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3 Ways to Build a Culture that Embraces New Thinking

By Glenn Llopis

The same advice is given to all newer generations entering the workforce, "Be yourself, disrupt the status quo," but meanwhile, corporations fight that mentality — clinging to status quo, trapping employees in layers of standardization.

How can leaders confront marketplace challenges when they feel crushed and in turn stifle those they lead?

In its 2020 Insurance Outlook, Deloitte spells out many challenges facing the insurance industry. The coming talent gap, digital disruption, global uncertainty and much more.

But Deloitte also makes these points, which get to the heart of what I see in organizations in every industry:

- "Few carriers are debating whether they are being disrupted, both by forces within and outside the industry. Instead, many are beginning to focus on longer-term responses to avoid irrelevance."
- "Will legacy personnel wedded to the way insurers have historically conducted business accept the different attitudes, approaches, and ideas of newcomers, and work together to create the insurer of the future?"

Here's the stark reality: You know you're being disrupted and the risk is irrelevance. There's a clash between newcomers (and their desperately needed new thinking) and those who cling to the old ways.

But new thinking will not prepare you for the future if you don't first create an organization that lets that new thinking thrive. The problem is systemic — old thinking remains entrenched because the organization still rewards it.

You can bring in all the new technology you want, all the great thinkers you can entice, all the best strategists to plot your course. But if you don't dismantle "the way insurers have historically conducted business" — then you're wasting your time.

If it's any consolation, every industry and nearly every organization is facing this. The good news is that there are some concrete steps you can take to make your organization ready for the kind of new thinking you will need in order to thrive.

Give people ways to discover what they solve for.

"What you solve for," is an unusual phrase and certainly not anything the metrics and KPIs from the age of standardization were ever designed to measure or value. It's deeper than a job title or description and not defined by your skills and expertise per se. It's a combination of your interests, capacity and capabilities. It's what you enjoy and consistently think about in a big way. Think about what problems you are typically drawn to, and what kinds of solutions you favor.

Give people methods for collaborating across boundaries.

Now imagine a company structured in such a way that you could constantly map your "solve" to various projects or challenges being tackled throughout the enterprise — no matter the department, the business unit, or the function. What an intriguing and productive way to work.

Give people permission to influence the business in their own way.

One of the most powerful ways to interrupt outdated standards is to question everything you've been measuring as a metric of success. You can say you want change, but if you're still measuring people based

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on the old ways, they'll still operate under the old systems.

I spoke to a sales leader who told me she stopped measuring her team's days by how many sales they closed, and started measuring how many great conversations they had. Her team had a 25% increase in revenues.

But that kind of change requires an organizational culture that allows someone to share an idea and act on it. And, just as important, people have to feel safe enough to risk failure. In an organization that clings to the standards of the past, failure does not feel safe.

If no one takes risks, the organization cannot evolve. If the organization can't evolve, it will become irrelevant. IJ

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