



# An Exploration of Successful Global Entrepreneurial Innovation Leadership Attributes and Behaviors

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This viewpoint paper aims to identify the entrepreneurial leadership behaviors and attributes associated with successful entrepreneurial innovation to guide global business considerations. As designed, the insights covered will lead to the transformation of society and workplaces by applying proven innovation thought leadership. This paper combines a contemporary exploration of the literature on leadership with insights on national culture to develop more nuanced understandings of key entrepreneurial innovation leadership behaviors and attributes within multicultural and national contexts. The literature on entrepreneurial innovation leadership behaviors and attributes underpinned with insights on national culture provides more nuanced understandings of how leaders can appropriately adapt their leadership approach to transform an increasingly diverse and complex workplace and society. This helpful insight that may assist decision-makers in developing innovation leadership and transform global organizations. This paper offers a contemporary review of innovation leadership behaviors and attributes underpinned within a national cultural context.

Key Words: Innovation, Leadership behavior, Leadership attribute, Multicultural

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What is innovation? This question is widely discussed in the literature. According to Berkun (2010), a common understanding is that innovation achieves significant positive change for consumers. The reality is that innovation is dangerous for leaders and organizations to pursue. Organizations desire certainty, success, and efficiency; however, innovation is often the outcome of uncertainty, failure, and inefficiency (Oster, 2008). According to Brown and Katz (2009), an emerging argument is that the world needs innovation that balances the consumers' needs with those of society. Another commonly discussed question within literature is, how does innovation begin? Although unpredictable, innovation is often the result of a combination of hard work, curiosity, the pursuit of wealth, or necessity (Berkun, 2010). Successful organizational

innovation integrates customer desirability, the feasibility of what can be done, and economic validity (Brown & Katz, 2009).

The importance of leadership is evident in literature, although no single standard definition of leadership exists (Northouse, 2016). Modern leaders must be able to operate within and upon an organization to be successful in a fast-changing marketplace. According to a global 2019 survey of executives and managers by McKinsey and Compas, nearly 90 percent of those surveyed indicated that their organization faced current or future skill gaps (Agrawal et al., 2020). Only a third answered that they were prepared to deal with the skill gap. In today's turbulent workplace, leaders are challenged to quickly discern and apply the appropriate leadership attributes and behaviors to bring out the best in others.

Modern organizations are looking to innovate to fuel their growth and, as a result, are facing significant challenges. In a 2020 McKinsey & Company survey of more than 200 executives from different industries, only 21% indicated they believe they have the talent, commitment, and resources to pursue innovation successfully (Bar-Am et al., 2020). According to Berkun (2010), adding to the complexity of the innovation challenge, the technical merits of innovation are not enough. The perceived value, the effort required to transition, the necessary amount of learning, the ease of use, and the visibility of the innovations benefit all moderate if innovation is successful in the marketplace (Berkun, 2010). According to Bartlett (2013), advances in technology have produced a flood of information available to decision-makers that can make or break an organization. Advanced analytics improve information gathering, processing, warehousing, high-volume, and high-speed diverse data sets, keeping organizations from becoming paralyzed by information (Kakatkar et al., 2020).

The entrepreneurial innovation leadership challenge is introducing products to the marketplace that customers will use (Dyson, 2010). Unfortunately, many company's approaches end up missing the mark, and re-purposed uses for products are examples that exist everywhere (Oster, 2008). According to Suarez et al. (2018), organizations often focus heavily on their competition and trying to keep up with numerous advances in technology and, as a result, fail to imagine new possibilities. The sheer speed of the marketplace challenges leaders and organizations. In flat organizations, pinch points are created, leaving leaders feeling overwhelmed and overworked. Innovation takes time (Oster, 2008). Leaders need to be directly involved in observing customer interactions with innovation rather than outsourcing this essential step to save time (Brown & Kätz, 2009).

Some authors are raising the question, does innovation always create a benefit? The answer to the question of the benefit depends on the definition used. Historically the goal of a corporation has been one-sidedly to build shareholder value. According to Brown and Kätz (2009), this one-sided focus and prevailing efficiency mindset produced a western society based on commercialism. Efficiency thinking has fed the

demand for low-cost products leading to tremendous waste and other socio-economic challenges raising concerns. Recently the Business Roundtable made up of the CEOs of the largest corporations redefined the purpose of a corporation. Delivering value to consumers, investing in employees, dealing fairly with suppliers, and supporting the communities where corporations operate were added to a corporation's purpose. As long as the definition for innovation is to create significant positive change for both customers and society, innovation always creates a benefit. Even though leaders and organizations face many challenges pursuing innovation, the changing marketplace and the competitive advantage created by innovation is the allure.

### **Key innovation leadership attributes and behaviors**

Today's workplace complexity requires leaders to apply a blended approach to be successful. Generally, the more active transformational leadership behaviors and attributes are the most effective (Sosik & Jung, 2018). Leadership behavior is how a leader responds in an observable and recordable way. A leadership attribute is an innate quality of a leader as described by others. According to the literature, the following are the key leadership attributes and behaviors leaders must consistently exhibit for employees and customers to willingly participate in innovation and development.

#### **Innovation leadership attributes**

A leader's attributes of empathy, learning, and curiosity are essential to innovative leadership (see Table 1). The leader's ability to demonstrate empathy is vital to recognizing consumers' often-unstated needs, desires, and compensatory behaviors (Oster, 2008). According to Thomas and McDonagh (2013), successful innovation needs to meet consumers' explicit and empathetic needs. Although entrepreneurial leaders are viewed by many as determined and resilient, they experience fear of failure (Cacciotti & Hayton, 2015). According to Beswick et al. (2015), acceptance of failure as learning is a fundamental attribute to innovation but challenging to grasp. Most innovative ideas begin with curiosity, and an attribute insatiable curiosity drives a leader to want to understand why (Berkun, 2010; Oster, 2011).

**Table 1:** Key leadership attributes by source

Attribute	Source
Empathy	(Brown, 2009); (Oster, 2009)
Learning	(Beswick et al., 2015); (Oster, 2011)
Curiosity	(Berkun, 2010); (Oster, 2011)

**Innovation leadership behaviors**

There are numerous behaviors involved in every successful innovation (Berkun, 2010). The key innovation leadership behaviors from literature are listed by source in Table 2. According to Brown and Kätz (2009), innovation involves reflection on the ordinary. In a volatile, fast-paced workplace, the behavior of reflection is vital. In four studies using diverse populations, researchers created and validated the Innovative Behaviors Inventory (IBI) and the Innovation Support Inventory (ISI) consisting of individual innovation behaviors and contextual organizational and cultural support behaviors for innovation leadership (Lukes & Stephan, 2017). According to Lukes and Stephan (2017), innovative behavior is complicated and influenced by contextual factors. Getting others to ideate and think in new ways involves the leadership to display intellectual stimulation behaviors (Sosik & Jung, 2018). Intellectual stimulation behaviors involve rational thinking, creativity, and the freedom to fail (Brown & Kätz, 2009). Empathic observation enables the leader to "see the world through the eyes of others, understand the world through their experiences, and feel the world through their emotions" (Brown & Kätz, 2009, p. 68). Entrepreneurial leaders benefit from applying empathic observation behaviors to identify faint signs of customer's wants and desires (Oster, 2009).

**Table 2:** Key leadership behaviors by source

Behavior	Source
Reflection	(Brown, 2009)
Innovative Behaviors Inventory behaviors: idea generation, idea search, idea communication, implementation starting activities, involving others, overcoming obstacles, and innovation outputs	(Lukes & Stephan, 2017)
Innovation Support Inventory behaviors: motivating employees to create new ideas, financially rewarding good ideas, supporting innovations as soon as possible, and tolerance of errors during innovation implementation	(Lukes & Stephan, 2017)
Intellectual stimulation behaviors: reexamine critical assumptions, seek different perspectives, get others to look at problems from different perspectives, suggest new ways of doing things, encourage non-traditional thinking for traditional problems, and encourage rethinking those ideas never questioned	(Sosik & Jung, 2018)

Empathic observation

(Roberto, 2009)

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**Innovation leadership through a national culture lens**

Diverse and inclusive teams are more innovative than monocultural teams (Nyssen & Deckert, 2021). Additionally, a nation's culture influences both the ability and capacity of leaders and organizations to innovate. According to Nyssen and Deckert (2021), top-down decision-making, deep relationship-based trusting, and fluidly approaching tasks have significant negative influences on innovation. Viewing innovation through a national culture lens reveals potential opportunities and challenges for innovation leadership by country (see Table 3). For example, innovation is challenging within cultures that make top-down decisions because few differing opinions are likely to be raised during decision-making. The groundbreaking Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) project identified that India has a hierarchical power distance orientation and, conversely, the United States a more egalitarian direction (GLOBE, 2016). Similarly, based on work at INSEAD, India has a higher top-down deciding culture where the boss usually makes decisions, and conversely, Japan has a more group-based unanimous consensual decision-making approach (Meyer, 2021). These cultural observations are helpful for leaders to understand to appropriately adapt their leadership approach to bring out the best in their employees and customers based on their culture.

**Table 3:** *National culture examples with innovation challenge and opportunity by culture dimension*

Culture dimension	National culture innovation challenge	National culture innovation opportunity
Top-down deciding	India, Nigeria, Thailand	Denmark, Japan, Netherlands
Relationship-based trusting	Indonesia, Jordan, Philippines	Canada, Netherlands, United States
Flexible-time scheduling	Botswana, Ethiopia, Kenya,	Germany, Japan, Switzerland

*Note: Culture dimension data adapted from Meyer (2021) and innovation challenge and opportunity classification adapted from Nyssen and Deckert (2021).*

**Conclusion**

Innovation is widely discussed within literature and not all change is innovation. The world needs innovation that balances the needs of individuals and society. The modern

workplace is increasingly diverse and complex. Diverse and inclusive teams are more innovative than monocultural teams. Organizations desire certainty, success, and efficiency and innovation is the outcome of the opposite. Modern organizations are turning to innovation to fuel growth although there is a widely held perception by executives that they lack the talent and commitment to achieve their innovation goals. Key innovation leadership attributes and behaviors include empathy, learning, curiosity, reflection, the Innovative Behaviors Inventory and Innovation Support Inventory behaviors, intellectual stimulation behaviors, and empathic observation. Culture is the one thing that impacts everything and national culture presents innovation challenges and opportunities for leaders and organizations. Top-down decision-making, deep relationship-based trusting, and fluidly approaching tasks have significant negative influences on innovation. The literature on entrepreneurial innovation leadership behaviors and attributes underpinned with insights on national culture provides more nuanced understandings of how leaders can appropriately adapt their leadership approach to transform organizations and society. In the future a more comprehensive literature exploration of innovation leadership attributes and behaviors through the lens of innovation challenges and opportunities by national country culture would further benefit global organizations as they recruit, develop, and retain leaders for a increasingly diverse and complex workforce.

About the Author [left justified, 12 pt., bold]

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Dr. Jeff Doolittle received his Doctorate in Strategic Leadership from Regent University. He has helped business owners and executives of small businesses to global Fortune 50 companies, and his work is taught in university classrooms. Dr. Doolittle is the founder of Organizational Talent Consulting, a premier executive coaching and business consulting firm for leaders and organizations interested in achieving success and significance.

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