

5. Take turns sharing your individual reactions to each set of photos. Compare the responses of the student whose company pictures were examined with those of the students who were seeing the photos for the first time.
6. Repeat this process using the photos of other students' organizations.

Questions for Discussion

1. For each set of photos examined, how close did the descriptions of members of the class come to the photographers' assessments of their own companies? In other words, how well did the photos capture the culture of the organization as perceived by an "insider"?
2. As a whole, were people more accurate in assessing the culture of companies with which they were already familiar than those they didn't already know? If so, why do you think this occurred?
3. Was there more agreement regarding the cultures of organizations in some types of industries (e.g., manufacturing) than in others (e.g., service)? If so, why do you think this occurred?

Practicing OB

Stimulating a Creative Culture

The president of your organization, a small manufacturing company, has been complaining that sales are stagnant. A key problem, you discover, is that the market for the products your firm makes is fully developed—and frankly, the products themselves are not very exciting. No one seems to care about doing anything innovative. Instead, the employees seem more interested in doing things the way they have always done them.

1. What factors do you suspect are responsible for the way the culture in this organization has been over the years?
2. What do you recommend should be done to enhance the creativity of this company's employees?
3. What could be done to help make the company's products more innovative?

Case in Point

■ Amazon.com: Innovation via the "Two-Pizza Team"

Amazon.com widely is considered the world's best online retail site, the undisputed leader of Internet commerce. Although many e-tailers pulled their plugs during the dot-com bust of the late 1990s, Amazon has become a profitable multibillion-dollar business. The man behind the company's success is its founder and CEO, Jeff Bezos. And his secret to success, he proudly proclaims, is his willingness to innovate.

His secret is simple (to explain, at least)—being willing to take risks. As Bezos put it, "Innovation is part and parcel with going down blind alleys. You can't have one without the other." And at Amazon, being innovative is possible because it's engrained into the culture of the organization. Indeed, the very idea of starting an Internet-based bookstore in 1993 was then as unusual as it is unremarkable today.

To keep innovation going at Amazon, Bezos does several things. First, company officials go out of their way to select people who are interested in being innovative.

Those who are unwilling to take risks or who demand stable working environments "flee Amazon.com in hordes," says Bezos. However, because Amazon is known for its pioneering focus, it also tends to attract individuals who buy into the company's highly innovative orientation.

Second, to keep ideas percolating, managers form teams that introduce and test ideas constantly. And, because the company's only presence is Web-based, it's easy to test ideas without making large investments. For example, it's possible to expose some customers, but not others, to some features or descriptions or prices. Then, comparisons can be made to provide instant feedback on how people behave.

Within the company's Seattle headquarters, these teams that test innovations are called "two-pizza teams." All projects involve only small numbers of people—"small enough that they can be fed on two pizzas," Bezos explains, explaining that six-person teams constitute a good size for getting things done.

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At Amazon, "getting things done" is all about making the best possible experience for customers. Recently, this has taken such popular forms as "inside the book" (which allows guests to the Web site to examine and search through books before purchasing) and various deals that allow customers to have their items shipped free of charge. Both have been wildly successful.

When asked if he considers himself to be an innovator, Bezos readily acknowledges that this description fits him perfectly. "I absolutely think of myself as an innovator," he says, adding that too often "we learn that we can't improve things." However, being innovative means learning that anything can be improved upon. And if Amazon's success is any indication, this clearly is so.

Questions for Discussion

1. As Amazon.com has grown in size over the years, do you think it has become easier or more difficult for innovation to occur? Or do you think that the company's size makes no difference in this regard?
2. What role do you think Jeff Bezos has played in instilling the innovative culture at Amazon.com? How, if at all, do you think he is involved in maintaining an innovative culture?
3. Personally, would you like to work at a highly innovative company like Amazon.com, or would you be among those who leave because you prefer a more stable environment?