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# STRATEGY HQ

the cooper group

## How Today's Companies **Lead, Grow & Last**

**HIGH FIVES  
EDITION**



# Breathe New Life Into Your Organization

Dear Colleagues,

Innovation has become so critical that I'm dedicating a series of current, relevant articles to it. They're filled with tangible examples of what's working today and what isn't to build profit, growth, a sharper competitive edge, and market leadership.

This is the first in the series. It's called the High Fives Edition because successful innovation is cause for celebration – but mostly because there are five reasons and five steps in building solidarity around innovation inside an organization.

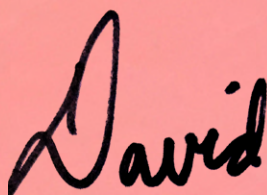
You can call your pursuit of innovation anything you want...

- Reinvention
- Value Creation
- Competitive Advantage
- Future Proofing
- Relevance
- Growth Engineering

...but no matter what you call it, it's the thing that enables you to lead, grow, and move forward.

If I had to sum up today's urgent need for innovation in one sentence, it would be this: **Evolve faster than the market changes – or get left behind.**

I hope you find this issue insightful!



David Cooper  
CEO and Principal Strategist  
The Cooper Group



# 4 **5 Big Reasons** You Need an Innovation Imperative

# 8 **5 Steps** to Building a Prolific Culture of Innovation



by David Cooper

# Big Reasons You Need an Innovation Imperative

The disruptors in your market or industry today, whether they're new technologies, steeper competition, skills gaps, or new trade policies, will soon be disrupted by another new wave of dynamics. Count on it. The one thing that won't go away or be defeated is the innovation imperative – because it's how companies lead, grow, and last.

Having an innovation imperative means having the grit to reimagine what you do, do it better, and do new things. How? Direct your leadership and teams to innovate around priorities like these:

- Envision and bring new ideas to life. Larger or small, they all keep you relevant.
- Concentrate on enhancing existing products or services, and introduce new ones.
- Modernize internal processes and policies to reduce costs and boost efficiency.



- Identify and eliminate pain points for your internal teams and customers.
- Find new and creative ways to elevate the customer experience.

That's innovation. It's the constant that allows organizations to lead, attract top talent, and thrive in times of uncertainty.

Here are five key reasons you need an innovation imperative.

## 1 **Manage the impact of disruptive technologies on your industry**

Companies must innovate to manage disruptive technologies for one indisputable reason: Disruptive technologies are not a passing wave. They're a perpetual tide that, if ignored, can render traditional business models and processes irrelevant almost overnight. The only way to stay afloat is to innovate with intent, courage, and a new way of thinking.

Reframe technology disruption as an opportunity for reinvention: Innovation turns threats into opportunities. New tech doesn't just improve things; it rewrites the rules and gives you ways to pivot.

- Companies win by leveraging disruptive technologies to do something new, better, and more valuable.
- Some examples include the customized use of artificial intelligence (AI), cloud

computing, automation, robotics, blockchain, and other tools to create better experiences, faster delivery, new platforms, and smarter products.

- Use technology to improve, change, or replace existing products, services, or business models. Make them cheaper, quicker, and more accessible.

## 2 **Stay relevant in a fast-changing world**

Markets move fast. Technology evolves faster. And customer preferences and expectations change faster than technology and markets combined; they are in fact what drives market shifts and new technologies in the first place.

Remember that business success follows relevance. Failing to innovate can quickly devalue a company into irrelevance. Staying relevant is about reinventing what you do to meet the evolving needs, expectations, and values of your customers, your market, and

- For example, Apple continually reinvents its product lines and ecosystem – from the iPod to the iPhone to wearables and now spatial computing. It stays relevant by anticipating user needs, creating intuitive tech, and building a brand that people want to experience.

- Microsoft made a big comeback by shifting to cloud computing, embracing open-source, and pivoting to AI, rocketing from a clunky legacy software to a key player in the future of tech.

You don't need to be massive to stay relevant! You just need to be agile, mission-driven, and relentlessly tuned in with your audience.

## 3 **Create real, lasting value and long-term sustainable growth**

Innovation isn't just about creating the next big thing. It's about solving real-world problems in smarter, more effective ways. This might

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industry. Innovation allows you to stay aligned with, or better yet, ahead of market shifts – before someone else beats you to it.



mean building something that completely redefines an established product category (like the iPhone), or creates an all-new product category (like Butterfly iQ), or establishes internal processes that save significant time and resources.

Keep in mind that the best innovations are simple, obvious, and indispensable to organizations and their customers. And they're not static. They keep getting better with ongoing advancements. Here's an example...

- In 2018, Butterfly Network, a digital health company based in the United States, created the Butterfly iQ, a handheld ultrasound device that connects to a smartphone. Using a probe and ultrasound-on-a-chip tech, it brings advanced imaging to clinics, ambulances, and remote areas. Innovation continues: In 2024, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved Butterfly iQ3, the third next-generation handheld point-of-care ultrasound system.

Sustainable growth is about scaling smart. Innovative companies open new revenue streams, improve margins, and enter new markets

that traditional players overlook. For example, Shopify didn't just build an e-commerce platform and shopping tool; it powered a colossal ecosystem for entrepreneurs – and innovation continues to be the multiplier.

## 4 Attract the right talent and investment capital

Today's professionals want to work for organizations where their ideas are welcomed, not buried in bureaucracy or relegated to the drawer of broken dreams. And they want a sense of purpose in their working lives, to make a difference.

By the same token, investors want to put their money into companies

that are focused on building the future, not clinging to the past or reticent to brave new horizons.

People and capital also follow relevance! Strategic and consistent innovation signals that a company has vision, resilience, the smarts to champion their market differentiators – and the guts to try something new. These reliably attract both talent and funding in today's business world.

## 5 Build agility and resilience

One of the most underestimated powers of innovation is its role in helping companies weather storms. COVID-19 was a stress test. New trade policies, an unpredictable economy, and changing market conditions are, too.

Innovative companies quickly pivot and retool their operations. Some find entirely new business models. And so, innovation is not just about being first to market; it's





# The companies that win are those that infuse innovation into their core genetics – not because it looks or feels good, but because it's the only way to lead in a world that never stops changing.

also about being the first to adapt or successfully sidestep unexpected disruptions.

## **Make innovation a core operating imperative**

Build it into your DNA. Innovation isn't a one-off project or task assigned to a siloed department. It's an organization-wide mentality that's nurtured and ingrained in a company's DNA. It's how companies stay relevant, create value, grow strategically, and remain resilient under pressure.

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## **Take the next step**

The future belongs to companies

that are bold enough to shape it. Make sure yours is one of them!

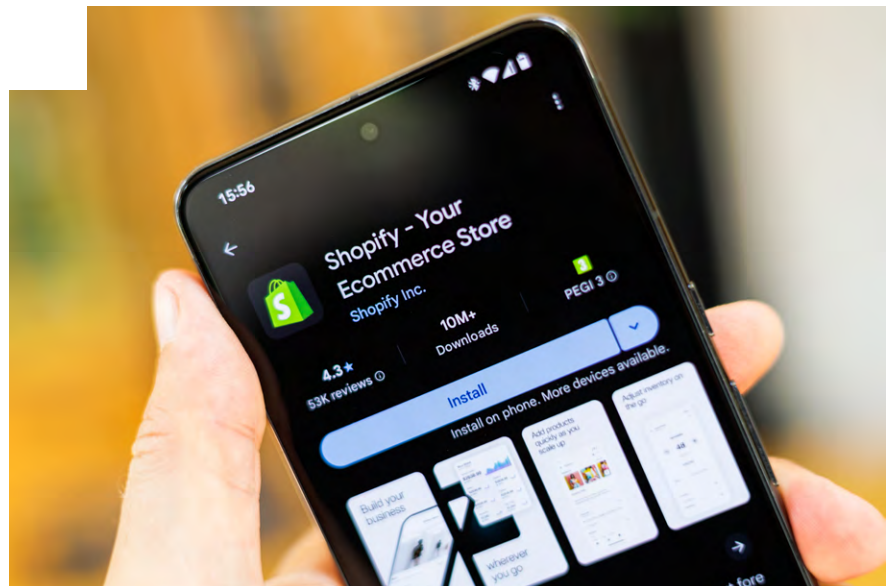
### **Get moving:**

Never wait for inspiration or until the bottom falls out. If innovation isn't already at the core of your business and operating strategy, now is the time to change that.

### **Start asking hard questions:**

This will give you fundamental

introduce, and pilot a culture and systems that overcome barriers and deliver consistent positive impact. The innovation imperative is how you create and fuel a culture where imagination and experimentation are rewarded, where failure is seen as a steppingstone, and where ideas come from every level of your organization. I share how to do this in the next article in this issue called, "5 Steps to Building a Prolific Culture of Innovation." Read on!



direction based on good, solid answers:

- "What do we need to change to become more relevant and stay that way?"
- "Where are we falling behind or failing – internally and externally?"
- "What problems do our internal teams and customers struggle with and how can we solve them?"

Nobody learns how to drive a parked car, so fire up your engines: Take action today to design,



# 5 STEPS



## TO BUILDING A PROLIFIC CULTURE OF INNOVATION

by David Cooper

**T**oday's leaders are looking for no-nonsense, high-impact methods for creating a company culture where innovation isn't just a platitude but rather something that drives results for the company, its customers, and other stakeholders.

I'm going to share those steps, but before digging in, here's a solid piece of advice:

### **Brand your culture of innovation to make it stick**

Every major initiative needs a statement of purpose. I highly recommend creating and building a bold statement into the ethos of your culture of innovation. Here are a few examples:

*"We collaborate to challenge assumptions, quickly test great ideas, and turn the best ideas into real-world solutions."*

*"Our competitive edge is constantly sharpened by the ways we solve problems faster than anybody else."*

*"Our goal is constant reinvention – staying ahead by redesigning how we operate, serve, and deliver value."*

You get the idea. But here's the truth: Your statement of purpose is the money line. It will guide everything you do in creating a successful culture of innovation.

Now, let's explore the key steps in doing just that.

## 1 Build a strong innovation ecosystem

Think of your innovation ecosystem as the living, breathing environment where innovation grows. Know that it thrives at the intersections of different skills and perspectives, demanding interconnectedness between people, teams, resources, and processes. All of these work together to conceive, develop, and turn new ideas into impactful solutions.

plug into the knowledge bases of market and industry research, customers, business partners, key suppliers, and if applicable, investors. These voices have critical insights that expose and challenge your blind spots and reveal the future by identifying opportunities faster.

■ Ideas cannot thrive without fuel, so your ecosystem needs enablers – sources of funding for experiments, technology platforms and tools, dedicated time and spaces for collaboration and creative work, real-time data and analytics, streamlined decision-making, fast

**Innovation needs a mix of skills, perspectives, and experiences. This means that leaders and HR teams need to hire beyond the “usual suspects.”**

These are the essential elements of the culture you want to nurture!

■ Make your innovation ecosystem embody the entire organization, including visionary leadership, diverse and empowered employees, collaborative R&D teams – and resources and internal processes that enable fast, flexible movement of ideas from concept to market. This is accomplished by breaking down internal siloes, mixing the talent pool by creating cross-functional teams, and focusing the entire organization on a common goal of breaking new ground – together.

■ You also need external collaborators because no company innovates in a vacuum. Strong ecosystems

prototyping, clear criteria for scaling ideas, and agile governance that encourages smart risk-taking instead of smothering ideas in bureaucracy.

■ A fluid conduit of learning and feedback: Failures are common in innovation, so start thinking of them as data points – not disasters! The goal is to give great ideas an experimental path that's fast, cheap, and reversible. To do this, you need quick feedback loops, not million-dollar black holes. A strong ecosystem treats every experiment as a learning opportunity, collects insights, shares them openly, and uses that feedback to fuel the next round of innovation.



## 2 Foster engagement, empowerment, creativity, and experimentation

Leaders set the tone here. In fact, leaders single-handedly give life and longevity to a culture of innovation by championing innovation as a strategic priority. They model curiosity among people and teams, and most important, they create and protect space and resources for experimentation.

Innovation needs a mix of skills, perspectives, and experiences. This means that leaders and HR teams need to hire beyond the “usual suspects.” It means empowering employees at all levels of the organization and making cross-pollination among teams a habit – not an exception.

Leaders and department heads must encourage their people and teams to imagine, create, and experiment, and so it is critical that they build psychological safety into the culture of innovation so that employees can test ideas without fear of career suicide. Again, failures are common and they’re valuable data points – not disasters.

## 3 Incentivize and prioritize accomplishments

Everybody knows that if performance isn’t measured, it’s not a priority. It’s that simple. And this is the lethal enemy of an innovative company culture.

Companies that are serious about creating a culture of innovation don’t treat passion, ideas, and contributions as an afterthought. Instead, they make innovation a core performance indicator for their people and teams. They tie bonuses, promotions, and other forms of recognition to measurable innovation outcomes – like coming up with winning ideas, rolling out new products and enhancements, achieving efficiency

gains, and discovering breakthroughs in customer experience.

## 4 Invest in skills that feed innovation

While technology is certainly a key enabler, innovation is not just about having and wielding tech skills in bringing new ideas to market. Companies that are serious about boosting innovation should consider investing in skills that help employees spot opportunities, connect dots, and turn ideas into workable solutions.

**While technology is certainly a key enabler, innovation is not just about having and wielding tech skills in bringing new ideas to market.**

### 1. CREATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS

give employees ways to generate different solutions instead of defaulting to an obvious one.

### 2. SYSTEMS THINKING SKILLS

are crucial for predicting ripple effects of new ideas and avoiding unintended consequences.

3. DATA LITERACY SKILLS help employees interpret data and make good decisions. Innovation is stronger when development plans are informed by evidence, not gut instinct.

4. COLLABORATION and cross-functional communication training involve visual communication and active listening to bridge understanding between technical and non-technical teams.

5. RAPID PROTOTYPING and experimentation training uses build-test-learn cycles to teach employees how to fail fast, adjust, and improve without burning through excessive time and money.

6. ADAPTABILITY AND RESILIENCE SKILLS give employees the mental agility to quickly shift strategies when dynamics change.

**7. CUSTOMER INSIGHT AND EMPATHY SKILLS** are required to truly understand customer needs, pain points, and behavior patterns. Innovation only works when it solves real problems!

**8. OPPORTUNITY SPOTTING AND TREND ANALYSIS SKILLS** have the power to turn your workforce into a radar system for identifying emerging market and product trends and competitor activities.

Make your innovation process transparent for all employees

- Create a system that acknowledges every idea that's put forth.
- Share your vetting process and researched evidence for choosing to pursue certain ideas.
- Track and communicate about winning ideas – from pitch to prototype to market.

- Openly celebrate ideas and people who move the needle.

### **Let us help you lead, grow, and last**

The Cooper Group (TCG) is a daring business and marketing consultancy for the here and now. Disruption is here to stay. Markets are wildly shifting. We specialize in forming sound, agile strategies that move companies through turbulence to sustained growth and profits. Contact us today to help you breathe new life into your innovation strategy.



**Companies that are serious about creating a culture of innovation don't treat passion, ideas, and contributions as an afterthought.**

## **5 Build a visible idea-to-impact pipeline**

Innovation is about thinking outside the box, which means you really need to just burn the box – including and especially the proverbial suggestion box. Never (ever) let innovation ideas disappear into a void if you want to nurture and sustain organization-wide passion, enthusiasm, and engagement.

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