



THE INNOVATION WORKER

RETHINKING THE KNOWLEDGE WORKER FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

A collection of Q&A articles from industry leaders—paired with infographics from original Intrepid Learning research—on the topic of innovation in the workplace.

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“The best knowledge workers innovate on the job every day.”

Introduction

Rethinking the Knowledge Worker for the 21st Century

by Sam Herring

Co-founder and CEO of Intrepid Learning

We've come a long way since Peter Drucker coined the phrase “knowledge worker” a half-century ago. Drucker defined the knowledge worker as the key to a post-industrial economy, where knowledge trumped manual labor and value was derived from how a worker applied knowledge to daily tasks.

But the world has changed dramatically since then. Companies that want to succeed today have discovered the next generation of the knowledge worker: the innovation worker, whose creativity, agility and commitment to continuous learning will drive future economic growth and lead to the next generation of ideas and inventions that shape our lives.

Why innovation? It's come up a lot in the past year, from a recent State of the Union address, to feature stories in the Harvard Business Review and the New Yorker. How has innovation become the watchword of our era—the topic du jour, so to speak?

It's natural to assume this recent focus on innovation organically results from a stagnant economy that shows few signs of gaining true traction in the near term. But I believe there is more to the story — that this is a unique innovation moment in the development of our economic system.

Knowledge workers now dominate most of the world's economies. They differentiate themselves through their ability to understand context, to judge situations, and to deviate from established norms to create new solutions. The best knowledge workers innovate on the job every day.

We're seeing through research studies by groups such as the Institute for Corporate Productivity that innovation and creativity are the most critical issues facing large organizations, and that innovation, addressed effectively, is a top driver of organizational performance.

Finally, the rise of social media has forever altered the innovation landscape. Today, it is possible to encourage innovation through simple methods such as crowd-sourcing product design and development.

Innovation is no manifest only as an exciting new product. Innovation is the result of reframing ordinary problems to generate creative solutions that have value in the marketplace. Innovation can be a new business model, a new process, or a new delivery channel. Consider Costco, a decidedly low-tech company, which perfected a business model of selling products at low cost through memberships and bulk packaging.

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“We are on the cusp of a new era of learning in the workplace.”

We are on the cusp of a new era of learning in the workplace. If we as business leaders create work environments that foster, nurture, and reward creativity, I believe the innovation worker will drive the 21st-century economy.

In this eBook, we invite you to consider the ideas of compelling thought leaders on the importance of innovation in the workplace. These leaders represent a broad swath of industries and experiences, but all of them agree that innovation—and the workers that champion innovation—holds the key to our continued economic growth.

Some of the many highlights that stood out for me as I reviewed these contributions included the following:

- Ernie Kahane's belief that all workers must adopt a “CEO mindset” to focus on the “big ideas” that will most impact the business—and that organizations must allow for failure in order to breed a culture that rewards and fosters innovation.
- Cheryl Lasse's thoughts on how the speed of the modern economy requires workers to become “great” at their jobs in much less time than in the past—and how that can drive employees to innovate in new and exciting ways.
- John Sweeney's observations on how his many years in improvisational theater have impressed upon him the role of every player in an organization as a source of innovation.

A fascinating account of Facebook's culture in the April 2012 issue of Fast Company magazine notes that potential hires are evaluated through the lens of their ability to solve future problems. “You have to

be prepared to jump in, make stuff, and grow,” says one Facebook executive. That's a great example of an atmosphere that communicates trust and a willingness to tolerate risks—and it's made Facebook one of the crown jewels of the social media era.

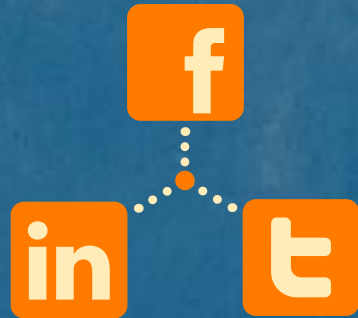
In *The Effective Executive*, Peter Drucker notes that “every knowledge worker in a modern organization is an ‘executive’ if... [the worker] is responsible for a contribution that materially affects the capacity of the organization to perform and to obtain results.” Drucker captured the quality that differentiates innovators from knowledge workers: the ability to be your own CEO, to trust your intuition, and to boldly propose new solutions to modern challenges. Back to Facebook: the ubiquitous “Like” button—used billions of times a day—was developed by just three people: a product manager, a designer, and a part-time engineer.

We invite you to consider these thoughts, and to share your stories with us about how innovation workers are driving your industry forward. We look forward to hearing from you. 💡



Sam Herring is co-founder and CEO of Intrepid Learning and leads the company's strategic direction. He is immediate past Chairman of the American Society for Training and Development's (ASTD) Board of Directors, and is recognized as a “Who's Who” training industry thought leader by TrainingIndustry.com. Sam is published in Fast Company and T+D magazine, and is a frequent keynote speaker at leading industry conferences, seminars, universities, and global corporations. He holds a Master's degree from Harvard University, where he studied ethics, religion and public policy, and a Bachelor's degree in history from Yale University. Follow Sam on Twitter @samuelherring

What tools are offered to foster innovation in your organization?



External social
media outlets
24%



Communities
of practices
38%



Industry
Associations
29%



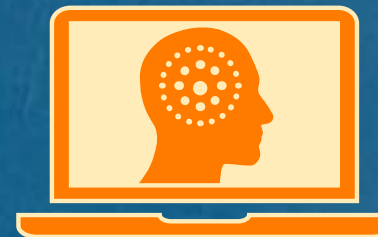
Dedicated time
for free thought
14%



Internal incentives
or challenges
28%



Internal social
media outlets
35%



Informal Learning
Technology
30%



Employee
Networks
39%

Respondents had the option to choose multiple categories. There were 638 responses to the above conditions.



“...top-notch innovation workers are already ‘flexing’ in these areas with insightful thinking and activities.”

Business and Academia Must Partner to Meet Companies’ Innovation Needs

by Martha Soehren

Chief Learning Officer and Senior Vice President, Comcast University and Comcast Cable

Q: How valuable are innovation workers to the 21st century organization?

“Innovation workers are critical to the 21st century organization. But the term ‘innovation worker’ warrants definition. An innovation worker is one who thinks broadly and forwardly with ‘blue ocean’ ideas and practices when it comes to technologies, physical products, work processes, the way work is done (not re-engineering), and the way collaboration and partnerships happen.

It’s a new day in the workplace, and neither business nor academia has worked in tandem to ensure the right entry levels for innovation workers or thinkers that match the needs of business. Of course, academia produces some very smart and talented graduates. But one of the key attributes needed in the new worker and the innovation worker is the ability to ‘flex’—around work demands, work schedules, work locations, work habits, and relationship building. This has to be accomplished with a high degree of openness in terms of adjusting to an organization’s culture, structure, and tactical—as well as strategic—focus. I say this while recognizing that top-notch innovation workers are already ‘flexing’ in these areas with insightful thinking and activities.”

Q: What is the new role for innovation workers over the next decade?

“First and foremost, the concept of the ‘innovation worker’ seems almost idealistic on this day in 2012. There are some really smart workers in organizations. There are some really smart college graduates entering the workplace. And they are generally good people with great intentions and ambitions. However, having said that, business and academia have a great opportunity to better partner and align people development strategy and organizational strategy. It’ll take a partnership—business and academia sitting at the table and asking: what do companies want in the graduate of tomorrow so they can meet their innovation expectations and needs? It’d only take a couple of really great companies to do this right, especially with practical application through internships, job rotations, mentors, and other resources or experiential learning opportunities. Granted, it would take a few years to get caught up with demand, but I believe it can be done.

I think of the doctorate in learning at the University of Pennsylvania. They have the concept right—the curricula is built around what learning leaders know is needed from a strategic perspective in learning and development. And, while there are many unknowns

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“Know thy people.”

when thinking forwardly, academia and business can certainly create the visual (or the vision) for this. Since most of us need a picture, I'll go for visual!”

Q: How can an organization best support and leverage its innovation workers?

“This is easy. Ask people what they need. Ask them what they want. Ask them what makes them tick. And ask them what makes them innovation workers. Know thy people.

A young worker recently requested some feedback from me. She asked, ‘Where do you see me now, and where do you see me three years from now?’ My bottom line response was: ‘I see you as a renter. You’re spending time here, and you’re producing a fairly nice product. But I anticipate that, any day now, you’ll stop by to tell me you’re leaving for another company. We need owners who think “blue ocean,” who show they know our business, and who are committed to our mission and our customers.’

The workplace is changing. Employees are changing. Stakeholders are changing. Innovation worker or not, it’s our job to ensure that employees see themselves as ‘owners’ and not ‘renters.’

An innovative owner is the best of all options. ”

Q: What do innovation workers have to do in order to increase their already valuable contribution?

“This is easy too. Know thy business. Know what the business expects. Where it’s headed. What the short—and long—term goals are. What the customers think and feel. What the customers want. How well the organization is serving its customers. What the key performance indicators (KPIs) are, and how the performance of the innovation worker directly and indirectly

influences and impacts the achievement of those KPIs — and especially the customer experience. These questions are even more critical when an organization is in business to make a profit. There’s an obligation to ‘paying’ stakeholders. But the same questions apply, and the stakes are equally high most of the time, in a not-for-profit. Know what the business is, what it does, where it’s headed, and how innovation workers can contribute.” ?



Martha Soehren is Chief Learning Officer and Senior Vice President for Comcast University and Comcast Cable. She holds undergraduate and graduate degrees in business, and a PhD in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. She has 11 years of experience in the telecommunications industry; 25 years of experience in the defense industry; and 13 years of experience as an adjunct professor, research advisor and academic advisor. She serves on the Board of Directors for ASTD and the Doctorate of Learning Advisory Board for the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. She is also a Learning Leader for the Masie Consortium. Follow Martha on Twitter @msoehren

My organization encourages innovation by offering:

A space for
innovation

18%



Frequent requests for
viewpoints from all levels

40%



Active conversation between
management and employees

43%



Participants willing to
join in on conversations

50%



A positive view of innovative
communities of practice

39%



Supportive management that
values employee innovation

53%



Respondents had the option to choose multiple categories. There were 638 responses to the above conditions.



“Organizations are now running faster than before. And they need creativity and innovation more than ever.”

Innovation and Creativity Are More Coveted Than Ever Before

by Tim Sackett

Executive Vice President, HRU Technical Resources

Q: How valuable are innovation workers to the 21st century organization?

“They are very valuable, and from two main standpoints. Organizations are now running faster than before. And they need creativity and innovation more than ever. The challenge is that creativity is hard to find and develop. Part of it is natural. In a sense, you’re either wired or not wired in a creative way. As a result, Human Resources teams are out there looking for creative people and managers inside the organization are trying to identify people on staff with creative instincts. Then they want to develop and supplement these creative individuals’ innovative capabilities. In the end, the core objective is to get the right people who can build and complete better and smarter projects faster.”

Q: What is the new role for innovation workers over the next decade?

“The key is staying out front of the competition. That’s everyone’s job today. But, more specifically, innovation workers represent the tipping point for an organization. The organizations that innovate faster and better will lead the markets. They will have a huge competitive edge. And, if you don’t have the right mix of innovation, your organization will scramble and trail its rivals. Organizations with the best blend of innovation workers will set the agenda and identify the future for the next decade.”

Q: How can an organization best support and leverage its innovation workers?

“That’s a good question. Organizations have to understand adult learners better, particularly how they interact with each other. Adults are wired already, and they’re hard to change. So organizations should look at these folks and figure out their strengths, as opposed to fixing their weaknesses. Of course, continuous improvement is an essential goal. But you move the needle by making the strengths even stronger.”

Q: What do innovation workers have to do in order to increase their already valuable contribution?

“From my perspective, people really need to understand that they have to brand themselves personally for the employment markets. That doesn’t mean you are looking for a job. But it does mean that you’re letting your managers and executives know what you can do, what you’re capable of. Too often, people don’t do this, and organizations never ask. There’s a vacuum here. More reaching out is required. The vacuum needs to be filled. It’s hard in tough economic times, though, because people want to hunker down and avoid the spotlight. They don’t want management watching them. They don’t want to be torn down. This is probably a bit of a generalization, however, because the

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“...the younger generation is probably more willing to step into the spotlight after identifying the opportunities.”

majority of people want to be key contributors and get noticed. A last thought is that the younger generation is probably more willing to step into the spotlight after identifying the opportunities.”💡



Tim Sackett is Executive Vice President of HRU Technical Resources, a contingent-staffing firm founded by his mother and based in Lansing, Michigan. A corporate veteran with many years of HR and talent acquisition experience, Tim focuses on finding and deploying unique and valuable human capital. He also writes on all things HR and Recruiting for the popular HR blog, Fistful of Talent, and for his own blog, The Tim Sackett Project. Follow Tim on Twitter @TimSackett



“To compete and win, you have to be smarter. You have to be more agile.”

Innovation Must Be Built Into Every Job

by Ernie Kahane

Director of Learning Strategy and Acquisitions Integration, EMC Corporation

Q: How valuable are innovation workers to the 21st century organization?

“You need to ask two strategy questions here. What territory are you competing in? And how do you win? Global competition is hard and fierce, so it’s important to know the answers. To compete and win, you have to be smarter. You have to be more agile. And you need to have big and small innovation from your employees. Big innovation is transformative. Small innovation is rooted in continuous performance improvement. You need both. And the more innovative you are, the better your chances are for survival. It’s also important to note that buying innovation through mergers and acquisitions (M&A) is very hard. In fact, two-thirds of all M&A deals don’t work. So you’ve got to develop a strategy to develop innovation in order to succeed.”

Q: What is the new role for innovation workers over the next decade?

“Every company needs to grow, instill customer loyalty, and sustain strong results. And innovation is a key driver in all of this. So, workers must have an active role in driving innovation. Innovation has to be built into their jobs. And companies need to rely on them for the best ideas. A good example is the way that EMC started with an innovation conference. It was initially about opportunity generation, and, over time, the effort produced many good ideas. However, ultimately it moved from being an event to a sustained institutionalized process. The bottom line is that innovation is now an ongoing component in all our work.”

Q: How can an organization best support and leverage its innovation workers?

“It’s a design issue, because innovation needs to be built into the organizations’ processes and work, not through separate departments. Each functional area must design ways to explore the new while executing the current process. We’re not talking about the traditional research and development process here. Innovation must become an integral part of every organization so all employees can work with new ideas. This also requires a culture of innovation, which is fragile and easy to break. To keep it vibrant, you must have high trust and high commitment from all employees. And to create trust, the organization’s leaders must also demonstrate innovation leadership. Part of this requires that the best ideas do win. Another component is making it okay to take risks and fail. To create a true learning and innovation mindset, organizations have to be willing to learn and grow from failure.”

Q: What do innovation workers have to do in order to increase their already valuable contribution?

“It’s essential to remember that innovation is global—we must become more culturally aware of this. We have to better understand how other cultures work, think, and collaborate. It’s vital to assume a CEO mindset for your area of responsibility. Ask yourself, “what are the big opportunities?”, and then develop appropriate expertise and competency. Finally, focus on

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“You’re paid to be innovative, and that’s well worth remembering.”

listening, identifying problems, and improving customer experience. You’re paid to be innovative, and that’s well worth remembering.” ?



Ernie Kahane, Director of Learning Strategy and Acquisitions Integration for EMC Corporation, is recognized as an organizational leader who creates and implements learning strategy that improves organizational performance and business results. He has focused expertise in learning theory, development processes, integrated learning platforms, and enterprise learning alignment. He has over 20 years of experience developing and executing learning strategies for major corporations. The author of a number of book, and the co-inventor of two patented consumer products, he holds a Ph.D. in Educational Policy Studies and Instructional Design from the University of Illinois, and has taught at Boston University and Hampshire College.



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“To survive today, companies must continuously innovate, which only increases the changing skills required.”

Innovation Workers Must Ask the New and Complex Questions

by Cheryl Lasse

Managing Partner, Edutainment Media

Q: How valuable are innovation workers to the 21st century organization?

“They are crucial — without innovation workers, everybody lives at the status quo. If we don’t focus on innovation and ‘what comes next,’ we risk being outpaced in the future by competitors who do. Companies have always needed to create a competitive advantage. But the difference today is that the pace of change has accelerated, and with it, the skills required for success have changed. To survive today, companies must continuously innovate, which only increases the changing skills required. One of the problems here, though, is that people now stay in the same job for less time, and, therefore, they need to be able to become ‘great’ without as much experience as they had in the past. On the other hand, new workers entering the workforce today want to be able to make an impact more quickly — they want to know how to be ‘great’ right away — and they’re very motivated to get there.”

Q: What is the new role for innovation workers over the next decade?

“The innovation worker’s role will be to ask new questions — of others, and of themselves. They must phrase the questions differently than in the past, however, and they must view opportunities differently as well. That means asking, ‘What if?’ It means asking, ‘What’s next?’ And it means asking, ‘What else?’ ”

Q: How can an organization best support and leverage its innovation workers?

“There needs to be a culture of innovation, and it must start at the top. The organization has to make it okay to fail, and okay to do things differently. Google is at the pinnacle when it comes to this approach. I think it’s important to give each person the opportunity to spend 20 percent of their time on what they’re really passionate about. Innovation workers are self-directed, but they often don’t have the time in their jobs to innovate — they’re busy fighting the status quo. Companies that want to foster a culture of innovation need to strive to be more Google-like.

So, how can we do that? How can we apply knowledge and skills to create insight and to solve problems in new ways? How can we harness each employee’s unique combination of skills and perspective to hone a company’s overall competitive edge?

In my view, there are four key points to understand before we can answer those questions. First, we must know what skills each employee needs to perform their current job. In essence, what’s their role as it contributes to achievement of corporate strategy? Second, we must know what differentiates ‘good’ from ‘great.’

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“... we must know
what differentiates
‘good’ from ‘great’.”

In essence, what separates innovators from non-innovators? Third, each employee must assess his or her unique skills. In essence, they must know how they rate relative to current requirements, and how they rate relative to innovative skills. And fourth, each employee must use his or her results to self-direct to training activities—formal and informal—that close both skill gaps.

When we've addressed those four points, we will know what skills each person in the company must have to be a great innovator. And, if everyone performs at the 'great' level, then the company is likely to have a competitive advantage.

Then, we can organize employees for success based on self-assessment results. We can even integrate pods of innovative workers among non-innovative workers to raise the level of innovation among the entire workforce.”

Q: What do innovation workers have to do in order to increase their already valuable contribution?

“Don't give up. That's often the outcome when innovation workers are surrounded by people who are operating at the status quo. Innovation workers need to constantly pursue their intrinsic motivation to be different. They can't let the people around them, who are comfortable with the way things are, dilute their efforts. Instead, they need to drive themselves and celebrate their successes where and when they can.” ♡



Cheryl Lasse is Edutainment Media's Managing Partner. She manages all client engagements and product development. She has a strong background in consulting, marketing, and sales — mostly in technology companies, where training has played a chief role throughout her career. She holds bachelor degrees from Syracuse University in Computer Science and Human Relations. And she has her MBA from the University of South Florida with concentrations in marketing and international business.



“There’s a growing need for innovators who can re-engineer health care processes in new and efficient ways that add to quality care.”

Health Care Requires Different Types of Innovation Skills

by Ken Kaufmann

Senior Organizational Development Consultant, Swedish Health Services

Q: How valuable are innovation workers to the 21st century organization?

“We don’t use the term ‘innovation worker,’ but we do recognize the role that employees who are applying their intellectual capabilities actually play.

That said, in health care, we are now trying to focus on quality outcomes, as opposed to the fee-for-service model. So innovation on the front line — which is at the bedside in a hospital — is all about ensuring quality patient care in new ways that control costs, improve efficiencies and prevent harm.

There’s a growing need for innovators who can re-engineer health care processes in new and efficient ways that add to quality care.”

Q: What is the new role for innovation workers over the next decade?

“There is a constant need for medical and scientific breakthroughs. But medical and scientific breakthroughs, on their own, do not necessarily contribute to better and more efficient health care. I believe that successful innovation in health care also looks at affordable business models that help us provide the best care at the lowest price. We need to treat illness,

prevent illness and treat the whole person — and finding the business models that make the most sense in this regard is essential. It’s really figuring out how to transform the industry.”

Q: How can an organization best support and leverage its innovation workers?

“The first order of business is investing in learning. We need people who can help health care practitioners better understand the costs that are incurred as we provide quality outcomes. We also have to help practitioners grasp the essence of the new business models in health care. That means giving them new business and finance skills. The last aspect here is that we need people who can help health care practitioners upgrade their technology skills. Health care processes are increasingly becoming digitized, and pushing practitioners to adopt technology, and make the best use of it, is critical. Getting practitioners engaged in this has a lot to do with change management.”

Q: What do innovation workers have to do in order to increase their already valuable contribution?

“Keeping skills sharp, and understanding what skills are crucial is really important. Also, understanding the big picture — what goes on outside your field in

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“...change is happening fast, and it's coming from all angles.”

health care — is key. The things to focus on are costs, process improvement, and applying technology. Finally, anyone on the front line of health care today has to be extremely resilient and flexible. Change is happening fast, and it's coming from all angles and directions, so it requires a good deal of strength to keep up.” !



Ken Kaufmann is a Senior Organizational Development Consultant at Swedish Health Services in Seattle. He focuses on leadership development, coaching, change management and team development for both clinical and non-clinical staff. Prior to joining Swedish, Ken worked at Starbucks Coffee Company, leading learning and change initiatives for the start-up of new supply chain operations in the US, Europe and Central America. He also brings change management experience for technology implementations, new equipment, mergers and workforce restructuring. Ken received his Master of Education in Adult Education and Training from Seattle University.



“... it’s less about grand innovators, and more about how an organization can foster meaningful innovation everywhere...”

Innovation Starts With the Organization’s Overall Commitment to Creativity

by JD Dillon

Director of Learning Development for Kaplan University

Q: How valuable are innovation workers to the 21st century organization?

“This is a developing story. Right now, these individuals stand out pretty obviously in organizations that are set up to foster talent. Many technology companies are good examples of this. Moving forward, innovation workers should not be seen as unique. They must be sought after, developed in greater numbers, and be viewed as essential employees. Steve Jobs obviously understood this well. He saw that innovation workers could create products that changed the user experience in ways that even the user was not ready to understand. I believe that as more companies in other sectors begin to view the innovation worker as essential, they will gain greater competitive advantage and deliver improved value for customers.”

Q: What is the new role for innovation workers over the next decade?

“I think the term ‘innovation worker’ is wrong. These are less workers and more partners. They are mutually reliant on each other. They share successes. It’s almost as if they are informal leaders of business change and adaptation. The reality is that they have a significant influence on how a business operates. In the end, though, it’s less about grand innovators, and more about how an organization can foster meaningful innovation everywhere and all the time.”

Q: How can an organization best support and leverage its innovation workers?

“It all starts with the organization. Regardless of the talent, if the organizational structure isn’t there, innovation and creativity can’t happen. There has to be a bottom-up approach, with empowered employees driving change. In these organizations, job descriptions are of much less importance. Instead, finding the right talent to do unique things and make unique contributions is the focus. You need people who bring something to the organization that it just doesn’t currently have. The overall philosophy has to be that an organization invests in innovative talent in the same way that it invests in physical assets.”

Q: What do innovation workers have to do in order to increase their already valuable contribution?

“It’s important to participate and buy into the purpose and mission of the organization. It’s more of a ‘we’ mentality than an ‘I’ mentality. That doesn’t mean you don’t ask questions or fight through red tape to innovate and create. You have to do that to deliver change and keep pace with the competition. Ultimately, the ability to contribute is what matters for these individuals.”

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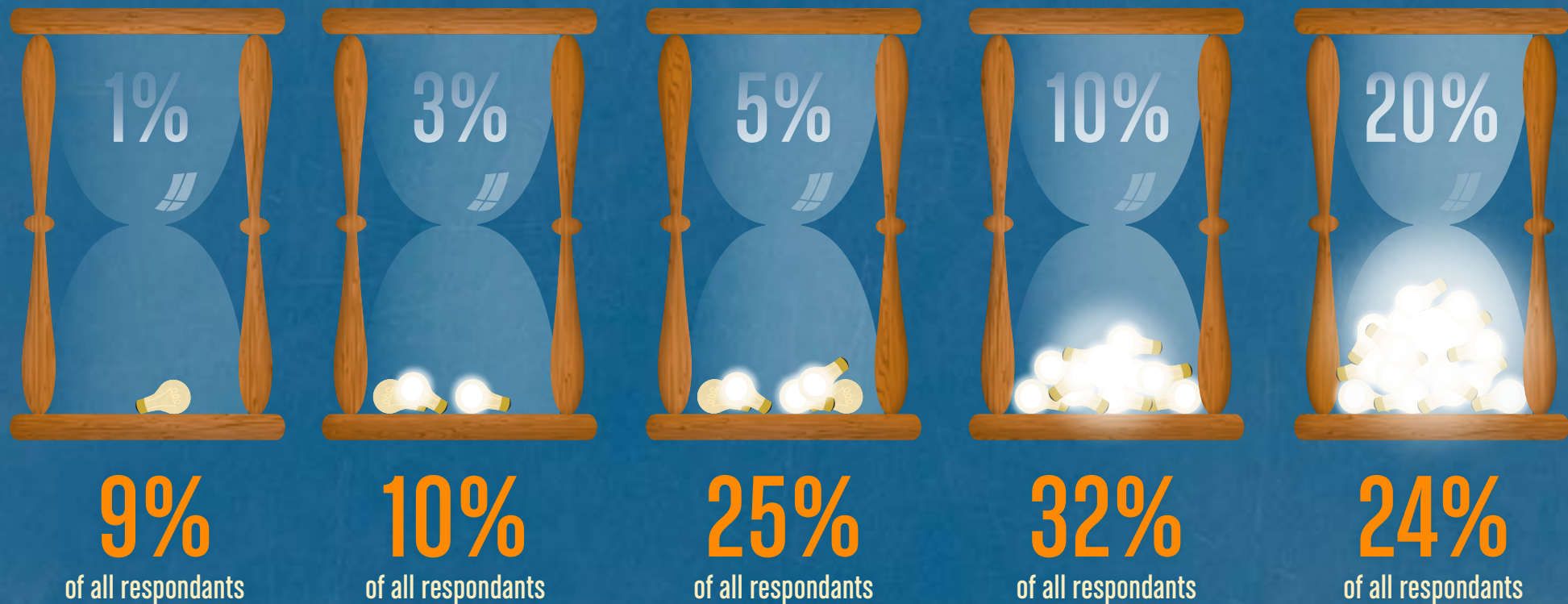
“It’s important to participate and buy into the purpose and mission of the organization.”

And the overall effort has to be focused on the customer, the end user. You have to ask yourself what other people will get out of your work.”💡



JD Dillon is an emerging personality in learning and development who specializes in leveraging social behaviors to drive learning and performance results. As Director of Learning Development for Kaplan University, he has applied his theories on media-driven delivery and social integration with employees and leadership in student support centers across the educational institution. Using his unique ability to connect knowledge, behaviors, technology, and storytelling, JD also spent several years designing and implementing learning strategies for The Walt Disney Company and AMC Entertainment. Follow JD on Twitter @JD_Dillon

Approximately what percentage of your team's weekly time is made available to pursue creative ideas?



Percentages based on 246 respondents.



“Increasingly, the role of innovation workers will become more ‘prophetic’ in nature.”

Innovation Workers Must Join Forces With Wisdom Workers

by Stace Rudd

Partner, The Brighton Group

Q: How valuable are innovation workers to the 21st century organization?

“How valuable are they now? That’s a question that is usually only answered anecdotally or subjectively. Rarely is an actual value ever placed on what most leaders claim is the most valuable resource in their company — people. How might investment change if investors could pick up a company’s annual report and quickly determine a company’s ‘innovation ratio’ in the same manner they could determine a company’s price to earnings (P/E) ratio? If there were such a thing as an ‘innovation ratio,’ investors might value it more than a P/E ratio.

There are some methods that try to actually measure the value of human capital (the business balanced scorecard is one), but for the most part, we have to accept without metrics the premise that the key point of competition in the 21st century will be the deployment of human capital, and that the innovation factor in human capital is critical and needs to be invested in — which may explain Apple’s stock price.”

Q: What is the new role for innovation workers over the next decade?

“Increasingly, the role of innovation workers will become more ‘prophetic’ in nature. There have been some interesting studies that indicate that there is a naturally

occurring difference in the general population’s ability to look at events taking place today and understand how they will turn out in the future. According to at least one study, it’s estimated that 80 percent of the population can foresee the consequences and outcomes of current events only as far out as about two weeks! Another 20 percent can see out as far as two to five years. Very few can see how things will probably turn out as far as 20 years in the future — think Steve Jobs or Winston Churchill. As such, innovation workers — particularly those who come from that 20 percent of the population able to see more distant horizons — are going to be asked to help the rest of the population better understand the future impact of innovations being developed today, including the potential of unintended consequences.”

Q: How can an organization best support and leverage its innovation workers?

“There are a variety of ways to answer this question, but if I may, let me relate a story. A short while back, I was asked to sit on a product advisory board for a computer game company that wanted to develop an automated screening process for new hires using video game technology to do virtual, online business simulations.

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“The good news is that there is a lot of experimentation going on at this time with innovative organizational designs.”

The first meeting of the advisory board was attended by several ‘innovation workers’ (including a 23-year-old CEO), who had been working on the product for awhile. The product developers enthusiastically described how the technology would work. The advisory board was intrigued by the product idea, but universally came to the same conclusion: using the product as described would present some daunting legal and regulatory challenges for employers. The issues of job criteria validation, discrimination, and employment law had not been adequately considered in the product design. Identifying these constraints at this stage of the process was a difficult setback.

The moral of the story is that ‘innovation workers’ need to be teamed up with ‘wisdom workers’ early on, so that necessary constraints can be understood in the formation of new ideas and products, and not as oppositional feedback later on. Marissa Ann Mayer, Vice President of Search Products & User Experience for Google, recently noted that knowing and understanding constraints are crucial to innovative endeavors. But she also notes that, ‘constraints must be balanced with a healthy disregard for the impossible.’

It should be pointed out that the business simulation product has still not come to market.”

Q: What do innovation workers have to do in order to increase their already valuable contribution?

“Innovation workers need to be able to create organizational environments and structures for themselves that truly support better innovation, creativity and continuous improvement. Consider this thought: your organization is perfectly designed to produce exactly the results and outputs you are currently producing. So, if you’d like to see more innovation in your organization, ask yourself what innovations need to be introduced

in the design of the organization, its culture, and its environment. When innovation workers understand all the variables of this question fully, and can use their innovative abilities to create a better organization or system in which to work, they will be able to increase their value.

The good news is that there is a lot of experimentation going on at this time with innovative organizational designs. But before you mindlessly cut and paste some of these interesting ideas into your own organization, be sure you understand why something works. Implement the principles, not the processes.” 🧠

Stace Rudd is Partner at The Brighton Group, which provides business leaders with the highest quality and most comprehensive career and organizational consulting services available. He has more than 20 years of business experience as a Human Resources and Organizational Design executive, with firms ranging from emerging startups to global Fortune 100 companies. Stace works with senior leadership in a variety of for-profit and nonprofit organizations to design and implement human capital development platforms. He also has championed the development and implementation of leadership and partnering programs that have received national awards from Bersin & Associates and the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD).



Do you have a vibrant exchange of ideas between individuals within your organization and its leadership?



Frequently 40%

Regularly 40%

Sometimes 40%

Occasionally 40%

Never 40%



“Being innovative
will become a given.”

We Are All Innovators Now

by John Sweeney
Owner, Brave New Workshop

Q: How valuable are innovation workers to the 21st century organization?

“I’m an improviser by profession — and by nature — so for me innovation is not only a job skill, it’s a cultural necessity. And I think the workplace of today and tomorrow is moving in that direction: it absolutely needs innovation workers. Innovation should be taken for granted, it should be primary requirement, like being able to read, or type, or drive a car.

To take the idea a step further, we need to recognize that we’re all innovators — all of us — and the act of labeling individuals as innovators and non-innovators will hopefully become increasingly obsolete. That said, the choices we make and the cultures we work in will influence, diminish, or stimulate how innovative the environments and workers are. Looking ahead, I believe that organizations will create a variety of work environments to ensure that everyone can find a place to be their most innovative self. That is, if they want to stay competitive”

Q: What is the new role for innovation workers over the next decade?

“I’m going to stay on this soapbox a little longer: I don’t think we’ll see innovation as a subset of a larger organization. There won’t be an innovation team, or an idea person, or an innovation council. Innovation will be woven throughout corporate cultures and business units. You just aren’t going to associate innovation with that guy in marketing with cool glasses, good ideas,

and the first iPad in the company. Everyone will be on the innovation team, because every team will be the innovation team. Everyone will be able to contribute good ideas, everyone will be accountable to the innovation output, and everyone will have access to the same innovation tools.”

Q: How can an organization best support and leverage its innovation workers?

“They can stop worrying about whether workers are innovative or non-innovative, and start focusing on creating a more innovative culture.

As a performer, I see culture in a very specific way. To me, culture is how it feels to be on stage, working with my team to create and deliver an instant product for our audience by behaving innovatively. Everyone is equally innovative. Great ideas come from everyone. The culture has no status, hierarchy or organizational chart. Ideas can germinate freely and move quickly. This type of culture quickly creates value for our customers, and it radically increases the level of trust in the team. Everyone feels confident in this environment, so everyone is more collaborative. And, on a good night, you can almost feel the innovation all around you. It’s everywhere, within everyone, and it spreads like wildfire.

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“Don’t wait for your organization to do it. Get going, and make it happen. Now. Today.”

In our world, if there are people who don’t want to behave in a way that builds that kind of culture — well, they can go somewhere else. I think organizations would benefit from a similar attitude: let go of the traditional hierarchy, create a culture that fosters innovative behaviors, and let everyone benefit from the results.”

Q: What do innovation workers have to do in order to increase their already valuable contribution?

“There’s a lot you can do. First, you have to embrace the premise that you can be a culture of one, for yourself. Model the behaviors you want to see in your company. Let your example shine. If you want to be innovative, be innovative. Don’t wait for permission, or for someone to ask you to do it.

Once you’re there, you need to develop an innovation fitness plan for yourself. You have to do simple and frequent things to keep up your innovation wellness, including regular challenges to your personal status quo. Listen to a radio station or program you hate; go to see a movie in a different language; volunteer to help a nonprofit find a solution to a problem they are facing. Intentionally do things that make you feel uncomfortable, so you can become comfortable with being uncomfortable. Don’t let your ‘discomfort practice’ isolate you, though; be sure to seek out like-minded people who want to improve things and create a great culture. Build each other up; treat each other in a way that exemplifies an innovative culture. Don’t wait for your organization to do it. Get going, and make it happen. Now. Today.” 💡


John Sweeney is the owner of the Brave New Workshop (BNW), the oldest satirical comedy theater in the nation. He is also a keynote speaker, trainer, improviser and author. In his first book, “Innovation at the Speed of Laughter: 8 Secrets to World Class Idea Generation,” Sweeney demonstrated how improvisational theater skills and behaviors, like those practiced at the BNW, can be used to develop critical business skills and drive innovation. Companies as diverse as Hampton, Microsoft, Honeywell, Target, Major League Soccer and General Mills seek out Sweeney to address topics such as change management, idea generation, teamwork, and sales training. Follow John on Twitter @IamJohnSweeney



Has the open exchange of ideas between you and your peers increased over the past 15 years?



YES!
87%



NO.
13%

Results based on 261 respondents.



“...I think we can really unlock innovation by drawing from our strengths...”

Seizing Your Unique Opportunities to Innovate

by Judy Albers

Director, Client Management, Intrepid Learning

I'm fascinated by innovators, but I have to admit I often don't feel like one. Do you ever share that feeling, about yourself or your organization? Our essayists have taken what may seem to be conflicting positions about who can be innovation workers. Some say you need to find the innovators and get them collaborating. Others say everyone's an innovator.

If reading any of this has made you feel uncomfortable about going forth and innovating, excellent! You're being honest, and exploring discomfort is a great way to innovate, because so few people are willing to do it. After carefully considering the points of view from our authors—and doing a bit of soul-searching of my own—I've come to a few conclusions of my own about innovation and what it means to me.

The ability to innovate is a learnable skill, not an innate one.

There is no such thing as The Innovator's DNA, except for the ironic title of a fabulous book based on an eight-year study of innovative CEOs, founders and inventors. The researchers behind the book thought they were going to find the traits common to innovators ... but there weren't any. What they found were five skills that innovators consistently employ:

- **Questioning**—posing queries that challenge common wisdom

- **Observing**—scrutinizing the behavior of customers, suppliers, and competitors to identify new ways of doing things
- **Networking**—meeting people with different ideas and perspectives
- **Experimenting**—constructing interactive experiences and provoking unorthodox responses to see what insights emerge
- **Associating**—drawing connections between questions, problems, or ideas from unrelated fields.¹ This is the secret sauce. As Steve Jobs said, “Creativity is connecting things.”

I posted this list in my workspace to remind me that I can innovate every day.

Successful innovators consciously draw from their strengths.

Some people do seem more naturally creative, but I think we can really unlock innovation by drawing from our strengths, and tapping into our passions—the things we “are also” outside of work.

I work with a measurement consultant who's also a screenwriter who can find the stories in the data

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“If you’re trying to find ways to innovate more often, or to a greater extent, start small and work your way up.”

he analyzes. He wrote a post in 30 minutes on John Belushi’s impact on his life that moved me to tears. I admire him, and I wish I could do that.

I work with a marketing strategist who’s also a photographer. She’s always got a creative idea for a visual design that delivers on the precise business need. I admire her, and I wish I could do that.

I could conclude that I’m not that innovative, especially in such company, but I’d be wrong. I just have different strengths.

Personally, I’m good at finding inventive ways to overcome organizational obstacles, because I seek to understand the valid concerns behind them and employ my strength in winning others over. Then together, we do what many thought was impossible. That is my creative strength; that is how my innovative nature manifests itself.

When it comes to leveraging creativity and finding solutions to problems, it’s not a question of whether each of us is innovative or not. It’s a question of understanding our strengths and using them as a starting point for our innate innovative capabilities.

If you’re interested in honing your innovation skills, you should:

1. Broaden your innovation vocabulary

As the folks at Gallup who brought us the StrengthsFinder² have taught us, there’s tremendous power in a broader vocabulary for “strength.” The same can be said for innovation. The more thoroughly we can articulate what it is and how to practice it, the more successful our organizations will be at fostering innovation.

Take the StrengthsFinder or Innovator’s DNA self-assessments so you can consciously operate from your own innovation strengths. Read up on personal innovation and how to foster a culture of innovation.³

2. Make time to practice

I have a friend, a chief learning officer, who schedules one day a month to think. She takes a day away from the office and allows herself no meetings and no prescribed tasks—nothing but the opportunity to reflect on what’s changing in her business and what she can do to meet challenges in new ways. The payoffs she’s seen in her ability to innovate are far greater than the cost of taking a day away from her pressing projects.

If you’re trying to find ways to innovate more often or to a greater extent, start small and work your way up. Try integrating a few new behaviors into your existing routines. For example, keep a little notebook just for observations. The act of writing down observations and taking the time later to associate them (or even better, to meet with a group to share your observations) is a powerful way to practice the skills of observing, networking and associational thinking. If we practice mindfulness as we go through our day—observing our own experiences as customers, interesting things our friends say, behaviors we see, headlines we read—it’s amazing how much raw material for innovation is out there waiting to be noticed. Check out a fun business parable, *The Radical Edge*⁴, to explore this idea in depth.

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“I’m energized by what our essayists have written, and I can’t wait to apply their ideas into my own personal style of innovation.”

3. Have fun!

As much as we often stick to our comfort zones, some of the research-validated elements of happiness are challenge, novelty, and growth.⁵ I’m energized by what our essayists have written, and I can’t wait to apply their ideas into my own personal style of innovation. 🧠

Judy Albers is a learning strategist who oversees Intrepid’s educational marketing services to a major client. A TrainingIndustry.com Top 10 Outsourcing Deal, the client-facing education portal won Chief Learning Officer Magazine’s Gold Award for Excellence in Content and was a Stevie Award Finalist for Best Training Website.

Prior to joining Intrepid, Judy was First Vice President, Learning Resources and Technology, at JPMorgan Chase, where she was responsible for selecting and implementing learning systems. She facilitated education strategy and governance for Bank One during their three years as the highest rated bank in the Training Top 100.



1 *The Innovator’s DNA* by Jeff Dyer, Hal Gregerson, and Clayton Christensen

2 *Gallup Management Journal’s Clifton StrengthsFinder Center*

3 *Fostering a Culture of Innovation*, Gallup Management Journal

4 *The Radical Edge*, by Steve Farber

5 *The Happiness Project*, by Gretchen Rubin



Portrait of an Innovation Worker

“An organization can best support its innovation workers by providing clear expectations, access to necessary tools and information, and the autonomy to get their work done.”

—Bill Cushard, Director of Training & Development, Allon Hill



THE INNOVATION WORKER TAKES RISKS.



THE INNOVATION WORKER IS REWARDED FOR HIS IDEAS.



THE INNOVATION WORKER TALKS TO EMPLOYEES UP AND DOWN THE LADDER.



THE INNOVATION WORKER IS SUPPORTED BY HIS ORGANIZATION.



THE INNOVATION WORKER TAKES TIME TO THINK ABOUT NEW IDEAS.



THE INNOVATION WORKER NEVER STOPS INNOVATING!

Survey Stats:

INDUSTRY

Respondents belonged to the following industries:

Manufacturing	4.3%
Finance	4%
Education	3.6%
Healthcare	3.2%
Technology	2.9%
Consulting	2.5%
Government	2.5%
Insurance	1.8%

Of the 274 completed surveys, 98 provided their industry.

COMPANY SIZE

Respondents worked for companies of these sizes:

2,000 employees or less	12.7%
2,001-5000 Employees	5.4%
5,001-10,000 Employees	2.9%
10,001-50,000 Employees ...	7.2%
50,000 or more	3.2%

Of 274 completed surveys, 88 provided their company size.

COUNTRIES

The top three countries represented were:

USA (95% of respondents)

Canada

United Kingdom

Also participated:

India, Indonesia, Italy, Mexico, Paraguay, Switzerland, Trinidad & Tobago

Of 274 completed surveys, 88 provided their country.

