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MASTERING INNOVATIVE LEADERSHIP

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PART #1

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Innovation is, in my book, quite simply a fertile union of creativity and leadership. Thus you might say that the term 'innovative leadership' is redundant and all leadership is innovative. That assumes people in leadership roles really are leading, as in visualizing the new and better and moving us in their direction.

Sadly, real world leadership is more prosaic, and less innovative. In fact, in almost every survey ever done on the topic, employees say that their leaders are holding them back, not drawing them ahead, in the quest of innovation. So, there seems to be a need to focus on leaders and their role in innovation, especially at a time when the only thing everyone, at all ends of the political spectrum, agrees upon is that we ought to be innovating our way out of a half-hearted economic recovery.

What, then, is an innovative leader? And, more to the point, how can the many people holding leadership positions begin to tip their weight forward a bit more, and encourage the rest of us to innovate our way out of this economic funk?

Which Side of the Leadership Coin Are You On?

To define an innovative leader, first differentiate between the two basic strategic orientations leaders tend to have. I call them basic orientations because they are expressions of a fundamental personality trait: How conservative or open the leader's personality happens to be. Someone who tends to like stability and tradition has a conservative personality, while someone who likes change, asks lots of questions, and tends to be creative or into exploring is said by psychologists to be open to experience.

It happens that we tend to promote conservative personalities more often than open ones, because they fit our stereotyped notions of who should be our leaders. As a consequence, many of our institutions are not temperamentally very open to new ideas and experiences. On the other hand, entrepreneurs are, by nature, quite innovative and open to experience, so new startups have the opposite personality, at least until they grow and prosper, whereupon the innovator is usually replaced by a more sober, conservative personality, and innovation slows down.

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Can an entrepreneurial, creative innovator learn to create systems and manage large-scale businesses? Sure, some do – the ones who are self-reflective and willing to learn new tricks. Similarly, conservative, stable business executives sometimes manage innovation quite well, but again, they are the ones who recognize when they need to flex their style and push their organizations in new directions.

Which style is your natural one? Does your personality push you toward being maintenance-oriented and a good custodian of successful businesses, or are you more of an innovator by temperament? Here's a simple self-diagnostic you can use to find out (taken from Chapter 3 of *Business Innovation For Dummies*). To identify your basic leadership orientation, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Do I focus on doing things consistently and carefully?
2. Do I find routines boring and dull?
3. Do I take pride in perfecting my skills?
4. Do I get the most enjoyment out of trying new things?
5. Do I insist that employees and team members do things correctly?
6. Do I insist that employees and team members try new approaches?

The following sections explain what your answers to these questions indicate about your leadership orientation.

Maintenance Orientation

If you answered yes to Questions 1, 3, and 5, your default orientation is toward maintenance. You're probably particularly good at keeping a successful business or operation going smoothly and well. However, this maintenance orientation will tend to reduce the amount of creative thinking and experimentation you do, and make it more difficult for you to lead innovation and change. You'll need to make a conscious effort to change your orientation in order to allow innovation to happen.

Innovation Orientation

If you answered yes to Questions 2, 4, and 6, you probably didn't answer yes to the others, because people usually favor one or the other orientation. Your orientation is creative, and your tendency is to look for new ideas and approaches. You ought to find it fairly easy and natural to adopt innovative leadership techniques and to inspire others to become more creative. Your weakness may be in persisting long enough with one idea to bring it fully through development and refine it into a profitable routine.

Mastering Both Orientations

You need to be able to shift your orientation and not be stuck with just one approach. Knowing your basic orientation helps you understand not only your strengths but also your weaknesses.

A maintenance-oriented leader is great at keeping things running smoothly and doesn't get bored with the pursuit of efficiencies during scale-up. However, he may tend to forget about creativity and fail to lead the way to the next big thing. Maintenance only makes sense as long as what you're maintaining is worth it. At some point, you need to trade it in for a new model.

Alexander Hiam is a leading innovation expert and the author of more than 20 books on innovation, marketing and creativity, including *Business Innovation for Dummies* (Wiley, June 2010)

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POTPOURRI

- **President Nominates Barker for Another EEOC Term**

President Obama has nominated Constance S. Barker to another term as Commissioner at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). Ms. Barker has been serving in that capacity since being appointed in 2008 to fill a seat that had been vacant for two years. She is one of two Republican representatives on the Commission. The other is Commissioner Victoria Lipnic. The remaining three Commissioners are all Democrats in keeping with the tradition of having three representatives from the President's political party. They are Chair Jacqueline Berrien and Commissioners Stuart Ishimaru and Chai Feldblum.

- **Census 2010 EEO Special File Availability**

It is now likely that the U.S. Bureau of the Census will not be releasing its EEO Special File based on the U.S. Census 2010 data until 2013 or later. The original target was Fall 2012, but the budget problems in Washington, DC have left everyone wondering if any "noncritical" work will be completed on time. There has been no official announcement to date about the EEO file release. Just don't look for it any time soon. In the mean while, the Census 2000 EEO data file should be used for affirmative action purposes.

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OFCCP RESTORES FUNCTIONAL AAP AUTHORIZATION

On June 28, 2011, Patricia Shiu, OFCCP Director, signed an agency directive restoring the authorization for Functional Affirmative Action Plans, although with some twists in requirements. You can see details of those requirements in the directive at www.dol.gov/ofccp/regs/compliance/directives/dir296.htm.

OFCCP says the new procedures will provide federal contractors the opportunity to organize their AAP establishments along functional lines, as their business is organized. It will still be necessary for contractors to prepare written requests for approval of functional AAPs in advance of their implementation. This time around, there is no automatic approval provision, should OFCCP not act upon the request within 120 days. Positive approval is required. In addition, annual updates must be submitted for OFCCP approval if continuation of the agreement is desired. Each agreement will expire after three years, rather than five as in the old Functional AAP program. Failing to submit an annual update will assure the contractor moves to the head of the line for a compliance evaluation.

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