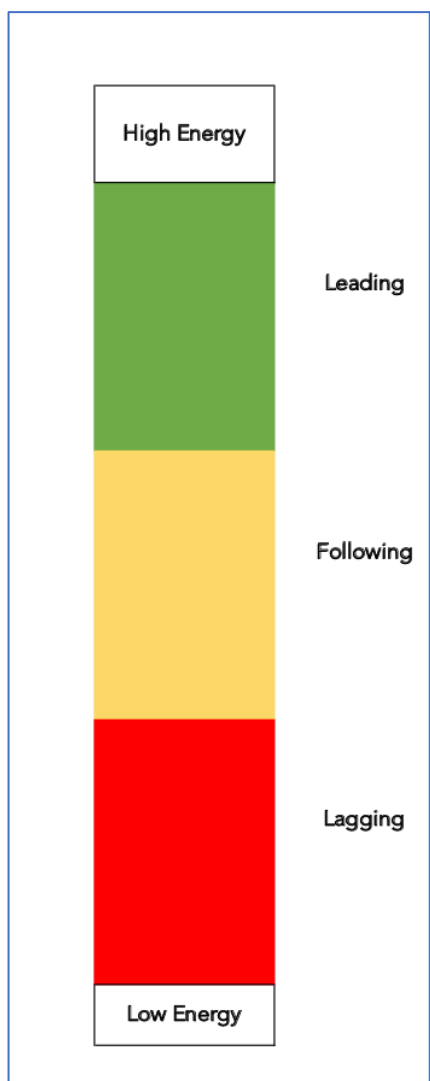# Is Your Organization Ready to Innovate?

Four Elements of Organizational Culture Essential to Innovation

Leaders and team members must meet all four conditions and keep improving on them. Research shows that lagging in even one area diminishes the organization's ability to innovate effectively.

High Energy

Leading

Following

Lagging

Low Energy
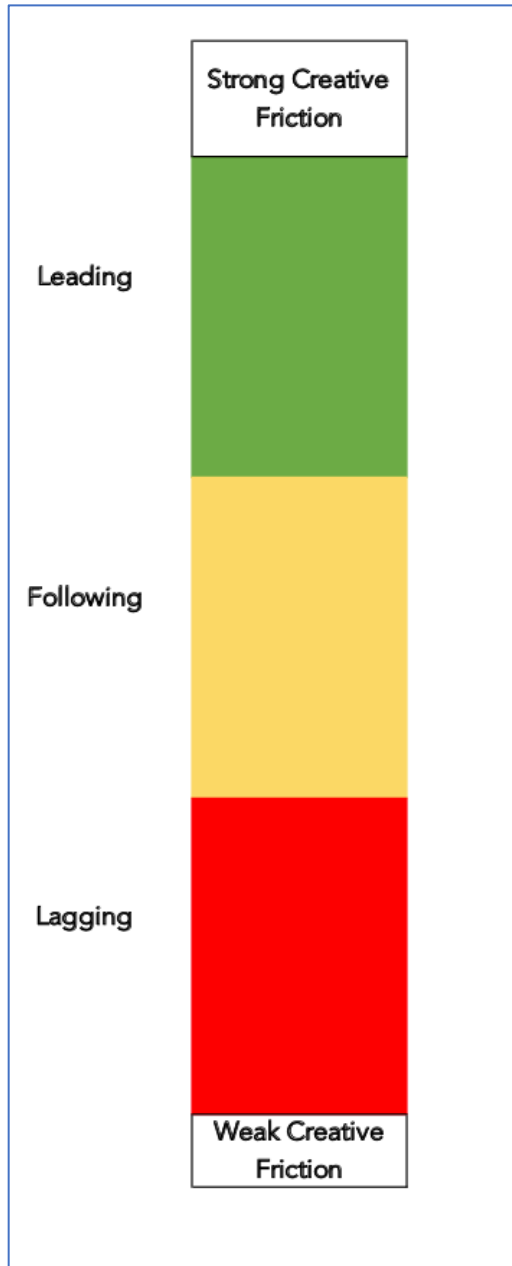
Constant Energy

Why it's important:

Team members who demonstrate constant energy—that is, strong and consistent passion and engagement—are equipped to challenge assumptions, develop new solutions to problems, and persevere in the face of setbacks. When energy is low or sporadic, teams either fail to deliver innovation results or achieve only incremental impact.

Tips for leaders:

- Set high expectations for teams to achieve breakthroughs.
- Convey your own passion for the innovation opportunities that teams pursue.
- Make the team's progress, learning, and success visible to other colleagues.
- Set ambitious timelines to inspire teams to move into action quickly.
- Stay in contact with team members formally and informally from project kickoff to conclusion.

Tips for team members:

- Pursue ideas that excite you personally—and share your enthusiasm with your teammates.
- Tell people outside your team about its progress, learning, and success.
- Approach customer collaboration with a spirit of curiosity and open-mindedness.
- Set regular meetings with project sponsors and reach out informally between status updates.

```
Strong Creative
Friction

Leading          [green]

Following        [yellow]

Lagging          [red]

Weak Creative
Friction
```

Creative Friction

Why it's important:

Cultivating creative friction means enabling rich, frequent interactions between team members. Although phone and digital communication can be useful, face-to-face communication is ideal, because it builds trust. When team members regularly share perspectives and build on one another's thinking, they become more productive collaborators and gain an authentic appreciation for different points of view—and great ideas emerge.

Tips for leaders:

- Co-locate teams to make interaction and idea sharing easy.
- Provide budget for regular face-to-face meetings for teams that aren't co-located.
- Provide attractive and accessible meeting spaces to support creativity—and technological tools to support information sharing.
- Encourage team members to balance formal and informal communication.

- Demonstrate the kind of open, transparent, empathetic communication you want team members to embrace.

Tips for team members:

- Make an effort to meet with team members face-to-face.
- Seek meeting spaces (on- or off-site) that are comfortable, open, and adaptable.
- Use instant messaging, file sharing, and other tools to exchange information and ideas when not face-to-face.
- Occasionally meet with team members informally (over meals or drinks).
- Strive to understand teammates' perspectives and make sure disagreements are about ideas, not personalities.
- Communicate your ideas visually as well as verbally—pictures and mock-ups help bring concepts to life.

Highly Flexible

Leading

Following

Lagging

Very Litle Flexibility
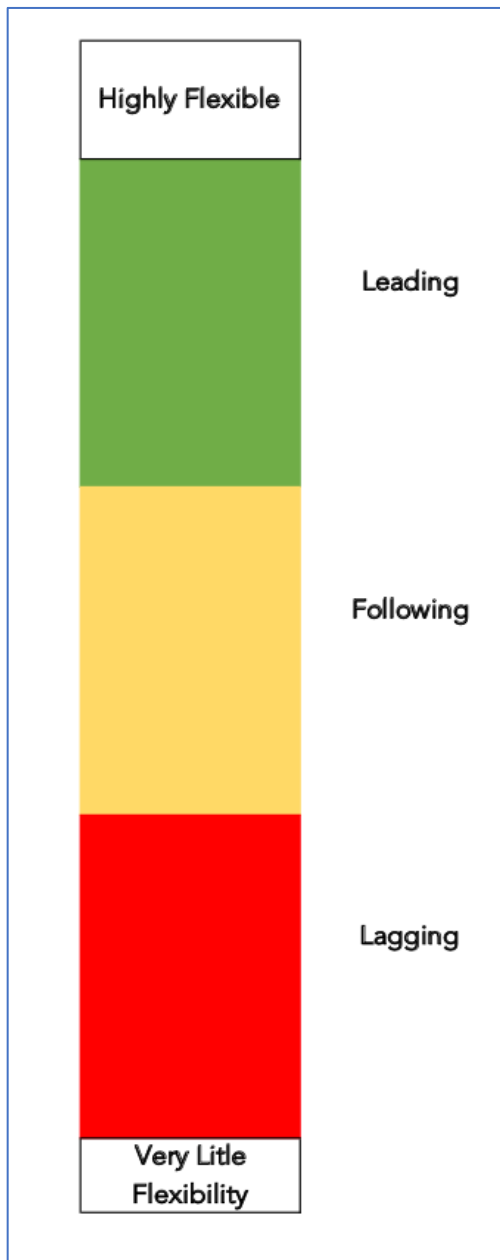
Flexible Structure

Why it's important:

Structure is a balancing act: You want to provide teams with the framework and guardrails to support effective collaboration and manage risk, but it's also critical to remain flexible enough to react quickly to changes in the environment.

Tips for leaders:

- Create small teams of three to six people to enable speed, agility, and accountability.
- Make teams interdisciplinary so that they can explore a broader spectrum of ideas.
- Provide team members with challenges to address, not solutions to implement, and let them decide how to tackle the work.

- Empower members to make decisions within clear boundaries.
- Assign a team leader for efficient decision making, but encourage team members to collaborate as peers.
- Limit to the absolute minimum the need for teams to report out on their progress toward goals.

Tips for team members:

- If the team is too large (more than six people) or doesn't represent multiple functions, ask project sponsors if you can reorganize. (For instance, you might set up smaller subteams that are responsible for specific pieces of a project.)
- Use speed as a guiding principle for your work.
- Commit to innovation objectives, but regularly review and adapt your plans for achieving them.
- Suggest changes to roles and responsibilities to better support goals as the team learns what's needed.

Purposeful Discovery

Why it's important:

Purposeful discovery is the process of designing and conducting experiments that address complex, ambiguous innovation challenges. It involves quickly testing different ideas for meeting customers' needs so that you can learn and adapt.

Tips for leaders:

- Require team members to engage customers directly and early on to develop a deep understanding of their needs.
- Provide budget and resources to build prototypes and mock-ups early in the discovery process.
- Press on any assumptions that haven't been tested with experiments.

Strong Purposeful Discovery

Leading

Following

Lagging

Weak Purposeful Discovery
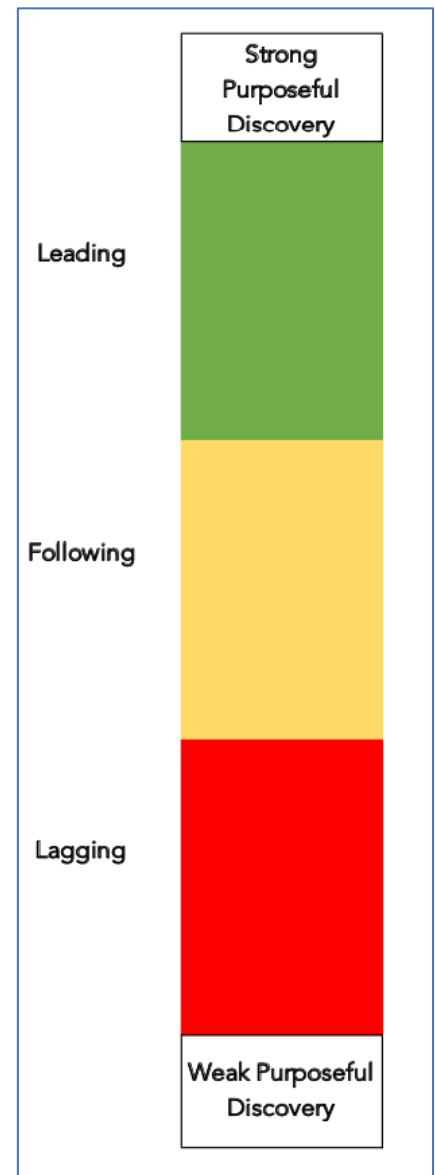
- Communicate and reinforce your support for team members pivoting in different directions on the basis of new insights.

Tips for team members:

- Make customer empathy and understanding a key part of the team's early work.
- Develop visualizations and prototypes—even rough ones—to test ideas with customers.
- State clear hypotheses for how to solve the challenges you seek to address.
- Design tests and simulations that enable you to collect quantitative and qualitative data proving hypotheses true or false.
- Avoid "falling in love" with your ideas too soon; be prepared to pivot according to customer input.

Adapted from: Is Your Company Actually Ready to Innovate? Daniel Dworkin and Markus Spiegel Harvard Business Review; November 06, 2015; https://hbr.org/2015/11/assessment-is-your-company-actually-ready-to-innovate