

Nine steps to more creativity in the boardroom

When business innovation fails in an organisation, there has often not been a future-led approach, and a lack of creativity in all aspects of the project.

Temps de lecture : minute

28 February 2023

Sometimes the same people participate in workshops and decision-making, with no outside experts or unusual suspects invited to contribute, leading to more of the same ideas instead of the breakthroughs needed.

Other times, business transformation stalls because it has not been designed as a change process. Either too few people have been involved with little dialogue and no ownership at the end of the process, or there has been too little attention paid to building an innovation culture.

Board members and executives can put themselves at an advantage when trying to achieve transformation by approaching business innovation as a design challenge, understanding the importance of creativity in the process and how to apply it in practice.

Putting creativity at the heart of the boardroom

Building creativity as a central aspect to boardroom culture and processes first requires a recognition that everyone is born with the imagination and creativity needed for business innovation. Then executives and boards must learn by doing - using trial and error to see how creativity translates

into their unique organisational context. Lastly, people must develop and embrace using their creative intelligence throughout projects to design the future of their business. Often, this comes with the understanding that business innovation also requires a renewal at board level and a challenge to restructure established frameworks with creativity as a central priority.

There are nine principles to embed more creativity in the boardroom:

1. CREATE: Understanding that innovation is a design challenge

Creativity matters in business because accelerated change requires increased innovation efforts which depend upon creativity. The main hurdle to many is that creativity requires leaders to unlearn some of their current management practices, like doing thorough research before acting, and managing projects in a methodical and linear way. Business innovation requires learning to adapt new ways of thinking and doing,

2. CHANGE: Being prepared to transform

On the journey to business innovation, the need for creativity will only increase further. Businesses today face a range of key obstacles – complex societal challenges like the world's climate crisis and the technological revolution that is affecting the way we live, work and interact with one another. In these circumstances, sustainability and digital transformation need to be a big part of a business's strategy and will require leadership to drastically rethink and redesign their organisation's direction in order to incorporate them as key values. Complexity requires creativity.

3. CARE: Embracing your true purpose

When aiming for transformation, it's essential to develop a culture of innovation. To design new possible futures, leaders need a creative

approach, including the ambition to change for the better and the ability to shift perspectives, make unusual connections and visualise what is not yet.

Not all businesses need transformation, some just need change, and it is important to make the distinction in the approach. However, both require creating a culture of innovation by developing a shared purpose and set of values

4. LEARN: building your creative confidence

The *research findings* of INSEAD professor Nathan Furr, who looked at the balance between nature and nurture for both IQ (general intelligence) and CQ (creative intelligence) show that while IQ is roughly 80% genetic, only approximately 33% of CQ is genetic. This shows that creativity and innovative leadership are qualities we develop, not qualities we are born with.

Most multinationals, executives and management consultants have a style of leadership informed by more analytical and operational thinking (left-brained), low on creativity. Creative agencies, entrepreneurs and designers often have a dominant “explore” (right-brain) orientation. Leaders are learners, and creativity can be learned if you develop a growth mindset.

5. ACT: Learning by doing

A culture of innovation is essential to help people learn on the go. Business innovation is an ongoing journey and iterative process, it doesn't always accommodate linear project planning. A key objective of an iterative, or agile, process is to introduce something tangible as quickly as possible, so leaders can collect feedback and improve the next version. When applied at all phases, creativity guarantees a flexible and resilient roadmap to change.

6. ENGAGE: Involving and empowering different people.

The connection and involvement of internal and external stakeholders is important to improve buy-in and quality of any future strategy. People make the difference between an average result and a great one.

Throughout any project, to design the right role in the process for all involved, leaders need to start with mapping the different stakeholders and understanding their potential impact on the project. All those with a great interest in the project and a high influence on the result need to be part of the business innovation journey. Input from people outside the core team will also encourage new perspectives and prevent a set of behavioural constraints developing between the same group of people.

7. ENVISION: Imagining a better future

It's essential for boards to visualise what they want their business to look like in the future. Once an organisation has established the key drivers for change in their industry, designing the future direction can be encouraged by asking "what if" questions, brainstorming and designing a future "story" for the organisation. It's also imperative to plan with positivity; a constructive dialogue about the future can only be facilitated when leaders embrace the right mindset to create trust and allow for creativity.

8. EXPLORE: Making it happen

When decision making it can be beneficial to have three options for 'future directions'. One choice isn't a choice, and having two makes it a black and white conversation. People will immediately decide one option is right, and the other is wrong. When you give people three options, they will consider all three and take time to think through the options. Within these three options, boards must consider the changes needed for specific elements of their organisation such as products and services,

sales and marketing or culture and leadership. Even this will be an ongoing process of adaptation and refining.

9. LEAD: Redesigning the board

Embedding creativity at board level could encompass making an “innovation board”, a group which actively employs “whole brain thinking”, balancing the analytical approach of left-brained thinking with the creativity of right-brained approaches. Setting up a team of “outside the box” thinkers from uncommon backgrounds to inspire the leadership team and unleash the creativity that is needed to design the future of a business can revolutionise decision-making.

With the changing role of the board, ensuring that the board responds positively can be difficult. However, by allowing more time on the agenda to explore the ideas and developing the board’s right-brain orientation through stimulating boardroom learning, inviting new board members or installing innovation subcommittees, the shock of the transition can be tempered.

Through these nine phases, boardrooms can move from making creativity an afterthought to a central pillar of their decision-making processes, thus revolutionising how they design the future of their business.

Fennemiek Gommer and Anne Mieke Eggenkamp together lead *Caracta Business Innovation*. Their new book, *Boardroom Creativity* is available now.

BOARDROOM CREATIVITY

How to
design
the future
of your
business

Fennemiek Gommer
Anne Mieke Eggenkamp

[Buy Boardroom Creativity](#)

Article by Fennemiek Gommer & Anne Mieke Eggenkamp