variety of developmental stretch assignments for deep experts. Look for short-term special projects that place experts outside of their comfort zone. You may be able to “lend” them to key clients to work on projects that stretch the expert, directly benefit your customer and, provide your firm with long-term benefit. You may periodically create pilot projects to explore applications of applicable technology to new markets.

- **Develop teaching/coaching skills.** Stretch your technical experts by pushing them into coaching and teaching roles. These roles can be formal or informal, but the important thing is to get them accustomed to sharing, to talking about the specifics of what they do. There’s an old saying that you never really know something until you’ve taught it to someone else.

Since expertise is transparent, experts find it very difficult to share their tacit heuristics. Sure, they may be able to talk about the general technology or discipline, the stuff typically found in related textbooks. But can they articulate their heuristics, their rules-of-thumb, their tricks of the trade? In this, they will most assuredly struggle, yet this is a primary way to grow and multiply organizational expertise.

Experts will often benefit from having a coach, especially a coach to help enhance their self-awareness and emotional intelligence, but don’t neglect the opportunity to cast them in the role of a coach. If you assign high potential specialists to coach emerging talent, you will reap multiple benefits. Young, energetic high potentials want to learn about how the organization works, how careers are built, elements of the business strategy, customer insights, and so on. They do need to learn these things, but they also need to learn about the technology and expertise that drive the organization’s value proposition and fuel innovation.

The young high potentials will push your experts to think more deeply about organizational issues, develop perspective, and enhance emotional intelligence. The experts will push the young high potentials to learn technical aspects of the business. The coaching relationship benefits both parties.

Develop perspective. Experts are focused on their discipline and stick to a narrow career path. Nothing wrong with that as long as they don’t develop tunnel vision to a point that they’re unaware of business challenges, the competitive landscape, customer segments, and business fundamentals. You don’t need to jump to a different career track to gain perspective.

You can ensure that your experts occasionally visit customers and serve on cross-functional project teams tasked with tackling organizational issues. This will give them opportunity to learn how the business works and develop relationships outside of their discipline. Ensure your experts are not insulated or isolated from the broader organization. Make sure they have opportunity to develop a degree of perspective that will enhance their deep expertise.

- **Leverage external development opportunities.** Encourage your experts to participate in professional activities outside of the organization. Support them in those activities. Experts will find it stimulating and engaging to participate in professional societies and conferences. You want them to be more than passive attendees, though, and it's OK to push them outside of their comfort zone.

Encourage your experts to make presentations, submit journal articles, lead panel discussions, and serve in leadership roles. Remember that development occurs outside of our comfort zone, and you'll want your experts to become skillful in articulating what they know. Proprietary expertise, of course, is off limits, but that still left lots of latitude for technical specialists to make professional contributions. You'll find an added benefit is that experts often return from those experiences inspired and anxious to try something new that will spark innovation inside your organization.

- **Enhance self-awareness.** The first step to development is awareness. Without self-awareness we won't be motivated to pursue development. We need awareness of our weaknesses, awareness of our preferences, and awareness of how others perceive us. We need to have our blind spots illuminated. Self-awareness is a critical component of emotional intelligence, which enables us to build effective relationships. It is critical for your experts.

Becoming self-aware can be a painful process, and especially so for your deep experts. They are successful. They have confidence. They may be arrogant. Figuratively speaking, we need to hold up a mirror for them to gain insight and grow in self-awareness. Consider 360 assessments and coaches to provide feedback. Develop coaching skills in all your managers so they learn to provide constructive feedback while minimizing the sense of threat that generates defensiveness.

- **Focus development on emotional intelligence.** The ability to manage emotions and build relationships is a strong predictor of success. And the lack of EQ is an even stronger predictor of derailment. When your experts disappoint you, it's almost always because of relationship problems. They may find it difficult to relate to others. They may be unable to coach effectively. Worse, they may be obstinate, arrogant, uncooperative, defensive, tactless, ... and the list goes on. These problems are due to a lack of EQ skills.

The greatest gift you can provide your experts is help with developing emotional intelligence. They probably don't need much help developing their technical skills and expertise. They're capable and self-motivated learners when it concerns their area of

expertise. But when it comes to relationships, it's a different story. Provide EQ development for all your employees, but especially with your specialists.

- **Respect the importance of personal influence.** Personal influence is an engagement driver and especially important for high potential specialists. Nothing wrong with providing awards, public recognition, even monetary incentives. But remember, experts are motivated by being the expert. It's hard to top the recognition value of simply asking them for their opinion.

Talk to your deep experts. Listen closely. Learn to know them personally. Consult them frequently. Help them to learn how to influence by reinforcing appropriate behaviors and providing course-correction coaching when they exhibit inappropriate behaviors.

- **Modify compensable factors as needed.** Compensation is normally calculated using several factors that may unduly short-change your deep experts, factors such as budgetary responsibility and span of control for direct and indirect reports. Your deep experts may work as individual contributors and provide value that far exceeds what can be inferred from traditional comp factors or position level or title. Consider how you may need to modify your comp calculations for targeted positions.

The problem occurs when a high potential specialist looks around the organization and sees that the general managers and sales people are reaping the largest monetary rewards. You don't want your deep experts trying to jump from their specialist career path to a generalist path because they feel their sense of fairness violated. Give this some serious consideration before you lose deep experts.

Experts need teams

Technical experts drive innovation. Never underestimate the importance of the individual expert. But teams also play an important role. Because innovation is the creation of the new and different, innovation activities are big. They require creativity, problem solving, and execution. This is typically way more than one individual can handle.

You can't innovate without technical expertise. You won't innovate without effective innovation teams. The composition of the team and selection of the team leader is critical.

- **Pay attention to the composition of your innovation teams.** Ask ten people what makes the more effective team, a diverse team or a homogenous team. Nine times out of ten (or more), the response will be the diverse team. That's not correct. At least not totally correct.

The most effective and easiest to manage teams are comprised of people with shared values and who genuinely like and respect each other. You want dysfunction in a team? Just throw a bunch of people together who have different values and see what happens. The different perspectives might – *might* – lead to great creativity. But innovation is more than creativity.

Effective innovation teams are comprised of deep experts with shared values, complementary specialties, and each with enough perspective to connect with the others. They benefit from diversity of expertise, different specialties. And it's where the specialties intersect that the magic happens. When deep experts connect, innovation follows.

Bottom line: the most functional and productive innovation teams are comprised of deep experts that have diversity of expertise and experience but share similar values. They like and respect each other, and contribute equally.

- **The team leader plays a critical role in the innovation team, the most important role.** Peter Drucker likened managers to both the composer and the conductor of a symphony orchestra. This is a great analogy when considering the role of the leader of an innovation team. Imagine an orchestra conductor dealing with all those great musicians, each one a deep expert. Each musician has spent thousands of hours practicing alone in their studio apartment, playing the same piece over and over, seeing patterns in the score, and building the muscle memory that enables them to play so effortlessly. The conductor must have credibility and a high degree of skill to get all those experts to play well together.

So it is with the leader of an innovation team. They must manage the egos of deep experts and get them to play nicely together. They can't do this unless they've got considerable emotional intelligence to build relationships with and between the team members. They must manage their own ego and be comfortable in their own skin in order to set the right tone, to create a team environment that is safe and non-threatening.

The most creative and productive atmosphere is charged with energy, animated, engaging. An oppressive atmosphere kills creativity and productivity. Effective use of humor, especially the team leader's self-deprecating humor, can help set the mood that fosters creativity.

Perhaps the biggest challenge of leading an innovation team (assuming you've done a good job of assembling experts with complementary specialties) is creating an environment in which it's safe to make mistakes. That is easier said than done. Remember that experts, above all else, want to be recognized as the expert. Imagine the group dynamics in a team of experts.

Each is likely to feel a desire to be recognized as the expert among experts, some more than others. In that environment, some will hold back in order to avoid a misstep that would mar their reputation. Others will be aggressive and tend to dominate. The team leader can't allow either to happen.

The best team leaders are adept at reading the team members and knowing when and how to encourage reserved team members and subdue the grandstanders. The goal is a team in which there is equal participation and contribution from all.

Innovation team leaders need credibility with their expert team members to win their trust. The symphony conductor may not be able to rival the skills of any individual expert musician in the orchestra on any particular instrument, but the conductor may be the most versatile musician and have familiarity with many instruments. Like the conductor, the team leader must have at least a basic understanding of the specialties represented on the team. At a minimum, team leaders must be conversant with their expert team members. They must speak the same language.

- **Lay the foundation with trust and shared goals.** No team will be productive unless team members have trust and confidence in each other and share common goals. Addressing these issues is the first and most important job of the team leader.

Creating trust isn't always easy and should be the starting point to create team effectiveness. You can't really trust someone you don't know. You can't have much confidence in someone who's unfamiliar. The team leader needs to help team members get to know each other on a personal level. This isn't natural for most deep experts who are often introverted.

Introspection contributes to building expertise. Experts need time alone to practice, reflect, and develop their unique expert point of view. The time experts spend alone is essential to building their expertise and innovation capability. But introverts have their challenges. They are generally uncomfortable initiating conversations, especially conversations of a personal nature. Leaders of innovation teams have their work cut out for them when it comes to building relationships within the team so members trust and have confidence in each other.

As a suggestion, consider launching new innovation teams with a get-acquainted activity followed by an in-depth discussion of the mission and goals of the team. When new teams convene with members who are not well acquainted, the team leader can pair them up and ask them to share two things with their partner: 1) take four or five minutes to talk about someone whom you care about deeply, and 2) share an embarrassing story about yourself, the most embarrassing thing you're willing to share. After about ten minutes when everyone has an opportunity to share, the team leader can then share this same personal information with the entire team.

Think about what this activity accomplishes. Asking team members to talk about someone else makes it easier for them to open up. When they talk about someone they care about, it provides personal insight and helps their partner learn about them on a fairly intimate level. Sharing something embarrassing is a way to let down defenses, lighten the mood, and send a message that it's OK to make mistakes and even to look foolish.

The way the team leader facilitates this activity and personally shares will really set the tone and help define the team's culture. As uncomfortable as it is to share something embarrassing, it sends a clear signal that none of us should take ourselves too seriously. This can be a breakthrough for uptight experts who are nervous joining a team of other experts and concerned about protecting their image.

Drucker compared the manager to a composer as well as a conductor, and it's the composer role that applies to goal alignment. Just as the composer defines the time signature and melody, the innovation team leader defines and clarifies the team's goals.

You can't assume there's alignment with the goals just because they've been clearly communicated. The leader must facilitate team discussion of the goals. The team leader may need to check in with individual team members to identify concerns and points of misalignment. Make this a top priority with every team that's formed. Create buy-in to the team's goals. Create alignment. Verify it. Reinforce it.

- **Create urgency without creating threat.** The innovation team leader role is very demanding. In addition to the ability to build relationships and manage the egos of a group of deep experts, the leader needs to be skilled at organizing and measuring work, managing processes, and driving for results.

In my experience, the leaders who focus on achievement and send positive messages are far more effective than those who focus on avoiding failure and are in the habit of using threatening messages. This seems like it should be intuitive, but it always surprised me how many team leaders, especially first-time team leaders think they have to be a hard-ass to be a good leader.

For deep experts, the nastiest threat is a threat to their ego, to their status as an expert. Each will want to establish and maintain a favorable position in their team of peers, and an insensitive team leader can unwittingly devastate an expert by criticizing them publicly, dismissing their contribution, or simply ignoring them.

That's not to say that leaders don't need to be tough, that they don't sometimes have to be a bit of a hard-ass. They sometimes do. But they should demonstrate their toughness appropriately and in a way that doesn't threaten the expert team members who are the ultimate drivers of team success. This may entail private conversations with team members, but at a minimum, it requires that team leaders carefully consider the messages they send, especially when conversations are public.

- **Promote constructive conflict.** The best innovation teams are not collaborative. Not in the traditional sense. When Joe shares an idea, Jane makes a suggestion, Jean adds an input, and then everything gets mushed up in a compromise, the result is almost always a sub-optimal solution.

The best innovation teams debate. They compete. They argue. They don't settle. They don't compromise on sub-optimal solutions. And they can do this all constructively because they respect each other, they like each other, and they're united by a shared goal to create and implement something new and different and exciting.

The best innovation teams almost have the feel of a family. Members can disagree, can argue without damaging relationships. In a family, it's because of familial love. In an innovation team, it's because of deep respect for each other's expertise and contribution.

The team leader is responsible for creating an environment in which it's safe to disagree, to stand alone, to debate. It's got to be safe to make mistakes. That doesn't mean mistakes are celebrated. It means that team members don't take themselves so seriously that they hold back or exhibit negative and unproductive behavior. It starts with a team leader that models the right behavior and reinforces it in team members.

Senior leadership plays a key role in innovation

The contribution of deep experts working independently and in teams led by a skilled leader is the stuff of innovation. Capable experts and team leaders are essential, but senior organizational leadership has a huge part to play in driving innovation.

The most important responsibilities include everything related to the full scope of talent management. Senior leadership needs to effectively recruit, align, engage, develop, and deploy talent. Innovation is next to impossible without the right talent management strategy and execution.

Senior leadership also has very important responsibilities related to providing focus, dedicating resources, defining risk, and shaping the organizational culture.

- **Be intentional about culture.** Our culture is simply the collective normal behaviors we exhibit at work. The way we do our jobs, solve problems, communicate, hire, fire, celebrate, dress, and even park our vehicles are a reflection of our culture. When norms of behavior are narrowly defined, we say we have a strong culture. When there's a lot of latitude given to behaviors in the organization, it indicates a weak culture.

Behaviors are a reflection of our values and assumptions about how the world works. Values are important and should be selected to drive behaviors that are aligned with our strategy. It's a primary responsibility of senior leadership, especially the CEO, to define the values that are important to the organization.

It's not the job of employees or anyone else to define organizational values. Senior leaders who don't define and clearly explain the values that are important and the behaviors that reflect those values are, simply stated, shirking their responsibility.

Innovation can occur within a wide range of cultures, but there a couple of attributes that are prevalent in innovative organizations:

1. In most innovative organizations, relationships are informal and leaders are approachable. Even if there are many levels in a complex structure, employees feel free to interact with leaders at all levels. A high level of approachability is typical in innovative organizations.

2. Related to approachability, the second cultural attribute common in innovative organizations is freedom of expression. Employees not only feel free to approach and interact with leaders at all levels, they also are free to challenge and disagree. A punitive culture that squashes dissent will squash innovation.
- **Focus innovation efforts.** Innovation teams need direction, but the nature of innovation is such that there is a lot of ambiguity about even the problems, let alone the solutions. As a very specific example, you might launch a team to find a way to reduce weight and simplify assembly of the coaxial rotor drive in a particular model of helicopter. Although this sounds like the problem is defined, it's really not. There's a lot of ambiguity that the team will have to deal with even in the problem statement. They will have to really understand the problem, why it's important to the customer, and identify many related issues that will impact possible solutions. Innovation is an exercise in problem solving, and problem solving is an exercise in dealing with ambiguity.

You might further provide a sense of urgency by being specific about targets related to quality and efficiency, but especially related to time and cost. For instance, you could communicate to the team that in order for the firm to participate in the upcoming CR2 program, they need to be ready on September 1st to demonstrate how the weight of the coaxial rotor drive can be reduced by 20% and the assembly time reduced by 30%.

What's important is that focus and a sense of urgency are provided by setting some targets. There should always be focus, but sometimes the goals can be blurry. For instance, you might choose to launch an innovation team that is directed to work on generating new business with helicopter customers. The team may be given a wide field with ill-defined borders in which to identify opportunities and develop solutions.

Senior leadership should create a sense of urgency and focus on innovation. Focus is important, but don't be so focused that there is no slack or freedom to pursue unexpected opportunities that arise. The way you dedicate and distribute resources should back up your messages about what's important. Resources and focus can't be separated, and resources are necessary to provide some slack and freedom to benefit innovation.

- **Organize for innovation.** You also provide focus through your organizational structure. The way you choose to organize – around customer segments, geographies, product lines, functions, or anything else – shapes the focus of your organization. In addition to focus, org structure helps define decision rights and accountability. Your org structure will impact your talent management strategy, help or hinder your organizational agility, and influence employee engagement.

Org structure should be thoughtfully designed to serve your strategy and business model, but consider also the implications for innovation that extend beyond the way it might serve to focus our energy and resources. Innovative organizations don't let org structures get in the way of nimbly responding to opportunities.

To illustrate a point, contrast a skilled college soccer team in which all athletes have assigned positions to play and a skill set to match. That disciplined team would be very different from a team of under-9s in which all the kids seem to have the same position – ball chaser. Watching little kids play soccer can be hilarious – like watching a swarm of beetles chasing a rolling ball of dung.

You can apply elements of both of those teams to your organization structure. You may have functional pillars, enabling functions such as Finance, IT, HR, Legal, etc., in which employees have assigned roles and responsibilities. They play their positions like the advanced players on the college team. But many of your employees may work on project teams that morph and change with the needs of the business and perception of opportunities. They swarm. However you choose to organize, make sure you build in some ability to swarm in order to seize an opportunity for innovation.

- **Clearly define acceptable risk.** You won't learn if you don't take risks. Learning occurs when you risk moving out of your comfort zone and risk making mistakes. So it is with innovation. You won't innovate if you don't take risks.

Just telling employees they're empowered doesn't mean they actually are empowered. And telling employees to take risks doesn't mean they're able to take risks. You need to help them understand the difference between acceptable and unacceptable risk. You need to show them what smart risk looks like and, importantly, what it looks like to take stupid risks.

Give this some serious thought and take the time to develop examples to illustrate what smart and stupid risks look like to you. There's no shortage of innovation gurus who promote the celebration of failure as a way to encourage risk. But this can backfire unless you've clearly defined by what you mean by desired and undesired risk. In that case, it's probably OK to celebrate a smart risk that ends in failure.

- **Aggressively manage organizational expertise.** Expertise is an important type of capital. You need to conserve it, protect it, and grow it. Create an infrastructure to do this – a defined process, managers who are accountable, and perhaps a structure such as Communities of Practice. Senior leaders need to do whatever it takes to ensure expertise is preserved and disseminated in order to build innovation capability.

It starts with capturing and documenting the tacit expertise of your senior specialists. Don't worry. You don't have to capture the knowledge of all your senior people. Only a small percentage of employees will have acquired a high degree of tacit, mission-critical expertise.

There are several practices that promote the development and management of organizational expertise.

1. **After action reviews.** Consider how you might develop a simple AAR template to guide exploration and documentation of lessons learned over the course of innovation

projects. Documentation can be saved and shared drive so others in the organization have access to AAR project documentation.

2. **Scenario sessions.** Consider periodic meetings to address a particular topic or problem and in which invited interested parties query one or two deep experts. These sessions might be treated as a kind of game, but the content is serious stuff. Questions should explore all aspects of the problem scenario. When experts are pressed to address time, space, and context, the tacit slowly becomes explicit.
3. **Pre-mortems.** Innovation requires more than development of a solution. It requires implementation. Before the completion and implementation of a solution, project teams should conduct a pre-mortem in which they try to envision every conceivable thing that might go wrong with implementation of the solution. Then plans can be created to mitigate the risk of implementation failure.

Innovation is the way to grow your business profitably. It is incredibly difficult to do well. You need deep experts, those who make their craft appear deceptively simple. You need team leaders who are able to get deep experts to play together as a maestro does with an orchestra. And you need senior leaders who can assemble and deploy this talent in an engaging environment.

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