

Rulkens Rules: Innovation Leadership

10 bold questions to supercharge your innovation engine

In my work with high performance organizations, I have come across 10 common observations which separate the good from the excellent when it comes to innovation leadership. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your organization on each of these items?

1. Is 'doing more' the default answer to 'too much to do?'

Energy is the most precious resource of any organization. In order to focus on the few things that really matter, you have to realize that certain coasts are set apart for shipwrecks. Your ability to strategically quit equals your ability to succeed. When was the last time you fired your worst customers?

2. Does every single executive bring in business?

Business success is driven by nurturing and expanding relations in the outside world. This is an activity not limited to sales, but must be done by every high-paid employee. How much time do your executives spend on internal stuff instead of engaging the external world?

3. Are you playing to win, or playing not to lose?

Are you focused on maintaining the status quo, use legislation to smother competition and reward control? If so, you are playing 'not to lose.' Here is the problem: in the end your clients are attracted to companies which are playing to win. The same is true for top talent. How do you inspire and reward your people to think bold, big and courageous?

4. Do you have committees instead of teams?

A team has the same goal, shares resources and wins or loses together. Think of an airplane crew. A committee might have the same goal, yet does not share resources and can win or lose individually. Innovation and strategy execution often fail because an organization thinks it has teams, yet in reality it has committees. Which role-model examples do you give to inspire your people to show more team behavior?

5. Do you eat your frog every single day?

Eating your frog is a metaphor: it means to start the day doing the things you do not like to do. These are the very things which usually hold you and your organization back from truly creating a high performance organization. What is your frog?

6. Do you have a compelling vision, or are you just seeing things?

A compelling vision is the fuel for any organization. However, a vision means nothing, unless it translates into actual behaviors. For instance a vision of "10% additional EBIT" hardly carries any power. What invigorates people is the question "How will we behave differently if we would work for a company which is able to achieve 10% additional EBIT?" Therefore, which high performance innovation behaviors are you actively driving in your organization?

7. Do you stand out like a tall giraffe, surrounded by tiny field mice in the market place?

Good enough never is. We are moving to a market place which consists of niches and in your niche 'the winner takes all.' First price is a Ferrari. Second price: a set of steak knives. How much growth has come from new clients which were attracted to you spontaneously?

8. Are you building on your organizational strengths, or trying to compensate its weaknesses?

If you focus your energy on compensating your weaknesses, you will end with a large set of strong weaknesses. This is a recipe for mediocrity. What are your organizational strengths? Are your performance systems geared towards leveraging these strengths?

9. Are you focused on success, not perfection?

The market does not need perfect. It often prefers speed over perfection. Speed is the untapped opportunity in many organizations: what would be possible if you could execute every key project in half of the time? What are you doing to improve the clock-speed of your organization?

10. Do you drive innovation or are you simply fixing things?

High performance organizations are always looking for creative ways to make themselves obsolete. This guarantees a consistent focus on innovation and puts you in the drivers' seat. How much of your revenue comes from products or services which you did not have three years ago?

Looking at these 10 questions, **which one improvement would have the biggest impact on the capacity of your organization to take massive action on innovation?**

Next question: **If not you, then who is actually working on this...?**