



How to Lead an Innovative Team

Description

In one of my very first roles in financial services, I was lucky enough to work on a team that was tasked with changing the way the organization worked. It was a time of massive change all around—in technology, banking regulation, customer expectations, and society—and my team was at the core of making change happen in our firm.

Part of our role was to re-imagine how we would work with our customers in the future and what our new customers might look like. We had the freedom to explore the unknown and the space to play with ideas.

We were so different from the teams around us, whose role it was to keep the business going, that I can still remember the conversations with colleagues from those other teams who perceived us as mavericks and at odds with the core purpose of our organization.

I also remember my boss at the time having to be pretty courageous in granting us the freedom to do things differently and even defending our methods to his peers and senior leaders.

That all sounds pretty dramatic and being part of that team felt important. We were supporting the future success of our organization. And we succeeded. That organization still thrives and innovates today.

Leading an Innovative Team

We talk about innovation a lot, but I have worked with very few teams whose leaders support innovative ideas to full bloom. We're often constrained by our experience as leaders of different types of teams and find it hard to let go of those ways of working. A team that solves known problems with known solutions requires very different leadership to a team that is trying to solve those same problems with yet-to-be-discovered solutions or even a team that is looking to solve an unknown problem.

If you are lucky enough to be leading an innovative team, then it will be your role to create the

conditions for them to be innovative. Peter Senge once said that much of the capability of a ship lies in how it is designed, and, for innovative teams, leaders need to think of themselves as the designer and not necessarily the captain.

What can you do to design your team well? It could be getting the right people on the team who bring diverse experience and thinking, defining the vision with that team, or introducing ways of working that encourage collaboration and creativity.

Empower Your Team to Innovate

How do you feel about letting people step out of the box that defines their role? Innovative leaders expect individuals to think beyond their individual roles. They encourage their teams to challenge the norm, to experiment and test concepts, and challenge each other, so they make the best decisions for the business.

A leader of an innovative team listens more and talks less. They let their team surprise them, within the boundaries of the future strategy, of course.

Leaders of innovative teams take their heads out of the needs of today and look towards the future. They plan ahead; their eye is on the horizon and what their team can do for their organization. They are the voice of the team to many stakeholders, often finding themselves having to push against peers and leaders who don't quite see the benefits of teams who are there to enable future success.

Leaders such as these are needed today. Once again we find ourselves in a time when huge changes are happening or need to happen. To continue to be successful, we will need to innovate and not just talk about it.

At [Kaplan Performance Academy](#), I find myself experiencing all that I benefited from as my younger self, as part of a team given the space to be creative and innovative and not constrained by our current ways of working. We've captured that in our Commercial Acumen learning journey—providing participants with the insights and tools to be more innovative and make better commercial decisions. It's our small way of adding to the innovation out there.

Ready to see how you can meet your organization's learning and development needs? [Learn more](#) about the unique digital learning environment of [Kaplan Performance Academy](#).

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