

Notes from *The New York Times*' New Work Summit

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The topic of innovation is squarely on the agenda of today's corporate decision makers. This was in full display at the recent New York Times' New Work Summit, where we joined a select group of business leaders, engineers and scientists, designers and futurists to discuss the challenges leaders face in transforming their organizations into engines of innovation. Over the course of two days of panel discussions, problem-solving sessions and s'mores by a fire pit, these best practices emerged:



Don't mistake action for transformation. Summit attendees are genuinely struggling with how to move away from a periodic, reactive approach to innovation and instead to undergo a true cultural shift to an innovation-driven workplace. In this environment, "culture hacks" such as limiting the size of PowerPoint decks or regular cross-functional job shadowing, provide a concrete start to moving the organization forward as leaders work toward a realignment of the organization's DNA.

Personalize employee engagement with the "three Ps." The level of enthusiasm and engagement people bring to their work can be attributed to three factors: **pathway** (one's career trajectory), **people** (the community one is a part of) and **purpose** (the sense that one's work has a larger meaning). Everyone places a different weight on each factor—and those weights change over time. Knowing the relative importance of each individual's "Ps" is critical for employee engagement. Talent development, retention strategies and rewards should be designed to leverage this insight.

To drive change, target the swing voters. No organization undergoing a transformation will be able to get everyone on board. Instead, focus on winning over a solid majority by using the law of thirds: One third of your employees will be behind the transformation, one third will be opposed, and one third will be undecided. Use the supporters to evangelize to those still on the fence.

Take time out to think. Managing innovation is hard, and sustaining it requires foreseeing complex problems involving people, culture and the flow of ideas. Even very experienced leaders can benefit from setting aside regular blocks of time to consider the innovation process at a distance and think about questions that don't have immediate answers - such as how the organization's innovation will continue when the current champions are no longer around.

Build diverse teams, not just diverse organizations. Innovation thrives on diversity of thought and experience. But this means that diversity must reach down to the team level. Your metrics may suggest that your organization is diverse—but if most of that diversity is concentrated in one or two departments, the organization as a whole is unlikely to reap diversity's benefits.

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Innovation in the workplace is the result of continual dialogue between people with a wide range of backgrounds and perspectives. The New York Times' New Work Summit showed that leading innovation depends on the leader's ability to create a context where creativity and unconventional thinking become the sustainable norm.

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