

ROKABOAT Advisory

Driving innovation into your business change lifecycle, bringing agility to your workforce, and preparing you and your organisation for the disruption of the next decade.

Transformation in complex business environments...

... impacting people, process, structure, technology & culture.



From Readiness to Relevance

Creating Competitive Advantage with
Innovation in the Workplace

Part 1 “Another One Bites the Dust”

In this article I discuss how an organisation can become more resilient and able to handle turbulence, allowing it to survive and prosper.

I use the history of Yahoo, Nokia, MySpace, and Garmin to demonstrate how complacency, denial, culture problems, and blind spots can lead once-successful firms to fail. Amazon and Apple, on the other hand, have grown and progressed by innovating and adapting.

But survival isn't enough. Organisations need outside knowledge, operational resilience, workforce adaptability, and collaboration. These qualities are part of a corporate resilience jigsaw puzzle—a single operating system with seven common delivery mechanisms. Leadership sponsorship, regulated rhythms, decision frameworks, and cultural reinforcement.

I also address the risks of misusing resilience and innovation, not just from my personal experience but from industrial and academic leaders who highlight that they are tools, not ends.

In conclusion, corporate readiness and innovation are essential. They are essential and must be extensively integrated into your company to stay relevant in today's world.



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Web : <https://rokaboat-emea.com>

LinkedIn : <https://www.linkedin.com/in/innovation-transformation>

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About the Author

Gary Thompson is a transformation leader with over 25 years' experience driving enterprise change across global banks, industrials, and multi-sector conglomerates. He's known for blending strategic clarity with hands-on delivery, reshaping operating models, embedding innovation capability, and delivering measurable impact. His track record includes a £600m product-innovation uplift at a FTSE 100 manufacturing organisation, a 23% improvement in operational efficiency at a regional Middle Eastern bank through system and team alignment, and €9m in annual savings at a leading European bank, consistently converting organisational complexity into measurable performance.

His methodology centres on designing systems that adapt to people, embedding rhythms, roles, and guardrails that make resilience and innovation repeatable. Whether building agile product squads, automating core processes, or optimising service delivery models, he focuses on delivery mechanisms that empower teams to act with clarity, adapt with confidence, and collaborate across boundaries. Transformation, in his view, is not a one-off initiative. It's a behavioural operating system that comes to life when culture, structure, and technology align.

As co-founder of Quality Systems & Software (QSS), Gary helped launch the pioneering requirements management tool DOORS, adopted by blue-chip organisations across the US and Europe. Under his leadership, QSS scaled rapidly before its acquisition by Telelogic of Sweden. DOORS is now owned by IBM and remains the global standard for requirements traceability.

Beyond enterprise delivery, Gary has shaped innovation ecosystems across the UK and MENA, advising innovation think tanks, designing commercial upskilling programmes, and leading public-private dialogues on emerging technologies. As an ex-advisory board member and frequent speaker for SSON and OPEX, his thought leadership bridges boardroom strategy with frontline capability, making innovation not just a concept, but a culture.

Gary is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (FCMA) and a certified Prince2 Practitioner. He is based in the UK and available for interim, advisory, and board-level transformation roles, alongside speaking engagements, conference presentations, and public-private dialogues on innovation and change.



Introduction

"Another One Bites the Dust" isn't just a classic Queen anthem, it's the soundtrack of disruption. Every day, another company exits the stage. Some slip quietly into obscurity, others collapse in a blaze of headlines. Either way, the playlist keeps shifting. The real question: will your organisation take centre stage for the encore, or be archived in the greatest-hits of failure?

Failure is the most reliable constant in business. Start-ups know the odds as nearly half don't survive their first three years. But don't think size protects you. Giants fall too, and history is littered with their logos.

So, what's separates those who endure from those who don't? It's culture. Not motivational slogans we have all seen on the walls of offices, but the embedded traits that keep a business alive when the market turns. Yahoo!, Nokia, Myspace. All were once dominant industry leaders. Now they are case studies. Amazon, on the other hand, keeps rewriting the rules through relentless innovation.

The challenge isn't just to survive disruption, it's to outpace it. That means cultivating traits that convert readiness into relevance. Or, to borrow from Queen again: stop living "Under Pressure" and start performing like "We are the Champions."

Because in this market, survival is just the intro riff. Winning is the chorus.

Where have all the big guys gone?



Karl Albrecht
The founder of Aldi



There are only two ways to establish competitive advantage: do things better than others or do them differently



History shows what happens when leaders forget that truth. Market dominance is never permanent, and the graveyard of once-mighty brands proves it. The stories differ, but the pattern is clear: complacency, denial, cultural missteps, and blind spots about where the real competition comes from.



Complacency kills: Yahoo! vs. Google

At the turn of the century, Yahoo! commanded more than half of the search market. Google was a rounding error. Yet Yahoo! failed to innovate, even passing on the chance to acquire Google in 2002. Google, by contrast, relentlessly improved its product and scaled. Today, it owns over 90% of the market; Yahoo! clings to little more than 1%.

Denial kills: Nokia vs. Apple

In 2007, Nokia controlled more than half of the global handset market. Apple was a newcomer with just 5%. But Apple understood the shift from hardware to software ecosystems, building on its iPod dominance to reinvent the smartphone. Nokia dismissed the app-driven future and paid the price. Apple now defines the category; Nokia is a footnote.

Culture kills: Myspace vs. Facebook

Myspace used to be the world's leading social network until it was acquired by News Corp, when its corporate direction and focus shifted from the user experience to advertising revenue. But hey, here comes an upstart, Facebook, whose founders focused on community, usability and innovation. By 2009, Facebook had overtaken Myspace and never looked back. The lesson here is that the product defined by culture and customer focus matter as much if not more than technology.

Blind spots kill: Garmin & TomTom vs. Waze

Garmin and TomTom assumed their fiercest rivals were each other. In reality, the real threat came from outside the category in the shape of a start-up, Waze. Their app was built on the premise that drivers, those of us caught up in the day to day problems of driving around, know what's happening on the ground. By turning the users into their source for information and data, they turned the market on its head, providing much more accurate data and undercutting the cost of expensive dedicated GPS devices.

Platforms redefine value: Recruitment Agencies vs. LinkedIn

Recruitment agencies once dominated the hiring market by turning employer access to job candidates into a commercial service in the 1970s (previously it had been a service paid for by the candidates or provided through government owned job centres.) By the early 2000s, they controlled most talent pipelines. Then in 2003, LinkedIn changed everything by creating the world's largest open talent database. Employers could now bypass agencies, search directly, hire faster and cut costs. Agencies weren't beaten by other agencies, they were disrupted by a platform that made their core asset free and accessible to everyone.



The wider pattern?

And it's not just these names. Airbnb redefined accommodation, Substack reshaped publishing, Wise disrupted cross-border payments, and SpaceX outpaced aerospace incumbents. Different industries, same story: incumbents defended yesterday's playbook while outsiders rewrote the rules.

As seen above, history shows a clear pattern: start-ups rarely win by price or scale alone. They win by redefining the customer experience, making it more convenient, more personal, more accessible, and by exploiting technologies or models that incumbents were too slow, too rigid, or too unwilling to adopt.

Time and again, market leaders underestimated shifts in behaviour, from ownership to access, physical to digital, or centralised to direct-to-consumer. Start-ups removed friction, reframed value, and left giants clinging to outdated models.

And it shows that disruption doesn't only impact Fortune 500 or FTSE 250 boardrooms. It often starts in a garage, a dorm room, or a co-working space and can impact a widely dispersed market, like the recruitment industry.

As such, Innovation isn't the privilege of global giants. Start-ups rewrite the rules while incumbents defend yesterday's playbook.

If you don't want to bite the dust, be ready

Let's return to Queen's "Another One Bites the Dust." The message is clear and uncompromising: disruption doesn't wait. If you're not prepared, you're overtaken.

Readiness, however, isn't a slogan or a line in a strategy document. It isn't luck either. It's something you design and embed. And in the organisations that consistently withstand disruption and stay ahead, four traits stand out as the backbone of strategic readiness:

- **External Awareness:** a clear line of sight into shifting customer needs and expectations, emerging technologies, and market dynamics.
- **Operational Resilience:** the ability to absorb disruption, whether it's from a world event like a pandemic, or from a competitor who has suddenly got their act together.
- **Workforce Agility;** a culture that pivots fast, collaborates without waiting for permission, and accelerates when others stall.
- **Working together:** not just within teams, but across silos, divisions, and even ecosystems to solve problems that matter.



These are baseline capabilities. Minimum standards, not nice-to-haves. Yet too often they're missing, misaligned, or misconfigured. Like common sense, everyone assumes they're there, until reality proves otherwise.

And that's the point: the big failures we've just walked through weren't inevitable. They lacked these traits. They mistook dominance for durability. If their leaders had embedded readiness and driven a culture of innovation, they might have seen the storm coming instead of being swept away by it.

Meanwhile, start-ups thrive because they live these traits by default. They're alert, resilient, and fast. They don't just meet customer needs, they anticipate them, reframe them, and deliver better ways of doing things.

But beware: start-up agility can quickly calcify into corporate sluggishness. One day you're nimble, the next you're legacy. And once you stop seeing what's happening around you, it's already too late. No matter how much you duck and dive, the trajectory only goes one way. Down.

Consolidated Delivery Mechanisms across the Four Traits

When you look across the four traits of strategic readiness, a clear pattern emerges. Each trait - External Awareness, Operational Resilience, Workforce Agility, and Working Together - has its own emphasis, but the mechanisms that bring them to life are strikingly similar. Leadership sponsorship, structured rhythms, empowered roles, data visibility, cultural reinforcement, and continuous learning show up again and again.

That repetition isn't waste. It's a signal. Readiness isn't four separate projects; it's one playbook. One operating system powered by shared enablers.

Treat each trait as a standalone initiative and you invite complexity, duplication, and diluted impact. Consolidate the enablers, and you build a single set of organisational muscles that flex across all four traits.

For boards and transformation leaders, this reframes the challenge. The question isn't, **"How do we build four new capabilities?"** It's, **"How do we embed seven delivery mechanisms so deeply that they power every capability we need?"**

The payoff is efficiency, clarity, and a readiness system that scales without duplication.

Recognising these overlaps is more than an exercise in efficiency. It reframes the challenge of readiness. Instead of treating each trait as a separate programme with its own playbook, we can see that the same delivery mechanisms underpin them all. That means the real work isn't about multiplying initiatives, but about embedding a small set of shared enablers so deeply that they power every capability at once.



Consolidation strips duplication, cuts noise, and sharpens leadership focus on what truly matters. The outcome is clarity: one operating system, seven delivery mechanisms, four traits reinforced together. This shift allows boards and transformation leaders to invest once, embed once, and reap benefits across the enterprise.

With that lens, the question becomes: what are the common needs that must be delivered to make readiness real?

Consolidated Delivery Mechanisms across the Four Traits



Aligned Leadership	Structured Rhythms	Frameworks	Collaborate	Data & Tools	Cultural Reinforcement	Measure
• Model Behaviours • Clear Mandate • Operationalise Culture	• BAU Rituals • Awareness & Feedback • Foresight	• Decision Rights • Evaluation Criteria • Authority Delegation	• Bridge Silos • Joint Forums • External partners	• Aligned Teams • Easy Access to Data	• Celebrate Engagement • Recognise & Reward • Storytelling	• Tracking Mechanisms • Insight Adoption • Learning from Feedback

To embed strategic readiness across all four traits, organisations need:

1. Leadership Alignment & Sponsorship

- Executives must consistently model behaviours (asking externally-oriented questions, rewarding agility, empowering boundary-spanners).
- Clear mandate and visible sponsorship for cross-functional roles (transformation leads, CX, data strategists).
- Leaders operationalise culture by embedding it into rituals, not just endorsing it.

2. Structured Operating Rhythms

- Make external scanning, stress-testing, retrospectives, and feedback loops part of BAU (stand-ups, quarterly reviews, dashboards).
- Institutionalise learning from disruption and feedback, closing the loop visibly.
- Bring together by making foresight, resilience and collaboration into your standard ways of working.

3. Frameworks & Guardrails to support decision making

- Use playbooks and clear decision rights to upskill and enable fast action without waiting for sign-off.
- Evaluate initiatives based on clear criteria such as customer value, market fit, and resilience.



- Delegate a level of authority within the organisation, together with the skills and knowledge to use it, to enable quick response during disruption.

4. Create cross-silo roles & collaboration mechanisms

- Develop roles that bridge teams, activities and functions such as programme directors, CX leads, and automation specialists. Also consider end to end process, product or service ownership, with input managed on a matrix structure.
- Set up regular forums for collaboration and idea-sharing.
- Involve external partners like customers, suppliers, and regulators in co-creating solutions.

5. Data, Tools & Visibility

- Keep teams aligned with real-time data and shared visibility.
- Ensure market trends and customer intelligence are easy to access and understand.

6. Cultural Reinforcement

- Celebrate curiosity, constructive dissent, and outside-in contributions.
- Recognise and reward behaviours that reflect agility, collaboration, and external relevance.
- Use storytelling to connect external signals and disruption responses to purpose and outcomes.

7. Measurement & Continuous Improvement

- Develop mechanisms to track your ability to respond such as time-to-pivot, time-to-reconfigure, decision latency, removing as much waste as possible.
- Monitor adoption of external insights into strategy and delivery.
- Treat every disruption or feedback cycle as a learning opportunity, embedding lessons back into design.

By stripping away the duplication, what's left is clarity: map the enablers against the four traits, and you see one operating system powering them all (Strategic Readiness Delivery Mechanisms Matrix.)



Insights from the Matrix

A handful of enablers consistently show up across every trait of readiness: leadership sponsorship, structured operating rhythms, decision frameworks, and cultural reinforcement. These are the foundation enablers, not optional extras. Without visible leadership backing, rhythms that institutionalise scanning and learning, clear guardrails for decision-making, and a culture that rewards curiosity and adaptability, the other traits simply don't stick.

Strategic Readiness Delivery Mechanisms Matrix

Delivery Mechanism	External Awareness	Operational Resilience	Workforce Agility	Working Together
Leadership Alignment & Sponsorship	Leaders model outside-in thinking, make external scanning a board agenda item	Leaders sponsor resilience testing, empower local authority	Leaders role-model adaptability, reward pivoting	Leaders champion collaboration across silos and with partners
Structured Operating Rhythms	Market scans, trend reviews, customer insights embedded in BAU	Regular stress-tests, scenario drills, post-event reviews	Agile ceremonies (stand-ups, retros) institutionalised	Cross-functional forums, joint planning cycles
Decision-Making Frameworks & Guardrails	Criteria for relevance (customer impact, market fit)	Pre-approved playbooks, flexible delegation during disruption	Empowered teams with autonomy within guardrails	Shared decision rights across functions, joint accountability
Cross-Boundary Roles & Collaboration Mechanisms	Boundary-spanners bring external signals inside (CX, data strategists)	Transformation leads bridge strategy and execution under stress	Agile coaches, product owners span functions	Collaboration champions, partner ecosystem managers
Data, Tools & Visibility	Trend reports, PESTLE, competitor benchmarking, customer journey mapping	Real-time dashboards, scenario modelling, supply chain visibility	Skills mapping, workforce analytics, collaboration platforms	Shared data platforms, integrated reporting across teams
Cultural Reinforcement	Curiosity rewarded, dissent encouraged, external insight celebrated	Flexibility treated as strategic asset, learning from disruption normalised	Agility recognised in performance reviews, adaptability rewarded	Collaboration stories celebrated, collective wins recognised
Measurement & Continuous Improvement	Responsiveness metrics (time-to-pivot, adoption of external insights)	Time-to-reconfigure, decision latency, resilience KPIs	Speed of skill redeployment, cycle time improvements	Collaboration effectiveness, cross-team delivery outcomes



These mechanisms create the conditions in which awareness, resilience, agility, and collaboration can actually take root. That's why they are the non-negotiables: embed them once, and they power every trait; neglect them, and readiness remains a slogan rather than a system.

While each trait has its own emphasis, they all draw strength from the same core enablers, proving readiness is one operating system, not four separate programmes:

- **External Awareness** leans heavily on foresight tools and external engagement.
- **Operational Resilience** emphasises stress-testing, redundancy, and real-time visibility.
- **Workforce Agility** depends on empowerment, skill redeployment, and agile rituals.
- **Working Together** is powered by collaboration structures, shared data, and joint accountability.

In summary, readiness isn't four separate programmes. It's one integrated operating system, with shared delivery mechanisms tuned to different outcomes. And the insights from the matrix highlight a simple truth: by embedding a common set of mechanisms, organisations strengthen all four traits simultaneously.

The tangible benefits from an Innovation Culture

Those four traits that drive survival and growth also form the foundation of a culture built for both endurance and acceleration. They give your organisation the confidence to navigate disruption and the pace to deliver every day.

Once embedded in day to day activity, these traits will help you move with pace, adapting and executing faster and smarter, putting you in a position to outpace the competition.

They are the backbone of an innovation culture, creating and underpinning an environment where curiosity, experimentation, and continuous improvement are every day behaviours within an environment where ideas can be tested, refined, and scaled.

What defines this environment?

Encouragement to question assumptions, explore new ideas, and ask "what if?" without fear. Innovation should be a shared effort, not limited to one team.

Space to Experiment safely, where mistakes are treated as learning opportunities. Teams are encouraged to run pilots, test hypotheses, and iterate visibly. Feedback loops and retrospectives are used for growth, not judgement.



Diverse Thinking and Collaboration, where cross-functional collaboration is the norm, different perspectives are valued, and teams co-create solutions across boundaries—functions, geographies, and even external partners.

Structures that Enable Innovation because innovation cannot be left to chance. Organisations need to build an environment of tools and structures such as innovation labs, funding models, agile squads, and fast-track governance, to support rapid experimentation and scaling.

Leadership that support and reward signalling that innovation matters by sponsoring initiatives, removing blockers, and recognising behaviours that drive change. Success is measured not just by outcomes, but by learning velocity.

In short, an innovation culture turns creativity into capability. It's how organisations stay adaptive, competitive, and resilient, especially in times of disruption.

Now, you can see what I mean by the four traits being the backbone of an innovation culture.

Why it matters.

Speed of change is now a competitive edge. An innovation culture provides the environment for both idea generation and delivery, ensuring sparks become solutions. Ideas are plentiful; execution is priceless. The advantage lies in turning bright sparks into reality.



Harvey Firestone
The founder of Firestone Tire & Rubber Company



Capital isn't so important in business. Experience isn't so important. You can get both of these things. What is important is ideas. If you have ideas, you have the main asset you need, and there isn't any limit to what you can do with your business and your life



What Harvey Firestone said was true, but ideas only matter if they create value.

I can quote from personal experience many organisations who have derived multiple benefits from ideas generated from within a democratised innovation environment, putting those companies into very competitive positions. Examples include

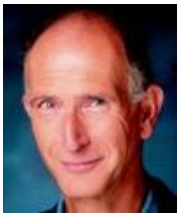


- The formation of multi-functional product development teams who were successfully tasked to deliver new products and business models targeting additional turnover of up to 10% over 5 years.
- Incremental improvements delivered by a process innovation function decreasing the turnaround time for a mortgage application to fulfilment process from 3 months to 15 days.

These results are quantifiable and can be used as a measure of the success of your innovation activities.

Beyond Today's Competitors

Innovation also fuels expansion. It helps organisations break into new markets, reach new segments, and rethink how they deliver value. The biggest challenge your business will face in five years may not even exist today. Radical innovation' that thinking beyond the obvious, reshapes industries.



Oren Harari
Former Business Professor at the University of San Francisco



The light bulb wasn't invented by candle-makers, and e-mail wasn't invented by the postal service.



As the saying goes: "The light bulb wasn't invented by candle-makers, and e-mail wasn't invented by the postal service." Disruption often comes from outside your field.

Amazon is the proof point. From online bookstore to global marketplace, its relentless innovation has redefined commerce and customer experience. Competitors copy, but none surpass. And it's still experimenting and innovating, such as testing delivery by drones.

The Investment Question

Leaders often cite cost, time, and resources as barriers to building innovation culture. True, embedding it takes time and persistence. But you have to start somewhere, and the four traits are the first steps. Delay, and you'll be overtaken by those already moving.



Poppycock and Balderdash

The different views of risks that Workforce Resilience and Innovation in the Workplace can bring

Let's be honest: resilience and innovation aren't risk-free.

Embedding these qualities across the workforce sounds progressive and forward-thinking, but without the right guardrails, they can backfire leading to workforce burnout, masking deeper issues, or creating strategic drift. So it's important to acknowledge the risks that come with driving these agendas, especially when they're treated as cultural statement rather than disciplined capabilities structured through frameworks and governance.

But there other, less obvious risks or potential outcomes you need to be aware of and rather explain them through my own experiences and observations, I want to use the voices of a number of thought leaders who recognise the risks yet advocate the strategy. This growing chorus of thought leaders, from psychologists to strategists to governance experts, who have begun to challenge the uncritical embrace of resilience and innovation.

They don't reject the value outright; instead, they urge leaders to look harder at how these concepts are deployed, where they're owned, and what unintended consequences they may carry.

In the sections that follow, we explore three provocative questions: whether resilience creates a scapegoat for systemic failure, whether innovation is an overrated distraction, and whether innovation belongs in the boardroom rather than on the front lines.

Does a resilient workforce create a scapegoat for other underlying problems?

Resilience should be a corporate core capability and praised as a strength that leaders should build into systems, teams, and culture.

But as highlighted by Jason Walker, when misused it can become a distraction so that instead of addressing root causes of problems like fixing broken processes or addressing burnout, you start to use resilience as a justification for endless pressure, or delaying change, or shifting responsibility.

So resilience is valuable, but only when it's grounded in strategy, systems, and shared responsibility.



Dr Jason Walker
Associate Professor, Alder University, & Forbes Contributor



Telling employees to 'be more resilient' is leadership on autopilot... Resilience training doesn't fix systems that are inherently broken. It's like putting a Band-Aid on a massive wound



But what about the stress imposed on workers when they are required to be resilient, yet are unsupported by their leaders? In their article "What Leaders get wrong about Resilience" in Harvard Business Review in June 2022, Danielle D. King (Associate Professor of Psychological Sciences at Rice University) and Megan R. McSpedon (a leadership and organizational development consultant) challenge conventional thinking about resilience in the workplace.

They stress that resilience shouldn't be treated as a personal trait of individuals, i.e. you are capable or not capable of being resilient, and that it must be supported collectively, with leaders actively reducing unnecessary adversity by creating a healthier work environment.

In short, King and McSpedon advocate for organisational resilience, where leadership takes responsibility for creating and maintaining the conditions that shape employee wellbeing.

True resilience means fixing the system, not just asking people to endure it.

Professor David Denyer, Professor of Leadership and Organisational Change at Cranfield University, believes real resilience means more than just surviving in tough times. It's about balancing that stability with moving forward with progress.

The most successful firms don't just endure, they continue to evolve, balancing defensive behaviours with progressive action and pairing resilience with agile systems, clear accountable leadership, and a bias for action.

These critiques don't reject innovation or resilience outright but they do remind us that without structural integrity, psychological safety, and strategic clarity, these traits become burdens, not assets.



Is Innovation is an overrated distraction

Not everyone is in agreement with the benefits that can be derived from innovation in the workplace, nor the ability for organisation to adapt and control an innovation culture. These naysayers don't dismiss the overall concept of an innovation culture or the benefits that can be derived from having a resilient workforce, but they do raise risks associated with their introduction.



Scott Berkun
Best selling author and former Microsoft product leader.



Innovation is a vague, subjective term that distracts from what you're really trying to do: profit by making good things



Scott Berkun, published an article in the Harvard Business Review in 2008, where he challenges the often obsessive hype surrounding innovation in the workplace, believing that execution and relevance matter more than chasing the development of novel ideas.

He contends that innovation activity offers no guarantee of usefulness, profitability, or relevance through ideas generated. In fact he states that many so-called "innovative" ideas fail simply because they don't address real problems. In his words, "innovation is a vague, subjective term that distracts from what you're really trying to do: profit by making good things."

I first read Berkun's article in HBR on a flight to Dubai en route to meet my remediation team in my Barclays days and I recall thinking that I agreed with his sentiment but also thinking "isn't this just stating the obvious?" I mean, why would anyone believe that the process of innovation was more important than the outcome?

But after a year or so, I began to recognise the pattern where sentiment expressed by management outweighed the outcome.



More recently I spotted this joke regarding the drive to embed artificial intelligence in business and it frames the sentiment of business leaders in the same way as Berkun frames them in using innovation.

You don't set out objectively to employ innovation within a business just for the bragging rights at dinner parties or down at the pub. Innovation is a means to achieve an objective.

If you start by thinking innovation will be the utopia that fixes all your problems then you will be sadly mistaken. However, if you think of innovation as a tool kit to drive change and betterment in the company, then you are on the right track.

The views of Berkun and others offer good insights into the risks that can develop when aura of innovation and its potential overcome the original objectives. Voices such as Vikram Joshi, a Forbes Business Council member and founder of [pulsd](#), a company in the business of democratizing fun in New York City, challenge the obsession with disruption, highlighting how refinement and disciplined delivery often outperform radical reinvention.

Alternatively, Filippo Gualtierio Blancato, a fellow in technology and geopolitics at Harvard University, believes that "innovation" is often overused and misunderstood. He says companies and leaders talk about it to sound forward-thinking, but many don't have the strategy or discipline to back it up. Instead of solving real problems, they use the word to protect their image or justify their position.

So with innovation, you need to be pragmatic and don't get carried away.

Don't chase innovation, chase better outcomes. Delivering corporate objectives, being better at what you do and delivering what the customer wants should be more important than chasing the next big thing. The most successful companies excel by refining and scaling what works, not by endlessly reinventing the wheel.

Go for stability not Disruption. Don't get obsessed by striving to be disruptive and radical as that policy often leads to reckless decision-making and ignores the value of stability, trust, and long-term relationships.

Innovation as a Buzzword. The term "Innovation" is sometimes used as a smokescreen for a lack of strategy or focus. Sometimes people use it to sound visionary, even when their organisations lack the discipline to deliver. True innovation requires more than language. It demands focus, structure, and the ability to enact.



Real Innovation is rare. Striving for breakthroughs is difficult, risky, and often misunderstood. Start by focusing on solving meaningful problems like process challenges or meeting customer needs, rather than buying into the hype and chasing the ultimate breakthrough.

It's worth noting that we cannot all become the next AirBnB or Uber.

Just saying...

Should Innovation belong solely in the boardroom?

Two of the big four consultancies, Deloitte and EY, believe, either explicitly or implicitly, that innovation should be led, owned, or tightly governed by the boardroom. Although they don't all call for total exclusivity, they do emphasize top-down control, strategic oversight, and leadership-driven innovation.

Deloitte, in their article "The Board's Role in Championing Innovation", positions the boardroom as the engine of innovation, arguing that directors must lead disruption, not just oversee it. They suggest that innovation is a strategic imperative best driven by those with enterprise-wide visibility and fiduciary accountability.

"Visionary leaders, armed with bold ideas and the curiosity to understand the power of innovation, are the driving force behind tomorrow's marketplace."

EY's Board Matters report (How Boards can sharpen their focus on Innovation) highlights how innovation is often neglected at board level and calls for directors to reclaim it. They argue that boards must rethink their engagement model and actively shape innovation strategy, especially in volatile markets.

"Most boards hardly touch the topic of innovation. It's a miss for sure."

"Boards must rethink how they engage with management and each other to prioritize innovation."

In consideration of their views, and having seen organisations who treat innovation as a boardroom only activity, I really think both Deloitte and EY are missing a trick. The workforce offers a rich talent of diversity of views and thought, that should be nurtured and used according to create solutions for the challenges faced by an organisation. Likewise, innovation should be governed otherwise chaos will ensue. But don't strike out the workforce entirely.

The senior leadership should have active involvement in an innovation culture, thorough structured frameworks and board-level sponsorship to ensure innovation is both creative and commercially grounded but focused on corporate objectives and striking the right balance between making today better vs reshaping the future.



Ben Little

Instructor at Harvard's Division of Continuing Education.



Innovation leadership requires both a good story and good underlying substance. Neither alone will do the trick



And finally, as always governance matters. Using workforce innovation in certain situations such as changes to regulated processes, merger and acquisition activity or in capital decisions, carries real strategic risk and needs strong oversight. The higher the risk, the higher the level of oversight authority, to board-level.

If innovation is opened up too widely, without clear boundaries, you can create confusion and misalignment, leading to situations that can impact the company's reputation.

So, when implementing bottom-up creativity ensure the leadership retains ownership of innovation's direction, funding, and risk appetite.

It would be inadvertent of me not to highlight these uncommon risks. Not that I expect you to encounter them, but merely for the fact that IF you encounter them, knowledge will help your awareness.



Jack Welch

Former Chairman & CEO of General Electric



An organisation's ability to learn, and translate that learning into action rapidly, is the ultimate competitive advantage





Key Takeaways

In today's fast-moving markets, where dominance is fleeting, innovation is the difference between growth and decline. The organisations that thrive don't just react to change, they invest in it. If you want to develop a resilient, future-ready culture, you need to demand pace, agility, and the support challenges legacy thinking.

You need to define your priorities to stay ahead of disruption, by understanding;

- **Innovation is a long term investment.** Like Research and development, innovation is vital for long-term competitiveness, even if results take time.
- **Staying relevant means constantly evolving.** Companies like Yahoo!, Nokia, and Myspace show what happens when innovation stalls.
- **Don't be Complacent.** Standing still erodes advantage faster than external threats. Urgency and foresight matter.
- **Start-up traits are strategic assets.** Awareness, resilience, and agility aren't buzzwords; they're survival mechanisms. Embed them across the organisation to adapt faster and stay relevant.

Making It Real

Creating an innovation culture means reshaping how work gets done, not just in terms of processes, but in the general mindset. It's what steers decisions and behaviours, especially when there is no-one around to look over their shoulders.

Start with smaller initiatives such as refining a process, testing a new idea, or tweaking an element of a product or service. Then, like dropping a pebble into a pond, these early moves create ripples that spread across the organisation.

Then, through nurturing, those ripples grow into a system that shapes how your organisation thinks, reacts and competes.

How to Nurture It

- **Embed readiness** – Building awareness, resilience, and agility into daily operations will ensure the organisation is constantly in a state of readiness.
- **Democratise innovation** – Encourage ideas from every level of the organisations, not just leadership or R&D. The staff on checkouts know a supermarket customer better than a board member.
- **Start small, and let the culture ripple outward** – Pilot improvements and let culture spread organically.



- **Measure the impact of any changes implemented** – Track outcomes such as faster delivery, reduced cycle times, increased revenue.
- **Invest for the long term** – Treat an innovation culture as you would an R&D function. Returns are not always immediate, but are vital to stay competitive.
- **Collaborate for speed** – Cross-functional teams accelerate delivery and sharpen responsiveness.
- **Challenge legacy thinking** – Don't be the candle-maker in a world of light bulbs. Embrace radical innovation.

Culture doesn't install itself. It grows... or it withers. The only question is whether you'll nurture it now, or watch competitors reap the rewards.

The clock is already ticking.



My thanks to **Freddie Mercury & Queen.**

Masters of reinvention and resilience – exactly the mindset we need for workforce innovation.