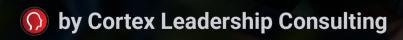# A Leader's Guide to Getting More, Fresh, High Quality Ideas from Their Teams

Executive Summary

This executive summary guide addresses why teams struggle with creative problem solving and provides practical strategies for leaders to foster innovation. Based on research from over 100,000 data points collected across five years, it offers actionable insights to help organizations develop cultures where fresh ideas can flourish.

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Why Teams Aren't Better at Creative Problem Solving

In typical meetings, new ideas often die within seconds. "No. Yes, but. There's no time for that. You need to understand how things work around here." These phrases quickly shut down exactly what 94% of senior leaders say they want more of – fresh, new ideas to solve their biggest challenges.

According to McKinsey & Company, 70% of senior executives believe innovation drives growth, yet 65% lack confidence in their innovation-related decisions. Almost unanimously (94%), executives recognize that people and corporate culture are the most important drivers of innovation.

Micro Interactions Matter

Conversations are key factors in creating high-trust environments where team members willingly share ideas.

Leadership Accountability

Organizational values only create engagement when leaders at all levels are held accountable to practicing them.

Active Curiosity Required

Leaders must actively seek different perspectives from all levels of the organization.

Training and Support

Specific team training and coaching designed to build trust can make almost any team capable of generating higher-quality ideas.

Idea Avoidance: The 58% Problem

The most telling research finding was that 58% of leaders and team members actively avoided generating ideas. People with strengths in ideation were often avoided as well. This avoidance leads to stagnation and loss of competitive advantage.

When ideators are ostracized by team members, innovation becomes almost non-existent except at smaller tactical levels. In some cases, when a leader is strong in idea generation, team members develop a learned helplessness response – expecting the leader to generate all ideas while they simply execute.

Research Methodology

- Observing teams in actual meetings
- Tracking progress through multiple weekly touchpoints
- Mapping communication patterns that drive culture
- Measuring behavioral preferences, motivators, and team strengths

The 4 Strength Zones in Generating and Executing Ideas

Visionaries

People who engage when looking far into the future with a "blank sheet of paper" to develop organizational vision.

Ideators

People who enjoy brainstorming new concepts or methods different from the status quo.

Executors

People who like to get things done, complete projects, and work with urgency to check tasks off lists.

Planners

People who consider what's feasible, quickly eliminating impractical ideas and creating plans for others' visions.

Research shows that in most organizations, planning is the area where people feel safest and most competent. Ideators are outnumbered five to one. Without a clear vision and enough ideas to compare, teams get stuck planning the execution of a single idea, which often fails to produce desired results.

Guidelines for Better Creative Problem Solving

Create Clear Vision

Spend equal time at all organizational levels to create a vision or desired outcome.

Listen Actively

Note concerns from team members without feedback, letting them feel heard and understood.

Encourage Fresh Ideas

Actively seek new ideas from anyone regardless of tenure or role in the organization.

Determine Feasibility

Use planners' strengths to determine the most feasible ideas for reaching the agreed vision.

Gather Feedback

Allow executors to report results and suggest improvements to the team.

Teams observed spending too much time planning before creating a clear vision demonstrated "innovation constipation." Leaders who failed to actively listen to frontline staff often found their plans didn't generate expected results when executed.

4 Main Factors Why Ideas Die in Meetings

New Ideas Seen as Threats

Leaders may perceive new ideas as challenges to their experience and expertise. Many see new methods as threats to their worth, leading to defensive reactions that kill innovation.

The Blame Game Syndrome

"I wasn't really behind that idea" or "Who's idea was that anyway?" This blame-avoidance culture is measurable by how many people are CC'd on every email.

The "Yeah, But" Response

This phrase signals "I heard you, BUT my thought is more important." It kills engagement and warns others they must defend every idea before speaking up.

Disruptive Ideators

People strong in generating ideas who cannot stop during planning sessions become obstructionists themselves when they haven't learned to channel ideas effectively.

Assess Your Ideation Tolerance

- How many new ideas have your leaders considered from team members recently?
- Do consultants work directly with teams to generate ideas?
- What percentage of meetings do people consider a waste of time?
- How many experiments do you support yearly, and how many have failed?
- Do you budget for experimentation time and resources?

3 Ways to Cultivate Ideation in Team Meetings

Simple behavioral changes can make a significant difference in cultivating ideation. When leaders implement these practices, the environment becomes ripe for innovation and team engagement rises.

Praise the effort, not the outcome

Based on Angela Duckworth's research on "grit," praising effort rather than results keeps ideas flowing and encourages persistence.

Stop using "BUT" and start saying "AND"

Replace "Yeah, but" with "Right, I get that you are seeing it that way, AND my perspective is..." Build on comments rather than shutting them down.

Ask for ideas on tough problems

Bring challenging issues to the team, not just tactical items. Engaged teams love solving big problems that will have meaningful impact.

A Culture of Continuous Improvement

Teams that are trained, coached, and supported become successful at ideation that leads to innovative problem solving. When continuous improvement becomes a core value, teams begin seeking feedback and willingly make fundamental changes to daily practices. Leaders must demonstrate responsibility for experimenting with new ideas while holding themselves accountable for results—not whether particular ideas succeed or fail.

A Leader's To-Do List

Foundational changes by leadership teams can quickly increase an organization's ability to innovate through challenges. When leaders commit to these practices, they create a culture of inclusion that triggers team members' best thinking.

Leadership Behaviors to Change

- Replace the "blame game" with assuming good intentions
- Believe in team members' ability to execute greatness
- Schedule time for interactive dialog about systems and processes
- Hold yourself and others accountable for supporting new ideas
- Create and enforce rules of inclusion in meetings
- Embrace new technologies alongside your teams
- Use video for conveying messages on decisions

Modifications to Team Meetings

- Use shared drive software instead of meetings for report-outs
- Hold in-person meetings only when team input is needed
- Build trust by starting and stopping on time
- Use timed rounding to ensure everyone participates
- Only label meetings "interactive" if everyone can provide input
- Keep meetings to 10 people or fewer
- Schedule meetings for specific purposes (planning, ideation, etc.)

The most important part of getting teams to think at their highest level is remembering that you cannot separate the human being from what they do at work. Changing how people treat each other in meetings isn't just the right thing to do—it results in sustainable profits and competitive advantage.