

Developing innovation leaders can be crucial to corporate competitiveness, growth

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A leader's ability to identify and diffuse innovations is critical to adapting to changing technologies and customer preferences, enhancing employee creativity, developing new products, supporting their organization's market competitiveness, and sustaining economic growth, according to a Penn State researcher.

"Commitment to innovation as a culture is prevalent in organizations as it is commonly woven directly into mission statements. However, leaders still lack the ability to plan, measure, and implement innovative programs, products, and services. These challenges are enhanced by the pressure to juggle several different and often conflicting roles," says Dr. David G. Gliddon, who recently received his Ph.D. in workforce education from Penn State and completed the research as part of his doctoral dissertation. His thesis adviser is Dr. William J. Rothwell, professor of workforce education at Penn State.

In a three-year study, Gliddon identified the competencies that underpinned these roles and developed a competency model of innovation leaders. The competency model can be tailored to any organization as part of a competency-based human resource development initiative.

Once tailored to a specific client, the model can be used to enhance job descriptions of the positions in which the identification and diffusion of innovations is critical, focus succession planning efforts for innovation leaders, discover gaps in an innovation leader's competence, develop competency-based training to fill these competence gaps, and incorporate the innovation leader's competence requirements into the organization's performance appraisal system.

"The aspect of innovation that is most difficult for

professionals to grasp is that it is seen as inseparable from risk. Business success is linked to organizations that can overcome the potential risk and become true innovators. These organizations have a corporate culture that nurtures innovation leaders who take risks and think creatively," says Gliddon, who now is a faculty member at Colorado Technical University.

It is not necessarily the innovation leader who must generate new ideas; rather, they must understand what creative employees value. They must encourage new ideas by seeking active input from their employees.

An innovation leader collaboratively interacts with their employees and supports high levels of teamwork, providing opportunities to share innovations. Once an innovation has been shared, employees should be empowered to then adopt the innovation if it is useful. Employees can then support the innovation leader by initially adopting the innovation, and encourage the diffusion of the innovation throughout organization's social system, Gliddon says.

Innovation leaders must also take personal responsibility for and be dedicated to projects that require innovations. Therefore, innovation leaders must establish a trust culture and maintain relationships based on trust. They must display initiative, set challenging project goals, and link those goals to the needs of the customer, department, and enterprise, according to his study.

"Innovation has been linked to the growth of existing enterprises and development of new enterprises. As new products, programs, services, and technologies are created, new opportunities for employment can arise. Innovation can support the creation of new jobs in an economy," says Gliddon.

The key sources of innovation include: research and development, systemic innovation, knowledge management, integration, new business venture strategies, and new business models. The innovation leader can support the success of this economy and the organizations, products, and employees it encompasses.

"Our current economy is characterized by a focus on knowledge, change, and globalization. It is fast and unpredictable and driven by innovative knowledge-based firms who are trying to innovate with scarce resources and skill shortages," says the Penn State graduate.

The competency model of innovation leaders directly addresses these issues and provides an exciting opportunity for economic growth for organizations that seek to maintain competitiveness through innovation. Progress in innovation can be made when organizations provide innovation leaders the opportunity to learn and develop their competence and creativity, according to the study.

Source: Penn State

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