

At a meeting I had not long ago with executives at a leading telecommunications firm in India, our discussion turned quickly to innovation. It's the competitive advantage every organization wants, but organizations often don't know how to make it happen. I'm reminded of a cartoon in which a group of frazzled employees sit bound together in their chairs while their boss stands off to the

From the President



side, pumps his fist, and declares: "All right! Be creative!" The firm in India was, fortunately, far more sophisticated about creating innovative, useful products and services year

after year. But even so, executives there worried about keeping their winning streak going. What else did they need to do?

Here was my advice: take a good look at your leadership skills. The truth is that very few executives know how to manage or lead innovation. A survey by *McKinsey Quarterly* found that 70 percent of leaders believe innovation will be a top driver of growth over the next several years. But two-thirds of those executives also admitted to not having a lot of confidence about their decisions regarding innovation. Another survey of global executives uncovered this telling nugget: the quality of leadership in an organization is the most important predictor of innovation performance. At CCL, we recently partnered with the design firm Continuum to launch a new, global program on innovation leadership that we think will help managers and executives to fill this troubling gap in their skills.

In many cases, however, some important underlying issues remain. Organizations often find themselves lacking the leaders they need in key roles and divisions because they do not have a leadership strategy that aligns with their business strategy. In other words, senior executives might flag innovation as a top strategic priority, but they are not making a similarly conscious effort to cultivate in key employees the leadership skills that make innovation possible, such as collaboration. Virtually all business challenges require collaboration among leaders, not simply great individual leadership. It's the lifeblood of innovation. Breakthroughs come from brainstorming, listening, and pooling resources. Yet in many organizations, few leaders are taught the fundamentals of teamwork or rewarded for using them. Not surprisingly, their innovation efforts are likely to stall.

Nurturing and sustaining innovation involves more than strategy and operations. It's also about carefully linking them to our people and organizational cultures. When that happens, we create a vibrant climate for new ideas and build the leadership capacity needed to bring them to life.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John R. Ryan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

John R. Ryan, president and CEO, CCL

Copyright © Jossey-Bass, a Wiley Imprint. All rights reserved.

Reproduction or translation of any part of this work beyond that permitted by Sections 7 or 8 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act without permission of the copyright owner is unlawful. Requests for permission or further information should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030; phone 201/748-6011, fax 201/748-6008, e-mail: permreq@wiley.com