

Mastering the Paradox: Five Unexpected Qualities of Innovation Leaders

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Abstract : Given the paradoxical nature of innovation, we propose that leaders of innovation-centered organizations need certain specific qualities focused on developing higher-order structures, fostering self-organization, and nurturing constructive dissonance and conciliation. Keeping in view the prolific literature on leadership and innovation, we carry out a quantitative study with data collected over a five-year period involving 31 leaders and 209 observers (direct reports, peers, and managers) from across five companies based in the United States. Rather than accepting, as some scholars and practitioners do, that leadership is all-encompassing, we argue that it is specific to a given context, e.g., innovation. We find that leadership is the locus of innovation and that leaders able to effectively lead the innovation agenda demonstrate five specific behaviors and characteristics, namely stewardship, communication, empowerment, creativity, and vision. We demonstrate that the alignment (or misalignment) between a leader's "self view" and "other view" is a tell-tale sign of whether (or not) the leader's organization will succeed at innovation. We propose a scale, iLeadership, and test it psychometrically for assessment of leaders and organizational units charged with innovation.

Keywords : innovation, leadership, innovation leadership, knowledge creation

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