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### Tap Creativity!

#### The creative spur

Way back when The Japan Railways East was digging a tunnel through Mt Tanigawa, there was a severe problem of water seepage. While the engineers got busy chalking out ways and means to drain the water, a worker suggested something else. The worker had discovered that water from Mt Tanigawa tasted really good. He suggested selling the water as premium mineral water. The manager accepted the suggestion and the water Oshimizu was sold under the brand name. It proved to be an extremely lucrative project for Japan Railway East.

Anyone who has read the book Corporate Creativity would be familiar with this story of Stern. The brilliant idea of marketing natural water from Mt Tanigawa wasn't voiced out in the boardroom. It came from an ordinary worker in an hour of crisis! What happened, happened because the manager was receptive to the worker's suggestion.

According to Alan Robinson and Stern, a company is creative when its employees do something new and potentially useful without being directly shown or taught. Bottom-line creativity and innovation are essential for a company's growth. CMMI level 5 set up a process called Organizational Innovation and Deployment in IT companies for this purpose. Despite such well-defined processes, innovation doesn't seem to happen easily.

#### Roadblocks to innovation in organizations

Companies proclaim the need for creative ideas. Obviously no organization can fall short of ideas. Yet why is it so that novel ideas are rarely implemented?

Some reasons:

- Strict hierarchical structures – The senior management distances itself from the employees
- Lack of internal communication – There is hardly any interaction between the senior management and employees.
- Lack of shared leadership - Employees just follow orders and seldom experience a sense of belongingness in the organization.

In the current era of changing trends, constant innovation alone can keep companies apace. They can benefit provided they try to tap the creative potentials of the employees across the organization.

#### Towards a creative organization

Here are some tips to set organizations on the path of innovation:

- Yearn for creativity
- Break hierarchies



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- Win employee trust
- Allow autonomy
- Tap the creative spirit within the employees
- See that every idea is considered, no matter where it originated
- Be sure to have a cross functional working mode where people can contribute effectively to all departments
- Do not undervalue employee ideas
- Avoid mere reliance on research and analysis
- Reward employees for their brilliant ideas
- Always remember that creativity takes its time to pay off

### **The essential six**

Alan Robinson and Sam Stern identify six essential elements to boost creativity and innovation in an organization. They are as follows:

1. *Alignment*: This will ensure that the interests and actions of the employees are directed towards the company's goals. Employees' ideas arise from experience and hence add value to the company.
2. *Self-Initiated Activity*: Such activities will give employees the freedom to take the initiative to resolve problems independently. Imagine a menial worker taking the initiative to discover something like drinking water.
3. *Unofficial Activity*: Most companies reject new ideas. This is primarily due to their apprehensions and business concerns. The management doesn't readily accept any suggestion unless it is profitable. Companies that allow employees such freedom make a distinct place for themselves. Therefore, it is worth the effort.
4. *Serendipity*: Creativity bears the capacity to bring two far-fetched things together and do wonders. This requires a keen insight to identify and promote them.
5. *Diverse Stimuli*: Employees need the liberty to experiment with different ideas and discuss their discoveries on a common platform.
6. *Within-Company Communication*: The management should ensure that they meet employees periodically and share their ideas to design ways to improve the business. Employees must be encouraged to speak without apprehensions.

### **Alternative Hiring Strategy**

As we have seen, innovation in any organization depends on its staff. Robert Sutton, in his book *Weird Ideas That Work*, recommends exclusive hiring strategies to improve innovation in an organization.

Here are a few



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- Hire those who are defiant and do what they think is right. Give people the liberty to work their own way of thinking and acting rather than imposing the rules of the book
- Hire those people you may not need! It is good to occasionally take those people whose skills have nothing to contribute to the company. Think of how their skills can be put to use after hiring them
- During job interviews give candidates problems that the company cannot solve. This will give rise to new ideas and help in hiring people who think out of the box
- Hire those with the questioning attitude

### **Wrapping up**

The hi-tech advancement that has happened in the last few centuries exemplifies the creative potentials of mankind. Creativity has not diminished. What is required is to discover and nurture it.