A framework to understand the commonality element in one's own organisational culture while working towards innovation.

✦ DR V VIJAYA, INDIAN INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT TIRUCHIRAPPALLI

The 'what' and 'how' of culture

Culture is a high-frequency term in everyday parlance as well as research. Around thousands of research articles are written each year on culture across many countries, in academic and practitioner journals.

Academically, one could define culture as a phenomenon that manifests as a common behaviour of employees while they attempt to perform various tasks to accomplish business or work objectives. Edgar Schein, a pioneer in culture research had defined it as a pattern of basic assumptions—invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration—that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.[i] One attempt at external adaptation is through innovations and this can be achieved when people integrate internally and reach a consensus, which represents the view of the organisation as a whole.

Innovation is critical for organisations today not just for value adding to products, but as a survival mechanism. Creativity and non-linear
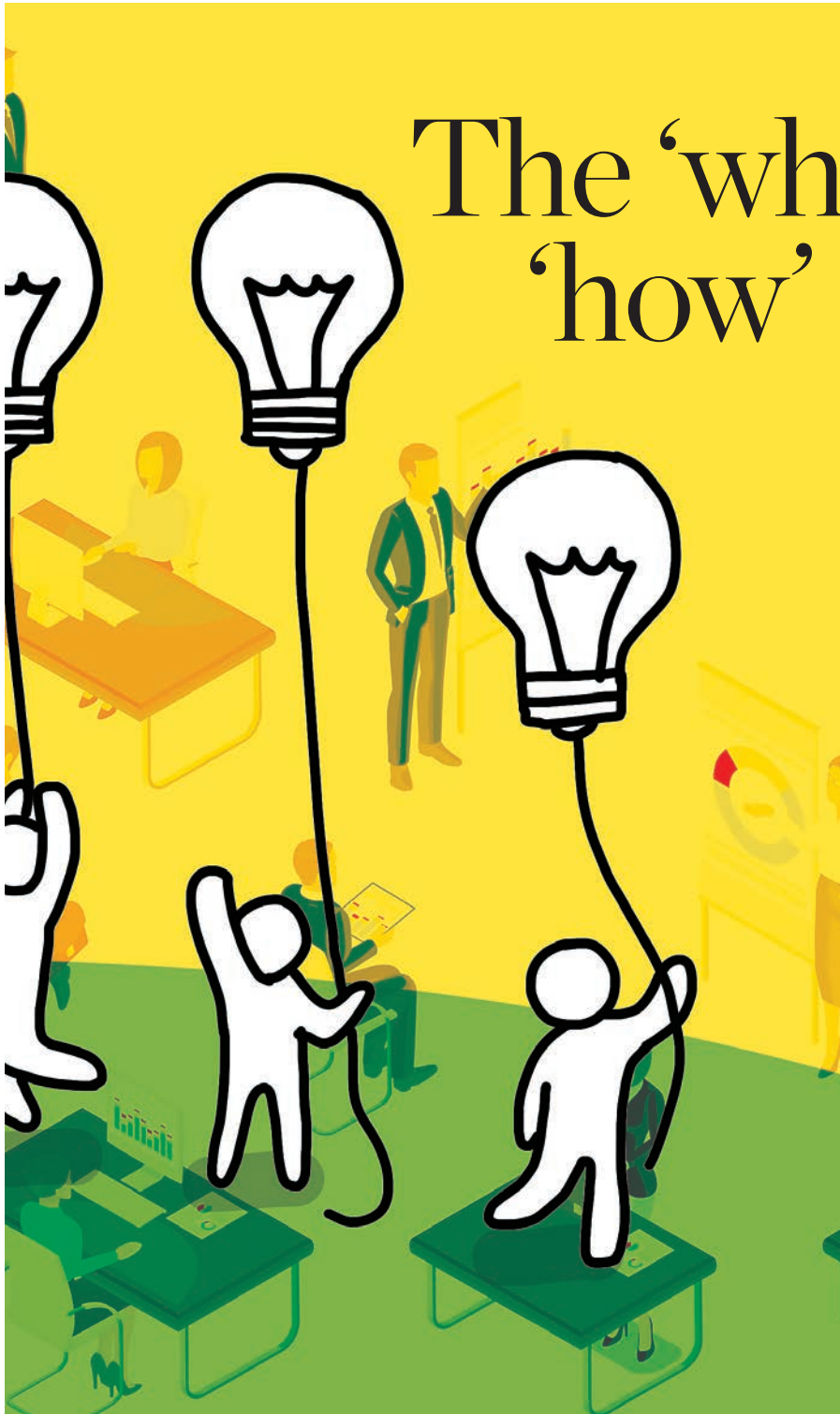
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thinking by connecting many discrete dots lead to new ideas and products. For instance, a voluminous range of mobile phone models are constantly introduced in the market. These are innovated upon continuously to deal with the volatility caused due to rapidly changing consumer preferences. Due to a conscious strategy of limited editions and a short product life cycle, mobile phone models' creation goes through 'obsessive-compulsinnovationosis'.[1] A few years ago, one could hardly imagine that a mobile phone to be bought for its primary function of oral-anywhere communication, would also have to possess the latest features in selfie photography as the most enticing feature of the product for today's consumers. An innovation context demands rapid adaptation and updation, which is to be done internally by employees as a team. This is an internal integration process based on what Schein refers to as developing consensus on strategy, goals, and means and measures of performance, which are decisions on external adaptation.

Internal integration is a cultural process between groups in organisations on important decisions in which each group in a company consists of individuals of different types. Employee diversity is seen as contributing to firm level innovations, but arriving at a consensus is a challenging process. Diversity could manifest as varying working styles, product views, perception of gender differences, perception and acceptance of inter-personal differences, seniority levels by experience and generation and other subtler factors like personality and mental models among others. It can be difficult to validate common norms as what looks right to one person need not be so to another.

With the advent of a global approach to product development and employee recruitment, there is a need to understand the external world globally and locally for their idiosyncrasies based on worldism,[2] which emphasises global interdependence and the need for a global identity. Proactive goal generation on the organisation's part is critical in kindling innovative work behaviours in employees.[ii] Dyer[iii] proposes that ideas stem from individuals, people are responsible, motivated and capable

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of governing themselves and that truth is determined pragmatically by fighting things out and testing in a group within an environment sensed like a family who will take care of each other.

From an innovating team perspective, some of the changing paradigms indicate that everyone is an innovator and there is a need for symbiotic partnerships. Millennials, the younger and major workforce of today, need collaboration and feedback on demand with reference to innovations.[iv] Adaptive cultures with attributes of structural flexibility and reflexive learning are found to significantly contribute to innovations[v]. High involvement work systems (HIWS), which connote collective interaction for knowledge exchange and the employees' experiences within that system, are found to promote innovation.[vi]

TSI[3] reflects group members' shared perceptions about the extent to which their group supports attempts to develop and implement new and useful ideas.[vii] At an individual level, a person's experience

in her attempt to be active in a consensus-building process is important. The level of hope, optimism, resilience and self-efficacy in employees is significant in developing innovative behaviours.[viii]

Culture building as a process in an innovation context manifests at three levels—individual, team, and organisational level—that are highly interlinked with each other. As culture is determined by organisational ways of thinking and acting,[ix] one good way to check for any synchronisation within the company is to view how each of the individuals perceives the culture as a process to come to a consensus on the what and how in the innovation process.

The Rainbow framework mentioned below is a simplified attempt to assess the enabling culture to innovate. This tool can be used in meetings to discuss and clarify issues in the innovation process after responses are gathered through a drop box or from anonymous hard copy submissions (revealing only the identity of the team or the department concerned) made by employees before the meeting. This will serve as a good reflective exercise on areas of improvement—to work on commonalities to build a stronger culture without starting a blame game.

Assessment scale

Individual level

RAINBOW INNOVATION CULTURE QUOTIENT*

Most of the time……………………………………………………………………Hardly any time
……5…………………4……………………3…………………..2…………………..1…….

Resilience
■ I like to keep trying even if some of my ideas/initiatives do not get accepted the first time.
■ I would like to actively take suggestions from others and not get disturbed when I reflect on my areas of improvement on business ideas I suggest.

Adaptability
■ I work on areas of improvement suggested by others and check my progress with them.

Innovativeness
■ I feel I am creative and to contribute to business.
■ I like to make suggestions to improve on people's initial ideas on business aspects.

Team level

Neutrality
■ My team has a systematic way of providing feedback to ideas from everyone.
■ As a team, we energetically involve in debates and discussions.
■ As a team, we interact actively with other teams and other members to discuss concepts.

Bonhomie
■ In my team, we feel comfortable sounding out ideas with others.
■ In my team, there is a friendly environment and understanding.

Organisational level

Ownership
■ The company listens to ideas/projects and systematically prioritises them.
■ There is a system to check on the progress on employee initiated projects accepted by the company.
■ The company willingly invests a fair amount of money, effort and time when we want to experiment with a new idea.

Worldism
■ In the company, we put in efforts to customise the products/service features we innovate to satisfy customers across the world.
■ In the company, we work hard to understand local contexts while conceiving a product/service.

* A table could be drawn with the RAINBOW dimensions. Scores of all members can be entered, and average under each calculated as an aggregate score is that is representative of a team or unit. The discussion can go ahead in checking as to why it is high or low and what can be done about it? IM

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1 A term coined in this article to reflect incessant efforts on continuous innovations on the lines of obsessive-compulsive behaviours that get repeated on a continuous basis.

2 A political ideological concept of L.H.M.Ling

3 Team support for Innovation

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr V Vijaya is a faculty member, OBHR, Indian Institute of Management Tiruchirappalli.