

3 Innovation leaders and followership

Patricia Macko and Wesley E. Donahue

The fundamental premise of this chapter is that, in order for innovation leaders to lead teams and achieve successful outcomes, they must understand the concepts of followership and team dynamics. This chapter will define followership, identify the different types of followers, and identify the characteristics that make a successful follower. Likewise, it will define the innovation leader-follower dyad, explore theories related to the innovation leader-follower dyad, and examine innovation leader-follower communication perspectives. Readers also will learn the importance of developing an appreciation and understanding of diversity among innovation leaders and their followers.

Description

While much emphasis has been put on leadership attributes when explaining the roles and characteristics of group or team dynamics, another aspect is often overlooked. This unique aspect is followership. Followership refers to a role held by certain individuals in a group or team environment. Followership is often referred to as the reciprocal social process of leadership (Riggio, 2008). The study of followership involves the examination of the nature and impact of followers and following in the leadership process. The leadership process is a term used to describe leadership as a dynamic system involving leaders and followers interacting simultaneously.

Research foundations

Followers play a powerful role in the successes or failures of organizations, groups and teams. Riggio (2008) states that effective followers are individuals who are enthusiastic, intelligent, ambitious, and self-reliant. Team projects allow both innovation leaders and followers to reproduce their existing norms and values through daily interaction thereby legitimizing their innovation leader-follower relationships. As a form of people management, innovation leaders can use active coaching techniques to ensure followers cultivate teamwork and strong communication. Innovation leaders must also give followers accurate and timely feedback so that they feel

valued and show followers that their contribution to the team and to the organization is recognized.

Kelley (1992) summarized behavioral characteristics of four types of followers: alienated, conformist, passive, and exemplary. Alienated followers are mavericks who have a healthy skepticism of the organization. They are capable, but cynical. Conformist followers are the yes people of the organizations. They are very active at doing the organization's work and will actively follow orders. Passive followers rely on leaders to do the thinking for them. They also require constant direction. Exemplary followers are independent, innovative, and willing to question leadership. Kelley (1992) views exemplary followers as critical to organizational success. Exemplary followers know how to work well with other team members and present themselves consistently to all who come into contact with them.

Kelley (1988) described four main qualities of followers. These qualities are: self-management, commitment, competence, and courage. Self-management refers to the ability of group or team members to think critically, control their own actions and to work independently. Commitment refers to the group or team member's ability to be committed to the goal, vision, or cause of the group or team. Competence refers to skills and aptitudes the group or team members hold which are necessary to complete the goals or tasks assigned to the team. Courage refers to the ability of team members to hold steadfast to their beliefs and uphold ethical standards even when faced with dishonest or corrupt leaders. Kelly (1988) also defined two underlying behavioral dimensions for followers. The first behavioral dimension looks at whether or not the team member as an independent, critical thinker. The second dimension refers to whether the team member is active or passive.

There are three leadership theories (see Figure 3.1) that focus on developing the innovation leader-follower dyad including Path-Goal theory, Leader Member Exchange theory, and Diffusion of Innovations theory.

According to House (1975), Path-Goal theory identifies a leader's effectiveness by evaluating a leader's impact on employee motivation, their ability to perform effectively, and their ability to increase employee satisfaction. The major concept of Path-Goal theory is that a leader influences the subordinates' perceptions of their work goals, personal goals, and paths to goal attainment. Innovation leaders, like a trail guide, lead their followers along the path to the goal. The theory suggests that a leader's behavior is motivating or satisfying to the degree that the behavior increases subordinate goal attainment and clarifies the paths to these goals. The first proposition of Path-Goal theory is that leader behavior is acceptable and satisfying to subordinates to the extent that the subordinates see such behavior as either an immediate source of satisfaction or as instrumental to future satisfaction. The second proposition of this theory is that the leader's behavior will be motivational (House, 1975). These motivational behaviors are measured to the extent that (a) such behaviors make the satisfaction of subordinates' needs contingent on effective performance by complementing the environment of

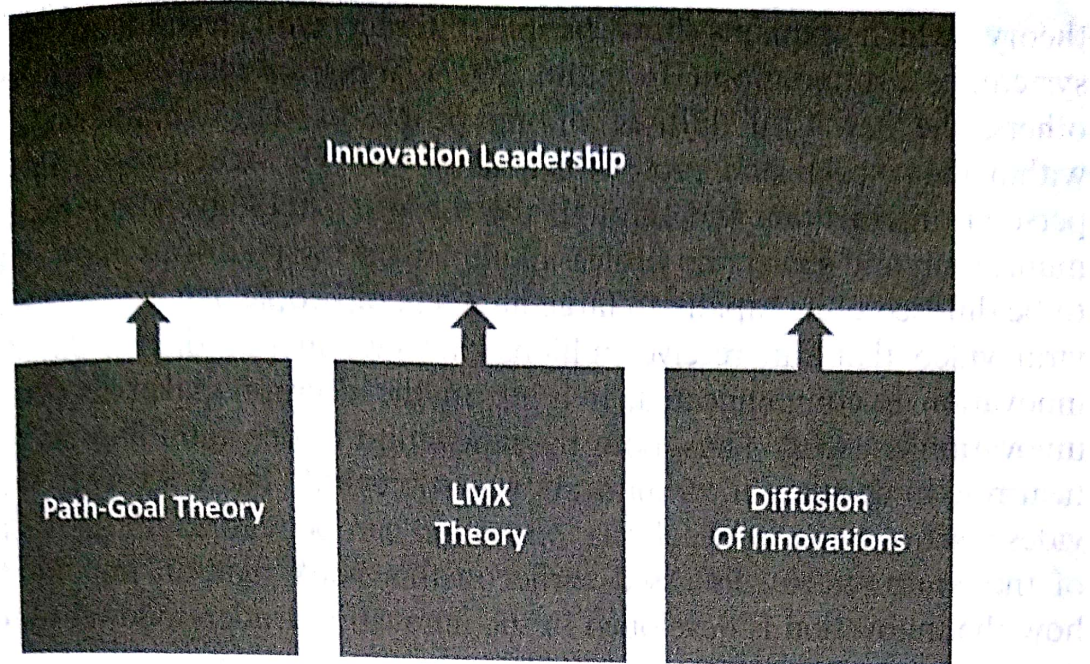


Figure 3.1 Developing the leader–follower dyad with innovation leadership

subordinates and (b) by providing the coaching, guidance, support and rewards necessary for effective performance (House, 1975). These two propositions suggest that the leader’s strategic functions are to enhance subordinates’ motivation to perform, satisfaction with the job, and acceptance of the leader.

The second theory associated with followership is the Leader Member Exchange (LMX) theory. The major concept of LMX theory is that within work units or teams, different types of relationships develop between leaders and followers (Clarke, 2017). These relationships are depicted by the physical and mental effort, material resources, information, and emotional support exchanged between the leader and follower (Zhichao, 2012). LMX theory is a development-focused theory of leadership and employee development is a key source follower motivation. LMX theory is grounded in role theory. Role theory suggests that organizational or team members accomplish their work through roles or sets of behaviors expected of the team members in their positional roles on the team (Broderick, 1998). Role definition tends to occur when team members are assimilated into new positions on the team and involves the leaders having a vested interest in the performance of that team member. An innovation leader can have a significant impact on the role assignment process because the leader has the authority to negotiate roles using formal methods. Thus, when combined with Path-Goal theory, innovation leaders lead followers along the path to the goal and develop them using LMX theory along the way.

The third theory associated with innovation leader–follower dyad is Diffusion of Innovations theory (DOI). This theory explains how an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time and among members of a social system and is based on many different attributes such as diffusion networks, individual influence, and innovation attributes (Rogers, 2003; Wejnert, 2002). To understand DOI, it is important to use socio-technical systems

theory, which explains how people interact with technology in a social system, as a foundation (Hermann, 2007). When an innovation is shared with others, the new idea diffuses among people as they communicate the idea within their social and professional networks. This can happen in live interpersonal interactions and through the use of technology. Many modern communications and social and professional networking platforms allow innovations to be diffused quite rapidly to large numbers of people. An example would be a viral video that can receive millions of views in less than a day. Once the innovation is communicated, it is up to the decision-maker to decide if the innovation is useful. Thus, both the innovation leader and followers play a critical role in deciding if an innovation is successful. The CREATE Model provides a set of steps by which the innovation can be readied for diffusion. Many of the competencies discussed earlier in this book play an important role in how the innovation is developed in the innovation leader-follower dyad.

Application and implementation strategies

A more democratic leadership style may work best when working in a leader-follower dyad (Gastil, 1994). Innovation leaders who possess a democratic leadership style involve followers in setting team guidelines for all to follow, involve followers in setting goals, engage in two-way open communication, facilitate discussion with and amongst followers, solicit input when setting policy and procedures, mediate conflict for team gain, and provide consistent and frequent feedback to followers. Followers bring their individual/internal aspects of their personal internal reality to the team environment. Their internal reality includes attributes such as personal values, attitude, intention and meanings, as well as various experiences. Followers reflect on the 'I' in the team environment as specific relationships. The 'I' is articulated by expressing their intra-personal characteristics such as views, feelings, and intuitions. Innovation leaders must understand that followers differ from one another in many ways. Innovation leaders must find ways to allow each follower to safely bring their own personal attributes to the team environment. This interaction makes up the internal aspects of the innovation leader-follower dyad.

The innovation leader-follower dyad is also made up of an individual's external aspects such as individual knowledge, skills, accountabilities and performance levels. This part of the leader-follower dyad treats followers as catalysts having external aspects which can be measured and defined. Leaders must know how to identify knowledge, competencies and actions of followers in order to achieve the strategic goals of the organization. Leaders must also reinforce desired behaviors of followers such as attendance, following team guidelines, and the ability to bring substantial ideas to innovative team environments (Karaköse, 2011).

In order for both innovation leaders and followers to have successful communication interactions, they must both share critical interpersonal skills with

team members (Mencel, 2016). Innovation leaders and followers must be able to engage in the following interpersonal skills.

- Focus on feelings, emotions and attitudes as they relate to personal needs
- Hold open communication at all times
- Communicate through oral and written correspondence
- Actively listen to leader and other team members
- Make requests for assistance and help when needed

It is important for innovation leaders and followers to build a self-awareness of their interpersonal and social styles. By building this self-awareness, leaders and followers create synergy for the team by learning how to communicate in an effective manner. The concept of synergy will be explored in a later chapter of this book.

When leaders and followers understand each other's social style and individual traits, they have the ability to communicate, listen, react, collaborate, and negotiate in an efficient and effective manner for the good of the entire team. Emotional intelligence (EI), sometimes referred to as emotional quotient (EQ), is the capacity for individuals to recognize their own and other people's emotions (Kunananatt, 2008). The more team members understand about their EI or EQ, the more they can respond the emotional needs of other team members. This understanding helps to guide thinking and leads team members to use appropriate behaviors that will lead to successful team outcomes. Innovation leaders must be aware of the diversity of their followers and how to manage diversity within the team environment. How can innovation leaders do this? First, they need to focus on treating every follower fairly, ethically, and respectfully. Second, leaders need to establish relationships of trust with their followers (Torres, 2012). There are several ways innovation leaders can establish relationships of trust with followers and these are listed below.

- Help followers develop team interaction guidelines.
- Understand how each follower uniquely contributes to the team and recognize their contributions.
- Encourage followers to learn about and respect each other's potentially differing perspectives.
- Show followers that you value their unique individual characteristics and views.
- Assure that you as the leader and all followers treat each other professionally and respectfully at all times.
- Assist followers to build a common focus on the goals of the team.

If a follower does not trust his/her leader, their team will not be able to converse on issues of real significance. Therefore, building trust between innovation leaders and followers is a necessary foundational activity in innovation leadership.

Discussion

Creating and diffusing an innovation requires not only a focus on leadership, but also on followership. Followership is the capacity of individuals to actively follow leaders of innovation initiatives. In order to maximize innovation effectiveness, it is advantageous to have different types of followers as part of initiatives. Researchers have characterized followers in a number of different ways. One way to characterize them is by their behavioral characteristics such as: alienated, conformists, passive, and exemplary. The more innovation leaders increase the knowledge of themselves to and others, the greater their potential for building effective relationships and inspiring innovation (Mencil, 2016).

No matter what follower characteristics are displayed, leaders must recognize that their job is to engage their followers. This requires that leaders create a democratic environment that provides open and honest communication so that followers feel valued and that their contributions to the team and the organization are valued (Gastil, 1994). An effective leader of an innovative organization is inspiring. They make people feel motivated, valued, and excited to innovate on behalf of their organization. Leaders must also be flexible and recognize the value and importance of team diversity and encouraging multiple perspectives. When leaders make their ideas, reasoning, and thinking apparent to others, they build trust over time. As a result, others then become more willing to give them the benefit of the doubt during times when the leader cannot share information.

A leader that values innovation uses trust effectively. A good leader knows that trust goes both ways; you must trust employees to do their jobs well and support the organizational vision and they must be able to trust you to support them, encourage them, and have their back if things go awry (Torres, 2012). Perhaps nothing is more important to the innovation leader-follower relationship than trust. Innovation leaders have a vested interest in helping followers maximize their contributions. They also have a vested interest in providing communication channels for followers to communicate their thoughts and feelings and to inspire others to innovate and to think of better ways to do things.

Summary

This chapter explored the concept of followership and how innovation leaders can be aware of the specific needs of their followers in the innovation leader-follower dyad. The definition, types, and characteristics of followers was explored. Three different theories that are critical to understanding the innovation leader-follower dyad were discussed including Path-Goal theory, Leader Member Exchange theory, and Diffusion of Innovations theory. The chapter continued with a review of different perspectives on leader-follower communication. The chapter concluded with a discussion of how these theories can be applied in organizations.

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or H₂O, is composed of the merger of oxygen and hydrogen. Each element is independent of the another, but when correctly combined atomically, a new substance is formed. The human body provides a good example to understanding synergy. To know how a particular bodily function works, it is necessary to study individual systems and subsystems.

Synergy in the workplace is a complex concept that goes beyond placing random individuals in teams and assigning them a task to complete. Innovation leaders should carefully understand the capabilities of individuals and what they can contribute. If a goal is to climb over a ten-foot high wall, one person alone may not be able to achieve the task. But, two well-coordinated individuals can accomplish the task by one person standing on the shoulders of the other. The key is that they need to work together, be motivated to climb to the top of the wall, and be physically capable. In business, firms merge to create opportunity and increased value that one company alone could not achieve. But, not all attempts to create synergy are successful and can actually detract from a set of goals. For example, if a global organization wishes to merge or develop synergy with a foreign entity and does not consider its culture, the result could be wasted time, energy, and money. Forced intervention by company executives who choose to dominate another company or culture will not ensure synergy. Synergy, therefore, must be carefully managed.

When exploring synergy, innovation, and innovation leadership, it is essential for one to be comfortable in acknowledging what one does not know. Once this becomes internalized and accepted, new learning can be realized and innovations can be developed in innovation network teams. It is important for an innovation leader to ask challenging questions without fear of judgement. In corporate environments, emphasis is commonly placed on individual problem-solving. Synergy in a corporate structure acknowledges what people know and do not know and how they work together to fill in the knowledge gaps in a cooperative, supportive way. If synergy is encouraged, everyone is acknowledged for having worth and every employee can contribute fearlessly. Respect for the individual using a philosophy of personalism is paramount.

Research foundations

Research and literature about synergy and its connection to innovation network teams has origins in sociology, management theory, organizational behavior, psychology, group and intergroup relations, network theory and modeling, and entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship. Early references to synergy, however, are related to religion. As time progressed, literature on synergy was developed in the field of social psychology by the likes of Mazel (1896). His thesis was that society was not developed by the elite members solely, but also by the masses collectively working together to build social systems that benefited everyone. Ward (1918) spoke of social synergy as a struggle between two social political movements that, when combined over

time, formed a constructive social order. Synergy also has roots in systems theory as related to biology, physiology, and medicine particularly with regard to how drugs interact with each other. In Dunglison's (1853) book *Medical Lexicon*, the connectedness between different organs and living systems is made clear. Synergy in nature, as in an innovative corporate environment, relies on individual elements, or people, working cooperatively in an effort to achieve effects that are not otherwise possible (Corning, 2003). Also in nature, the idea of symbiosis is relevant where there is a biological linkage between two different species each depending on one another, creating a system of mutual dependency (de Bary, 1887).

One of the earliest references in the United States of applying the principles of synergy comes from Benjamin Franklin. In Franklin's (1793) autobiography, *The Private Life of the late Benjamin Franklin*, he described founding a group of individuals collectively known as Junto in 1727. Junto, loosely translated, means to join. Harnessing his natural desire for building up his own personal social capital, Franklin populated Junto with people of varying backgrounds and professions for the purpose of learning and improving themselves. The meetings were reported to be positive and cordial and centered on questions that Franklin developed. Present-day Junto organizations exist such as The Junto Institute for Entrepreneurial Leadership in Chicago or CoIN, a web social entity that promotes open collaboration within and outside organizations. These, along with industry coalitions, professional organizations, and cross-functional teams are great examples of innovation network teams. Today, globalization coupled with multiple forms of communication has provided a way for teams to rapidly organize in a seemingly organic way, as in biology, for the purpose of inventing solutions free from the interference of traditional managers.

Considerable literature exists on synergy that relates to psychology and personality theory. To develop synergy, one should focus on achieving a goal with a team altruistically. In our highly competitive, well educated, and fast-paced society, it is common to find employees with aggressive ambition working to move up the corporate ladder by harming people who get in their way. To have synergy, individuals should possess a calling where one believes that what they do for work contributes to a higher good (Wrzesniewski, 2003). This notion has a basis in Goldstein's (1939) work on self-actualized behavior that states that an individual should strive to be the best they can be. Building on Goldstein's (1939) work, Maslow (1943) developed the hierarchy of needs and in doing so described synergy as that which is beneficial for an individual is beneficial for everyone. From this position, Maslow (1943) moved self-actualization into the realm of team decision-making and business synergy.

Innovation leaders should reflect on work as a source of becoming self-actualized. Demonstrating personality traits such as calmness, confidence, and competency can be motivating to team members. Likewise, research has indicated that extrinsic rewards are not always the best source of workplace motivation. Instead, intrinsic rewards, such as making a difference based on

the meaningfulness of what one accomplishes, can carry more weight (Ariely, 2008). Likewise, workplace compensation is often based upon responsibility, so those focusing on intrinsic rewards such as professional development to gain more workplace responsibility may achieve additional extrinsic rewards in the long-term with high performance and opportunity for promotion. People want to contribute, and in doing so, gain personal satisfaction that they can contribute to the common good. Work can be a virtue in itself.

An innovation leader is outgoing, social, and looks to the positive attributes of people while challenging himself or herself to become self-actualized. These behavioral traits set up an environment for learning and problem solving using a non-intervening management approach as defined by Maslow (1943). Synergy, therefore, begins with freeing up restraints about how one may be judged, and working to demonstrate a mutual respect for team members and the talents they possess for solving problems in a cooperative and humanistic setting. Once the stage is set for collective performance, the challenge of achieving positive synergy is well worth the effort. Studies in self-actualization of small business owners who are merchandising-oriented (Lessner, 1974) have been found to be more actualized than craft-oriented entrepreneurs. The networking activities involved in sales professions are social and therefore connecting. Likewise, the role of striving for self-actualization results in a content and productive worker that utilizes all aspects of their capabilities in a positive environment (Shostrom, 1987). Difficulties can arise, however, when attempting to correlate self-actualized workers and organizational performance (Dorer, 2006). Innovation leaders should understand the composition of personalities in an innovation network team. Likewise, team members should learn about themselves. Helping people become their honest self in the workplace by establishing a new working environment centered on effective communication can help to develop the synergy of the innovation network team.

Personality tests such as Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) or other similar tests can be useful tools to help team members understand each other's personalities. The MBTI examines self-understanding and how to understand others based on archetypes developed by Jung (1971) using personality traits such as sensation, intuition, feeling, and thinking. The MBTI should be administered by a trained professional. However, there are many other similar tests that can be freely used based on Jung's (1971) work for self-assessment. Although any personality assessment test can be criticized for producing results that may not be accurate or relevant, they can be helpful as a point of discussion on the synergy of a team. Thus, synergy is about learning characteristics of people that may not be self-evident.

Synergy between organizations is an outgrowth of well-defined intra-organizational structures. As businesses strive to improve their supply chain, culture, technology, and people must connect in a synchronized way to deliver on commitments. Effort needs to be placed on best practices to keep products flowing. Because businesses are typically organized into functional units, the units must communicate and coordinate efforts. Best practices centered

around adaptation, effort incentives, and information can achieve harmony and a degree of synergy (Dessein, 2010). Companies in the process of a merger or acquisition experience more synergy than a single company that is merely growing larger. In order for corporate synergy to work well, careful consideration should be given to whether or not customers can or will continue to do business with the new entity. Likewise, financial conditions should be considered. However, it is the personal interactions that business leaders have with their business partners that can indicate if a merger or acquisition will be successful.

Application and implication strategies

Developing synergy in a team that is driven by the differences of its members (Covey, 2004) can be challenging in an established company in contrast to a start-up where familiarity among team members may have developed organically. Regardless of how or where the team assembled, the reality is that for innovation to occur, it is important for innovation leaders to understand the synergy of their innovation network team. When leading creative people, three elements should be considered: head, heart, and hand. Head is what people know. Do those being considered for team membership have knowledge that is appropriate for and complimentary to their fellow team members? Heart is the passion and spirit one should possess to be energized about the task at hand and the ability to persist in light of setbacks. Hand means to be personally and positively motivated and committed to do what needs to be done. The concepts of head, heart, and hand should be part of the team's long-term strategy. Teams are effective when the members are skilled and emotionally invested.

In the context of organizational behavior and corporate strategy, it is essential for a company and, more specifically, the innovation leader to create a culture of openness, support, and positive communication. Innovation leaders and team members need to be open to possibilities from diverse group members and strive to attract and retain individuals using talent management strategies. Activities that bring employees together help to create and maintain team synergy. Innovation leaders should demonstrate caring behaviors toward their employees and suggest team building activities to build synergy. Group picnics or other kinds of outings help bring employees closer. At Optima Group USA located on the North Shore of Chicago, senior management purchased scooters so employees can travel from the company to scenic Lake Michigan. At Optima, employees are part of the decision-making process. The more successful the team becomes, the more successful individual team members are (Archer, 2006).

One of the most influential and powerful notions that an organization can develop in its employees is a belief in and the ownership of the mission, values, culture, and goals. Understanding and freely agreeing with a company's value proposition is also important. This means that a company's

product or service should create value for the customer. It gives the customer a reason for purchasing the product or service because the organization is delivering the specific benefits the customer is seeking. Thus, customer satisfaction is the source of sustainable value creation. From a marketing and sales perspective, the emphasis is less on the Old Four Ps: Product, Price, Promotion, and Placement, where the focus was on market dominance. Today, the emphasis is instead on the New Four Ps: Purpose, People, Personal, and Perception, where the key question is, does your product offering matter? If employees care and genuinely believe in the value of their work and fully embrace why they are doing it, others will believe so too and buy into the company's culture and what they are offering. One example of this is the rise of the iPhone. Early adopters continue to stand in line for hours to be among the first to own the latest phone even though other companies have developed similar technologies and products.

There are many similarities between the synergies that are supported within individual corporate teams and intra-organizational units. Considering intra-organizational synergy, there are practical guidelines summarized by Hansen (2009).

- Expand the company outward to build and enhance social capital with unfamiliar individuals.
- Choose diversity of talent over hiring people with similar traits.
- Look for people who have longevity with the firm so as to more easily connect with others.
- Build on reciprocity to share and exchange information to build trust.

The focus of each guideline remains the same: listen and strive to satisfy customer wants and needs by knowing what they wish to buy and use technology to target them. Finally, it is also critical to become familiar with Efficient Consumer Response (ECR) as a way of working in harmony with suppliers.

Discussion

Everyone has value. The key for developing synergy in an innovation network team is shifting management thinking from command and control to coordinate and cultivate. In this environment, individuals are more empowered and less encumbered by the presence of varying management levels and bureaucracy. Another benefit of this management approach is improved communication between employees and other group members. A flat organizational structure can contribute to some confusion due to the lack of a controlling hierarchical structure, but these issues are mitigated by placing importance on the work environment, culture, and mission of a company. Flat organizational structures are often evident in universities, internet-based firms, and even Lockheed Martin's Skunkworks. Often, flat organizational structures allow for stronger mentoring relationships among employees and encourage higher

performance because this type of environment encourages self-starters to thrive. However, larger organizations typically do have hierarchical structures that often inhibit the free flow of information. In such an organizational structure, administrators usually confine their interactions to other administrators rarely taking into consideration what line employees think. In such a system, vital links can be missed creating a disassociation from the customer that can have negative effects on corporate profit.

Organizations with flat hierarchies have a shorter chain of command, are more cost effective, promote faster decision-making, invite synergy, but are typically smaller in size. Companies that are organized in small teams with strong synergy have a better chance to be in touch with customers and therefore, remain responsive to their needs. The prerequisites for developing group synergy in a flat organization include: interacting, appreciative understanding, integrating, and implementing (Conner, 2011). This approach also casts a favorable light on external partners and investors who learn that the objectives of a firm are larger than any one person. In a horizontal or flat organization, the notion of ambition is viewed differently than in a hierarchical organization. Likewise, managing growth within a flat organization can be a challenge. The challenges of maintaining the core principals and energy of a start-up require effort, but can be maintained through communication and transparency and having employees fully invested in the company.

Summary

Sourcing from biology, psychology, and organizational management, the notion of synergy has permeated start-ups and larger companies alike. With more companies looking for innovation leaders to support growth in small to medium-sized enterprises, there has been a rise in the number of entrepreneurial programs offered by US colleges and universities. Companies are learning that returning to basics where the customer is central to sustained growth is simply good for business. If corporations pay close attention to issues of employee retention, they may notice that oftentimes key people leave a firm because they want more autonomy and in doing so go on to develop competitive businesses. Many companies have spent considerable sums to acquire a firm that they could have started with their own employees. The challenge for existing companies is to look to their culture to see if they are standing still or moving ahead. Do they have the capacity for change? The speed that business must adapt and the speed with which customers purchase product, particularly via the internet, is astounding. Developing a plan to incorporate synergy into a firm can serve to build a corporate community that is responsive, interconnected, humane, and sustainable.

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