

BLOG

How to Spark Your Team's Innovative Spirit

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Some of the most innovative companies in the world run their projects and innovation initiatives on [Conductor](#), our collaborative work management platform. We wanted to share some lessons we've learned from them.

Innovation Needs Freedom

It's no surprise that limiting freedom limits innovation. People need free time, freedom to experiment, and permission to fail to liberate their innovative spirit. Google famously has '20% time' where the company's founders encourage their team members to spend up to 20% of their time "working on what they think will most benefit Google."

Even though it's been reported that most people at Google don't take full advantage of their 20%, Google's Laszlo Bock notes that it's more important that the idea of it — the option to use it — exists.

Likewise giving clear **permission to experiment** and having confidence that if an experiment fails it won't hurt the experimenter are important factors. We recommend that teams adopt a **minimum target fail rate of 30%** to encourage big ideas. Without that, people might fear bigger, outside the box ideas and play it too safe, causing you to risk stifling creativity and ending up with only small incremental suggestions for improvement. That also sends a **clear psychological safety signal**, telling your team members that you expect them to fail a significant percentage of the time. You can reinforce that by celebrating the really audacious failures when someone tried something radically new and, critically, the lessons they learned from it.

Innovation Also Needs Structure

Giving people freedom to explore and create is great to encourage new ideas, but **innovation at scale also needs structure to stop creativity from descending into chaos**. It's important to separate the aspects that need structure from those that need more freedom. Structuring the mundane, repetitive tasks frees teams to apply their unique skills and creativity to approach problems with a spirit of innovation.

It also sets expectations for both the innovators and the executive. With established stage gates and feedback, innovators know what's expected of them in order to move ahead and why their idea was selected to progress or not. We recommend a workflow that begins with ideation (possibly using a system like design thinking), leads to a stage gate to reality check business applicability/relevance, drives through a funding process (possibly using something like a Shark's Tank/Dragon's Den pitching process), and then manages timeboxed experiments with stated hypothesis to ensure conclusions that can be measured and assessed.

Single Source of Truth

Rethinking a process or product is rarely a simple or straightforward task. Each person involved will bring their unique point of view, not to mention keeping track of research, facts, possibilities, and risks — the amount of information to process can quickly become overwhelming.

Having a central repository to keep track of files, conversations, and decisions will **simplify the innovation process**. When everyone has access to the same information, the team can work from a unified vision toward the common goal.

Support – Training

The people who are most passionate about an initiative are usually the team that championed the idea in the first place. Unfortunately, they may not be experts in the field. In fact, **some of the most innovative ideas have come from people who either didn't have deep expertise in the subject**, had cross-functional expertise, or were otherwise free from the constraints of *how it's always done*.

Giving early champions the reins to push their ideas forward contributes to keeping the idea's momentum up, but the gaps in the champions' knowledge need to be filled. Providing structured training that's automatically delivered to innovators at key milestones milestones will guide champions to nurture and growth their idea, increasing the odds that it's successfully rolled out.

Support – Coaching + Monitoring

Innovating often means venturing into unknown territory, which can be a scary time for even the idea's strongest supporters. Connecting champions to mentors and coaches who can provide support and guidance can go along way to reassuring innovators and giving them the courage they need to push forward with their idea.

Having the ability to log and categorize team members' skills and areas of expertise across the company **makes it easy to identify and connect experimenters with subject matter experts** who can offer guidance or support when needed.

Measure for Success

Measuring people's progress toward completion can be difficult, especially during an innovation initiative where goals and timelines can often be fluid and ill-defined.

Setting clear goals and milestones for innovators and having a process for tracking them helps to define expectations. It also gives coaches and the executive team clear benchmarks to measure project progress and circle back with the innovators to provide them with additional support or training if needed **so the innovation process isn't left stagnating**.

Recognize Successes

Success breeds more success.

Recognizing and celebrating a team member's successful innovation initiative carries a lot of benefits:

- Makes the innovator feel valued
- Boosts the innovator's profile as a subject matter expert within the organization
- Encourages others to value experimentation and an innovative spirit

- Gives peers an opportunity to add their congratulations
- Provides another avenue to increase awareness about the initiative which can also encourage adoption

Don't forget to build recognition into your own innovation process to **celebrate your team's successes and amplify your team's innovative spirit!**

How Conductor Drives Innovation

All of lessons learned above can be applied separately to help sparks a team's innovative spirit, but we've found that ideas grow and spread faster, and barriers are lowered when these functions are connected across a single platform.

Here's how we've seen Conductor used to drive innovation:

PLAYBOOKS

Conductor's Playbooks can be used to codify how your team should move through the innovation funnel, setting up innovators for success through each stage with clear milestones and stage gates.

With a structure in place, it's easy for both the innovator and the executive to understand project progress and make sure the project is set up for success from stage to stage.

Assign work, set deadlines, share files, and communicate all in one central task.

DASHBOARDS

Create custom dashboards to give visibility to both the innovator and to the executive team.

Define and track any data needed, generated from the work performed in the platform, to make critical decisions and demonstrate success.

Easily visualize the data, export it to Excel or PowerPoint, or interact with it dynamically in Presentation Mode to share status and communicate updates.

ACADEMY

Create a catalogue of learning content that innovators can access. Tag courses for easy filtering and access depending on the applicable phase of the innovation funnel, the theme of the proposed idea, or

other any other relevant criteria.

Set stage gates and assign essential content, training, or assessments that should be completed before moving on to the next phase of innovation.

Scope content to specific groups or push it out to the everyone to propagate new ideas throughout the organization.

ID PROJECTS IN TROUBLE

See at a glance each team's gut feeling on their projects. Quickly triage projects to identify which are in danger of derailing and why, to provide the support and mentorship they need to get back on track.

RECOGNITION

Announce new project rollouts on the central News hub. Team members can like and comment on posts to ask questions or share their enthusiasm. They can also reward one another with Kudos — a virtual high five — that is shared across the entire team.

With Conductor, teams can balance structure with the freedom to experiment, all while working together in with tools that support collaboration and enhance performance. [Request a demo of Conductor](#) and spark your team's innovative spirit.

READ ONLINE

Read this article on our website

getconductor.com/resources/how-to-spark-your-team-s-innovative-spirit



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