

A perspective on...

THE HR SIDE OF INNOVATION



[Developing Innovation-led Organisations]

Introduction

90% of leaders say people and culture are the most important factors for driving innovation.

On an initial glance that's a great statistic... until you start to wonder what the other 10% believe! Are they putting technology or infrastructure or the general marketplace ahead of people? And if they are then do they really 'get' what a culture of innovation is all about? Or is it simply that 10% of leaders are still harking back to the days in which employees were simply a necessary expense?

Admittedly there are a number of factors which will influence the success, or otherwise, of an innovation culture but the key to that success is the way in which leaders and employees step up to the challenge of working in a collaborative, agile and insightful environment. As a strategic advisor on innovation, I believe that in far too many cases, HR is sidelined in this process, being left to carry on with business as usual whilst the leadership team tries to impose seismic changes on working practices and attitudes.

This white paper attempts to redress the balance by highlighting the importance of involving HR in the building and embedding of a sustainable culture of innovation.



Innovation culture; a 21st century imperative

In tracing the development of modern business practice we need to look back to the Industrial Revolution. As game-changing in its day as innovation culture is today, the Industrial Revolution heralded the advent of the machine age. Workers became slaves to the great factory monoliths which whirred unceasingly throughout the day and customers moved from being discerning purchasers of necessities to automatons whose purchases completed the cycle; thus enabling the machines to continue to churn out their wares.

Move on one step further and computers entered the fray. We started to focus on the combination of physical product and information in order to create services and systems, which operated with technology as the main enabler. Phrases such as streamlining and customer data entered the fray. But despite drives to 'know your customer' the expectation still remained that customers were there to be sold to and employees were there to do the organisation's bidding.

Now the world has moved on again into the innovation age. Technology and the Internet have reached a level of maturity in which businesses from across the globe have access to the same levels of technology. When a sole trader has the same reach as a multi-national corporation then the differentiators change, moving from the 'what' to the 'how' and in the process putting customer experience at the heart of differentiation. Add in increasingly vocal customers and employees whose attitudes have been forged in the heart of a recession and who are no longer prepared to be seen as sales and profit fodder and the change is complete. People are once again back in charge of the business machine, and they expect to have their say.

In fact not only are people back in charge; the trend towards self-determination and co-creation looks exponential. In 2014 the last of Generation Y turned 18 and Generation Z are hot on their heels. This generation has never known a time without instant connectivity. They expect the world to be at their fingertips and because of that they are not prepared to be passive observers. Whether as employees or as customers, this generation is looking for work/life balance driven by them. More than that, simply because the world is on their doorstep they are looking for a more local connection which will bring individual meaning.



So the challenge is out there. When businesses cannot rely on product alone for sales, when customers and employees are looking for a co-created relationship, when customer experience and personalisation are the new watchwords then organisations can no longer rely on 'same old, same old' for their existence. So when 75% of CEOs say that fast changing market conditions are forcing companies to reinvent themselves quicker than ever before and when 72% admit they are too reliant on fading revenue streams then the change has to be fundamental.

The innovation solution

The solution is quite simply to transform the organisation into one, which embraces innovation at its heart. And that doesn't mean just tasking a few people with the job of inventing 'stuff'. A culture of innovation requires every person and every process to be infused with the innovation ideal, the desire to do more, be more. It means aligning and implementing innovation strategies that not only enhance business performance and drive growth but that fundamentally change the game.

Let's be clear, innovation culture is not some bolt-on that you can add to your annual report to look good in front of investors. Nor is it something, which you can impose in one department but not in another. Actually innovation culture is not something, which can be imposed anyway. To step up to a culture of innovation requires such a fundamental change of thinking that leaders and employees have to be led towards it, helped to engage with it and ultimately to embrace it as a working practice.

Out go silos and in comes collaboration; out go strict hierarchies and in comes flatter, more free-wheeling structures; out goes the fear of failure and in comes the acceptance that failure is an important learning experience. Most importantly, out goes the idea of people as things and in comes a respect and desire to create exceptional experiences for employees and customers alike.



What has HR to do with innovation?

So what has HR to do with innovation? Everything actually! By the very nature of their roles, HR professionals are front and centre of the people strategy. They are responsible for ensuring that the right people are hired, retained and equipped with the necessary skills to drive the organisation forward. They are the voice whispering in the CEO's and the leadership team's ears to advise them on the transformations required to embed a culture of innovation.

Any move towards a change of culture can prove difficult for employees to assimilate. Man is by nature a lover of stability and whenever we ask people to adopt new values, new beliefs and new attitudes there will always be an element of resistance. As the team who are most accountable for people strategy and implementation as well as being those closest to the very 'human' issues which arise in the workplace day in, day out, HR are also the most experienced in identifying the best route of change as well as being able to highlight probable roadblocks or issues ahead of time.

Even small cultural changes can be hard to instill, so how much resistance and inertia will leaders have to overcome when they look to adopt an innovation culture? When we look to sweep away job demarcation, silos, fixed processes and strict hierarchy and replace them with flatter structures, open collaboration and a fresh outlook on every process.

Having advised companies all over the world on innovation I've seen all too many instances of leaders failing to instill the required culture change, either because they don't plan their innovation adoption strategy in the right way or because they have failed to secure the support of others within the leadership team. In this latter instance, having an effective HR department, which brings their talents into play, can make all the difference. In fact, according to a crf research paper in 2013, when instilling an innovation culture HR can take a leading role in:

- **Bringing a specific innovation focus to talent planning, selection, development and promotional activities.**
- **Helping leaders develop the skills to support creativity and innovation.**
- **Making certain pay is competitive for those involved in innovation efforts.**
- **Supporting the development of a culture to foster innovation and support risk taking.**
- **Helping people collaborate on innovation efforts across departments.**

The paper also lists a number of behind the scenes activities including sharing learning and feedback, linking goals to innovation and providing ongoing support. Summarising HR's contribution the paper says...

"To add value to discussions of innovation processes, HR professionals need to bring what they know about people and human systems to the conversation, a perspective which those in charge of research or innovation may be lacking."

Building a culture of innovation

Let's look in a little more depth at the framework which drives the creation of a culture of innovation and at the part which HR can play in cultural transformation. And I'll start on a note of caution. Transforming the culture of an organisation has to be systematic. As a strategic advisor to CEOs and leadership teams I have seen far too often the way in which cultural transformations fail because leaders have either tried to impose change by decree or have looked for quick wins, ignoring all of the necessary preparatory work and 'skipping to the good bit.' Well, although you can devise your strategy with some quick wins along the way, the good bit just won't happen unless the groundwork is in place.

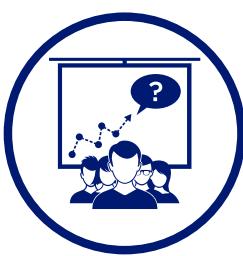
This then is the first task for HR; acting as a voice of reason when the CEO just wants to race off and 'do stuff.' HR professionals understand people and they can help the CEO and leadership team to understand that people won't be lectured to, won't be dictated to and that the surest way for the culture to change is to take the right pathway.

This has led to the development of a three-phase programme, which we call **The 3Es Innovation Methodology™** which consists of '**Establishing**' an innovation strategy, '**Enabling**' innovation leaders and then moving to '**Embedding**' an innovation culture into the organisation.

The innovation framework has been specifically designed to tackle the right problems at the right time and to enable organisations to move onto the next stage in a pragmatic, structured and sustainable way.

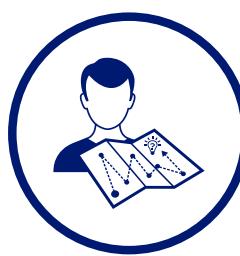
A pragmatic approach to CREATING INNOVATIVE ORGANISATIONS

The 3Es Innovation Methodology™



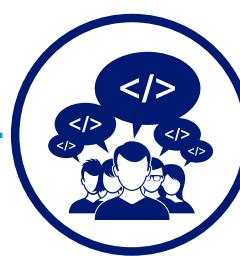
ESTABLISH

...a future-focused innovation-led strategy; defining how innovation will drive your organisation forward, deliver growth and shape the future.



ENABLE

...CEOs and senior teams to become innovation leaders; able to translate the future vision and innovation strategy into action and behaviour.



EMBED

...innovation into organisational culture; so that game-changing innovation capability simply becomes part of 'how' you do things.

Building a culture of innovation

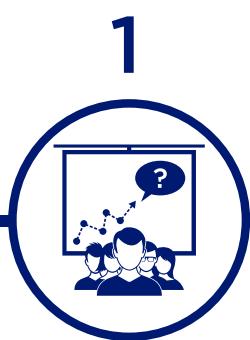
To thrive and become a leading-edge organisation you need to innovate with purpose; that means aligning and implementing innovation strategies that not only enhance business performance and drive growth but that fundamentally change the game.

Defining the strategy firstly requires the leadership team to map out core purpose, values and a growth strategy and then create an innovation strategy, which is aligned with these elements. At this stage there has to be agreement across the team as to the level and impact of innovation changes. HR may be called upon here to keep a people focus on plans and strategies and to help map out the impacts of new working practices, departmental re-organisations or changes in individual expectations.

Such changes call on the full range of HR expertise from instigating training programmes to drawing up new metrics and from contract changes to people management. When change occurs employees look for a lead and if the HR function is fully geared up to provide whatever support, advice or guidance is required then employee engagement in the new methodology is far more assured.

At this initial stage in the process, once the strategy has been mapped out, the next stage is to draw up a structured implementation plan. This may include employee induction programmes, departmental reorganisations, communication plans and training programmes. Learning to collaborate, to work together and to change the focus from short term profit to long term customer experience will sit easily with some, and prove extremely difficult for others.

HR has to be involved here at every step of the way planning to overcome objections, looking out for employment law implications and helping to identify the leaders with or without a title who sit at every level of the organisation and who can help to influence behaviour and change culture.



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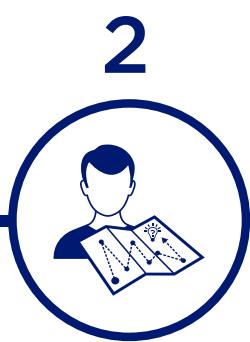
Building a culture of innovation

In order to become innovation leaders, senior teams need to learn new skills and adopt different behaviours. They need to be able to translate tomorrow's vision into today's actions and inspire people in order to drive innovation into the core of the organisation.

Aside from identifying and coaching leaders without a title at every level of the organisation, HR can also play their part in helping the leadership to embrace the personal and procedural changes, which a culture of innovation requires. Risk-averse leaders or those who are used to rigid hierarchies need to be coached in embracing failure as a learning point or in opening up to the idea of collaboration. They need to be able to engage and inspire others around innovation challenges and to communicate change.

Teamwork, collaboration, opening up tasks to multi-disciplinary teams; all are potentially frightening changes for those who are more used to traditional hierarchical frameworks. Asking ambitious team leaders to move away from departmental one-upmanship and to co-create; expecting specialists to open up to ideas from other individuals; moving jobs-worth and pass-it-on mentalities towards ownership and resolution, will require multi levels of belief and behavioural coaching and this strikes at the heart of the HR agenda.

So, innovation leadership is a far different thing from more 'traditional' methodologies and HR support is vital if leaders are to be given the tools they need to embrace the future. And when 58% of business leaders in large UK companies admit their senior teams are failing to effectively lead for innovation, it is more than time for HR to step up and work with the leadership to create change. And it is only when the strategy is in place, when the leaders at all levels are prepared that the organisation can move on to phase three and start to embed innovation into culture.



ENABLE

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Building a culture of innovation

Making innovation culture stick requires building it into everyday practice. Engaging people and developing sustainable innovation capabilities is critical to competitive advantage becoming less about 'what' you do and more about 'how' you do it. It is at this stage that all of the hard work, the development of strategies and the training of innovation leaders comes good.

The HR department is geared up to provide whatever support is required either on an individual or a group basis. Engaging employees in the new methodologies, helping them to change their behaviours and to understand that risk has moved from a failure to a learning point will require all of HR's people knowledge and skills. In fact, it is here, more than ever that HR can come into its own. There is an innate fear amongst many that innovation culture equals anarchy. Far from it: instilling a culture of innovation may open up pathways but those roads still have to be well defined. The risk agenda may have changed but smart risk is the order of the day, not 'anything goes' risk and that requires a fine line to be drawn between acceptable collaborative behaviours and those which are disruptive.

There is one final area in which HR can make or break the ongoing success of a move towards an innovation culture. That is in the way in which future employees are brought on board. Once a culture change has taken place it's all too easy to assume that new hires will simply slot in, will assimilate the culture without difficulty. That is wrong at every level but particularly when it comes to a culture of innovation.

Hiring for cultural fit and a strong and in-depth induction process will be needed if new joiners are to be brought up to speed with the expected behaviours, which underpin an innovation culture. Even moving between organisations which both profess to have an innovation culture requires a shift in thinking from one culture to the next. The leadership team may be the owners of the culture but HR are its guardians.



EMBED

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The HR dimension

In the previous sections I've touched on some of the ways in which HR can affect and influence the broad sweep of business cultural innovation. By acting as guides, as facilitators and as trainers the HR team can not only become key influencers of innovation, they can also help the CEO and the leadership team to have the confidence, knowledge and skills to transform the culture into one of innovation. But what about innovation within HR; when a true innovation culture has to touch the entire organisation, how can HR teams change their practices and attitudes?

In truth, every organisation is different and every organisation sets up their internal structures in ways which meet their own requirements but to help you start considering new approaches here are some broad-brush ideas as food for thought.



Policies, Processes and Contractuals

Are you still throwing the rulebook of company do's and don'ts at every new hire as they walk through the door. An understanding of the organisation's policies and procedures are important but the way they are presented speaks volumes; Is dress code more important than customer experience; is office 'face-time' more business critical than getting the job completed?

Are rigid hierarchies and structures preventing employees from taking the initiative to move things forward? Most importantly, is the right to fail accounted for within the structure? Creating a culture of innovation means not being afraid to take risks, feeling free to try something different and to look for new methods, processes and approaches. Sometimes these won't work but unless HR have promoted a culture which accepts failure as a learning point then no one will ever step outside of their comfort zone and try.

Hiring

Do you hire for qualifications, experience and culture fit? How do you assess culture fit at the interview stage? Do you hire like for like when an employee leaves or do you revisit team structure and reassess real requirements before drafting the job specifications? Is your hiring process the routine advert, CV, interview approach or have you embraced the new route, social media, personal referrals and 'tapping' your networks?

Companies like Zappos offer new hires money to quit if they don't think they will fit into the culture of the organisation; how do you facilitate a quick exit if one or both parties feel that the hire is not a really good fit?

The HR dimension

Financial Targets and Rewards

Are the ways you measure performance and reward employees in line with the customer experience you hope to achieve; or even in line with what you're asking people to do? E.g. 'we must sell solutions rather than products', but financial incentives are still earned for products sold! Are bonuses awarded to individuals for generating short-term profits or to teams for creating new 'stuff', which will lead to long-term benefits? An FCA (FSA) document from 2013 highlighted risks to financial services customers from financial incentives but the findings could equally apply across other sectors. Those risks included:

- **Firms failing to identify how incentive schemes might encourage staff to mis-sell.**
- **Overly complex incentive schemes which made it hard to control and manage risk.**
- **Over-reliance on routine monitoring.**
- **Conflicts of interest.**

Are you using targets and bonuses to drive innovation and customer excellence or to maintain the status quo?

The New Flexible Working

Rigid working hours, days and location are now firmly a thing of the past; employees work longer hours than ever before and therefore demand an increased level of flexibility in how, when and where they do it. This is mostly driven by Generation Y and will soon be driven by Generation Z, however it will be demanded by all.

If you look to control, to impose rigid hours and to ban personal/work time interactions then you haven't a hope of opening up freewheeling, creative thinking. Flexi-working, working from home or from alternate sites and blending the work-life balance are all on the table and HR have to find new ways to embrace new technologies and leverage the potential to be gained from social media.

Training, Coaching and Mentoring

Whilst there will always be a place for formal and structured learning, a more blended approach is now the preferred option. Creating individualised and personalised training, coaching and mentoring programmes which combine fact based teachings with the experience of more senior employees and encourage the free thinking styles of more junior, less inhibited and jaded thinkers. These combined learning programmes serve not only serve the employees 'today' training requirements but build the skills to thrive in tomorrow's ambiguous and ever more challenging world

It may not be as simple as wheeling a group into a lecture theatre but in the long run it will pay dividends for the organisation and for its customers and employees.

Wellness and Mindfulness

More and more employees are struggling with the demands of the 'never switch off' work life, with stress related work absences at an all time high. Have your policies and wellness offerings been updated to offer more holistic solutions; coping strategies in the form of mediation or mindfulness, a variety of desk positions/types to encourage physical activity and prevent 'sitting disease'? Are employees afraid to be ill in case it affects their future prospects?

Are those returning to work expected to be up to full speed on day 1? Or, do you operate a more flexible, personal approach, which provides counseling, phased return and access to retraining or medical interventions?

What can you do to encourage employees to feel valued and to create a culture of respect between the business and its greatest asset, its people?

And finally...

If all of this looks too hard then consider the alternative. Just as the great machines of the Industrial Revolution vanquished home weaving, so too will seemingly strong organisations be overrun as the customer demand for innovation and co-creation takes sway.

Businesses simply can't afford to take as long to innovate and get solutions to market as they did five years ago, and yet 68% admit they do.

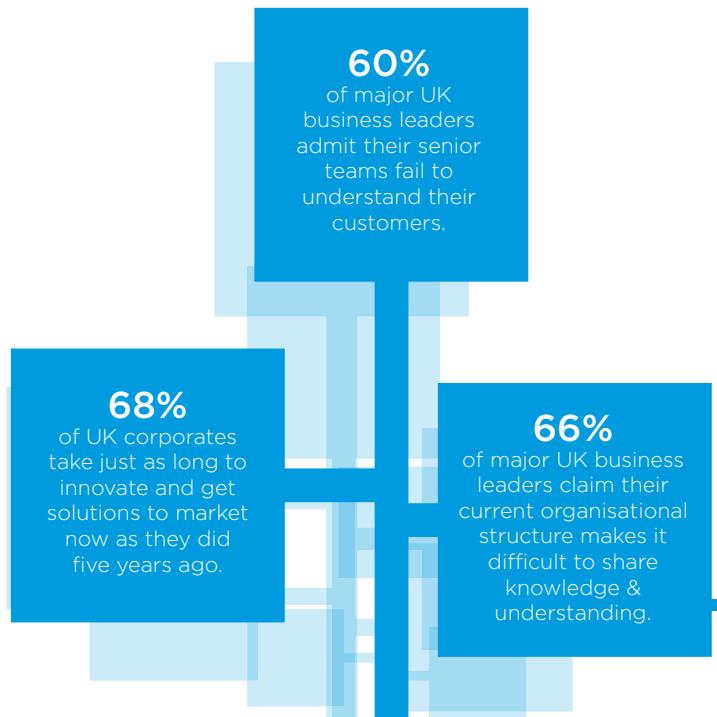
Businesses simply can't afford to have an organisational structure, which prevents the sharing of knowledge and understanding, and yet 66% admit they do.

And businesses simply can't afford to ignore customer needs, yet 60% admit that their leadership teams don't understand their customers.

The message is simple. The business mission has to be underpinned by a robust innovation strategy, which drives competitive advantage and exceptional customer experience. HR have their place to play in helping to model beliefs and behaviours which fit within an innovation framework. In fact as the crf research paper from 2013 said:

"There are so many areas where HR can help create a culture that supports creativity and innovation, whether as a leader or a strong advisor. The question is, why aren't most of us doing more?"

How effective is your Innovation strategy? Do you have one? If you want to find out more about how HR can help drive the transformation innovation requires, perhaps it's time you got in touch and talked to me about how I help some of the world's most ambitious companies succeed through innovation.



An expert view...

It's heartening - as an HR Professional - to see Cris take up the rallying cry for HR to join the creation of an innovation-led culture in business. Not that this surprises me though, as Cris gets what innovation is all about - enlightened, emboldened people thinking and doing creative things to bring about positive change.

Systems need to be created - for sure. Or indeed, the climate for innovation to thrive created, but it's people who innovate. People who out think their competitors. And people who build great products and services as a result of innovation moments.

So what can I possibly add to such a great piece of thought leadership?

One word: Design.

Ironic that Cris is a designer by trade but I'll add this special element as something HR needs to pivot itself towards Design thinking. Design mindset. Design as a craft in the profession.

Designing organisations, designing workflow routines, designing career paths and designing compensation and benefits - it's ALL about design.

HR has - within its rank and professional gambit - organisation design as a subset of Organisation Development (OD). It's often viewed as a more system-wide macro element to learning and development - but it's way more than that. It's learning - for sure - but it's also designing the flow of an organisation so that human endeavour results in effective and sustainable organisation success.

Innovation is not just a part of this it's the invisible force that powers the organisation's design. To learn, to adapt, to create new markets, to create communities out of customers and to build lasting belief in the organisation's purpose and mission in its people. With its people. By its people.

Famed academic Peter Senge came up with the concept 'The Learning Organisation' in his work and book The Fifth Discipline. In it he described the 5 features of a learning organisation: Systems Thinking; Personal Mastery; Mental Models; Building Shared Visions; and Team Learning.

Rather than take up space in this white paper with an exposé on all 5, the book and its subsequent use in modern OD practice lives on to this day and is really, coming into its own more now than ever before. Because it designs for change, adaptability and yes, innovation.

**"Design will save
the world"**

Design, as famed creative genius Yuya Furukawa said, will save the world. Designing for your people to build you a culture of innovation, will save us all from meaningless work.



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With 20+ years experience in organisation development & learning, Perry is a Chartered Member of the CIPD, advises them on Social Media and is a fellow at Sheffield Hallam University, the RSA & with the Corporate Rebels.

Perry writes for The Future Shapers, HRZone, HR Director, HRTechWorld and a variety of global business/HR journals.

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An expert view...

We stand at one of the greatest times of opportunity for the Human Resources/People practice in history. We were created at the dawn of the industrial revolution, to manage the personnel of companies and to keep that aspect of the corporate mechanisation going. We evolved to handling all resources human as we moved away from expendable individuals and toward a growing structure of specialised talent. We now stand ready for the next evolution of the world of work, and whilst our name may not have fundamentally changed, our main task has evolved yet again: we are responsible for corporate capacity and how it impacts building a culture of innovation.

Capacity is the next evolution of human resources. Simply put, it is the means through which all corporate goals are accomplished. There is no success, failure, or even daily operation without it. People are the lifeblood of businesses, and as the owners of all resources human, capacity is our mantel. We own corporate capacity. As we look toward the 21st century and all the advances that will come with it, we must shift our focus away from rigid HR rulebooks, policies, and procedures, and embrace how our tools enable corporate capacity and its greatest resulting outcome: innovation.

We hear a lot about a culture of innovation, how creating a workplace that rewards creativity and out-of-the-box thinking is the wave of the future. Many are dismissing it, that it's just new business buzz, but I beg to differ. As someone who has spent more than a couple of decades on the ground within HR at start-ups and Fortune 200 companies, I feel I must speak plainly: innovation and the culture that supports it is corporate survival. We can no longer afford to work with old models, worn-out policies and organization charts, spouting "*this is the way we've always done it.*" Perhaps that's true, but by the time those words have been uttered, the competition is innovating their way right past you. New ideas that enrich the customer experience, deepen long-standing relationships, increase share of wallet, and build the brand within the global market is the only way to win the game in the future. As the owners of capacity, as the keepers of all resources human, it's our responsibility to ensure our leadership and management teams are on board with this inevitability: we must embrace innovation, or we'll perish clinging to corporate nostalgia.

Building an innovation-led culture requires changing our mind-sets before we shift our delivery models. It starts within HR itself, the adaptation of the business owner mind-set rather than that of service delivery. We are more than capable of such a shift, but it requires us to evolve. We must throw out the old rulebooks. We must drop the siloes and walls between our own processes. We must consider ourselves strategic business partners with our main product becoming corporate capacity. We ourselves must adopt the innovative mind-set. HR must become more than its past; we must embrace the innovation-led future: data warehousing, sophisticated modelling, predictive analysis, game-changing compensation and rewards programs, self-directed cultural training and design. These are just the tip of the iceberg for the next generation of innovation focussed HR. We must become the change we wish to see in our own worlds. We ourselves must innovate in order to best drive corporate innovation.

As we continue along this path, we must step out in front of our leadership and management teams, crafting and paving the way through which our corporate culture will embrace innovation. We ourselves must not be afraid to fail, and we must instil that bravery in our constituents from the CEO on down. Everyone must feel the passion for the next big idea. We must gather the tools at our disposal and harness it, bring it out in every person who touches us. Ideas come from everywhere: our people, our managers, our market, our customers. Our corporate cultures become the incubator where even ideas that don't work are celebrated. Managers must be taught to nurture and coach talent. Diversity must become ingrained as a business practice. The path to the future is a corporate culture that seamlessly shifts toward the next idea without tearing itself apart from the inside out due to old human-centred fears. People like stability; we must coach them to thrive on paths of uncertainty. No small feat, but a worthwhile task.

A culture of innovation is the path to the future, and linking its success to that of corporate capacity is the means through which HR will secure its own next great epoch. We stand at the edge of the next great generation of global business, and it is now that we must carve our path to secure not just the future of HR but of the corporations we support. Capacity is the key to our future, and a culture of innovation is how we unlock the door to our greatest time in history.



Rita Trehan

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Rita Trehan is the former Chief Human Resources Officer at AES Corporation and Director of HR at Honeywell International. She is now a leading global expert on workplace culture and advises Fortune 100 companies and large corporations worldwide on reducing the risk of corporate scandals and maintaining a healthy workplace culture.

*She currently serves as Strategic Advisor to the CEO of AGL, Australia's largest renewable energy company and has delivered transformation projects for global firms such as Coca-Cola and the World Bank. A sought-after international speaker and commentator in the international business press, she has also just released her first book – *Unleashing Capacity: The Hidden Human Resources*.*

About the author...

Originally trained as a product & industrial designer, Cris spent over a decade as a successful entrepreneur & CEO building an award-winning design group. He is now recognised globally as a thought leader on innovation strategy, leadership and culture.

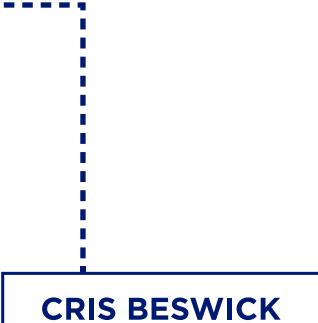
Cris is the Co-Founder of Innovation Thought Leadership Website The Future Shapers, Director of Innovation Consulting at Culture Consultancy, Strategic Advisor on Innovation at Wazoku, a Visiting Fellow at Cranfield University's School of Management and Centre for Customised Executive Development and a Visiting Professor at Icesi University in Columbia.

He specialises in working with CEOs and senior teams and has coached, advised and delivered keynotes to some of the worlds most successful companies on how to become exceptional by building game-changing innovation capability and embedding it into organisational culture.

Cris has also delivered executive education programmes on innovation for leading UK business schools such as Henley Business School, Southampton Business School and Cranfield University's Centre for Competitive Creative Design as well as international business schools such as Synergy Business School in Dubai.

Cris is also the author of the book 'The Road to Innovation' and co-author of 'Building a Culture of Innovation'. As well as authoring numerous white papers Cris has also contributed to articles for The Times, Financial Times and The Sunday Telegraph to name but a few.





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To find out more about working with Cris to build a culture of innovation in your organisation, get in touch for an initial discussion.

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