ATLASSIAN

How to Invent the Future

A no-B.S. guide to building a culture of innovation

Innovation is a lot like obscenity: hard to define, but you know it when you see it. Consider, if you will, the Snuggie™. Yes, that humble staple of late-'90s late-night TV commercials. Obviously, the Snuggie did not represent the first time we humans thought to drape fabric over ourselves to stay warm. Nor was this the world's first introduction to polar fleece (or sleeves, for that matter). The Snuggie wasn't so much an invention as it was an iteration. But was it innovative to make a sleeved blanket that you lay across your front instead of wrapping around your back? You bet it was.

Innovation doesn't always manifest as a massive, mind-blowing, net-new project. It might not even be something your customers can see. Innovation can be as simple as a process improvement that paves the way for customer-facing ideas to get out the door faster.

The defining factor isn't whether an idea is the first of its kind or whether it'll have an impact on all of humanity. It's whether an idea is original and useful within your environment. Is it different from what you've done before? Does it solve a problem? Will pursuing it involve some level of risk? If the answers are yes, then you're innovating.

> Failure and invention are inseparable twins. To invent you have to experiment, and if you know in advance that it's going to work, it's not an experiment.
>
> SCOTT GALLOWAY, NYU STERN SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

When you expand your definition to include small-scale improvements, like workflow hacks or selling postage stamps via ATMs, you start to realize that anyone in your organization – from the CEO to the intern who started last week – is a potential source of innovation. And that small shift in mindset comes with big implications.

First, because innovative ideas can come from anywhere, you have to be listening everywhere. The moment you establish an "innovation council", your goose is cooked. Not only is your attention now focused on a handful of blessed individuals, but you've also sent the message that the rest of the company is off the hook. They don't need to bother thinking creatively (and even if they did, they might not feel welcome to voice those thoughts) because, hey: the innovation group has that covered.

In a culture of innovation, listening everywhere means company leaders who have an "open door" policy. It means dedicated time for teams to experiment and chase down whatever wild ideas they've been kicking around. It means open, ad-hoc forums where employees can bounce ideas off one another and share what they've been working on, even if that forum is a simple Slack channel.

An all-hands-on-deck approach to innovation also requires a working environment where creativity can thrive. People have to feel like they're free to collaborate across departments and divisions; share work that's still in progress; ask "dumb" questions; challenge the status quo; take calculated risks; learn from their mistakes without being shamed.

"Feel" is the operative word here. It's not enough to have these freedoms documented in company policies. They have to be demonstrated, too. As a leader, if people observe you encouraging candid feedback and celebrating cross-departmental teamwork, that sets the tone. Every time you do that, somebody out there who witnesses it will discover the confidence they need to bring a fresh idea forward.

With that in mind, the first section of this guide focuses on the fundamental work of creating an open culture, which is a prerequisite for building a culture of innovation. In the second section, we'll detail tactical ways to operationalize innovation on a small and large scale. Finally, we'll leave you with helpful templates and thought exercises to share with your teams.

Ready? Let's do this!

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01

A WORKPLACE WHERE CREATIVITY THRIVES

THREE MYTHS THAT EXPLAIN WHY INNOVATION FAILS

How to stop the lip-service and start making meaningful investments that foster innovative thinking.

Businesses are terrible at innovating. Sure, recruiters promise innovative jobs, companies claim to sell innovative merchandise, and shareholders rave about innovation. But most of these promises are hollow. (And deep down, we all know it.)

That spells trouble for anyone competing in a well-established market space. You can't be a little bit different or a little bit better. You have to stand head-and-shoulders above the crowd. And that requires a metric ton of creative thinking – everywhere from the development of your product or service to marketing to customer relations.

It's not that we business leaders don't try. We just can't seem to get out of our own way. To go from being innovation blockers to innovation facilitators we need to change the way we think about people, places, and paraphernalia.

MYTH #1

Only a blessed few have the capacity for innovation

Organizations often buy into the notion that only a handful of the population are pioneers while the rest are followers. Rubbish! Innovation exists in everyone. Sadly, we spend most of our lives so controlled and so fearful of failure that we learn to suppress it.

Innovation is simply (pattern recognition) + (the ability to recognize an opportunity). Patterns occur everywhere in your business, not just at the C-level: from customers' behavior patterns to internal process patterns.

Given this, it makes no sense to control who gets to innovate. Executives bring a wealth of experience, but because they have the most to lose, might hesitate to offer genuinely fresh ideas. Lower-level employees, on the other hand, work on the front lines and interact with customers the most. Their ideas may be the most in tune with what the company needs to move forward.

MYTH #2

Innovation happens in a vacuum

Do you have an innovation room or innovation lab? Are whiteboards, pens, and sticky notes strewn across your office at random? Once upon a time, an organization in the U.K. converted a meeting room next to their CFO's office into an innovation lab. Nobody used it or even dared to go near it. It turns out the CFO would regularly ask those who ventured into the lab "Have you got no actual work to do?"

Investing in helping people learn (e.g., retrospective meetings, reimbursement for outside training, etc.) will do more to foster innovation than an abandoned room with whiteboards. Secondment programs, in which employees spend six months on a different team or in a different office, are another great way to cross-pollinate knowledge and inspire new ideas.

Physical space is rarely what blocks innovation. If innovation only gets lip service, dedicated rooms won't change anything.

MYTH #3

It's all about the swag

Prioritizing innovation doesn't mean putting up posters, handing out "Innov8" mugs, and printing out t-shirts for the Innovation Counsel™ (or committee, or forum, if you prefer). The optics are lovely when the Board of Directors walks through or when candidates are interviewing, yes. But posters and mugs are merely distractions.

Give people time instead of trinkets. It can come in the form of "20% time" for individuals, an innovation week for individual teams, or a company-wide hackathon (more on that in later chapters!). Allow people to think freely and deeply and uninterrupted. Then watch what happens.

That's the thing about massive organizational change: it has a way of choosing you. (And not the other way around.) If you respond by resisting it, you're sunk. But if you choose to embrace it, you've got a fighting chance at navigating it successfully and leading people on a journey they'll think back on as an adventure.

Setting the stage for innovation

Opening up opportunities is the first step towards innovation. Applying the philosophy of openness to all aspects of a business is the next. Great ideas emerge when people engage in open dialogues where they don't have to be afraid to share new, risky ideas. Of course, having employees speak up means nothing if no one hears them, so make sure you're listening.

Transparent information is important, too. Give people visibility into what different departments are working on through tools that make work discoverable and promote information sharing so people can build on each other's efforts instead of duplicating them.

If you're serious about innovation, open up communication and the flow of information between people with different job titles, experiences, and identities. (Side note: Thomas Edison was big on this in his lab, and we got the light bulb out of that, so...) Embrace cognitive diversity. Build a culture that doesn't just say it prioritizes forward-thinking but one that actually invests time and meaningful resources in it.

This way, down the rabbit hole...
Dig deeper into some of the topics mentioned in this article:

- Retrospective meetings
- Secondments
- Thomas Edison and the "Wizards of Menlo Park"

FIRESIDE CHAT

How Atlassian and Amazon enable innovation every day

Innovation is particularly important in the face of changing economic conditions, with many firms scrambling to adapt and stay alive. Other companies, such as Atlassian and Amazon, have been honing their innovation game for years. To uncover how that plays out day-to-day, we brought in the experts: Molly Hellerman, Atlassian's Global Head of Innovation Programs; Mark Schwartz, Enterprise Strategist at Amazon Web Services (AWS); and Stephen Brozovich, AWS's Principal Evangelist for culture and practices. They spoke with our guest moderator, Forrester Research's VP and Principal Analyst, Jeffrey Hammond. (Note: remarks have been edited for clarity.)

Jeffrey

Let's start off with the basics. How do you define innovation and why is it important for companies to think about it?

Stephen

A lot of companies start by figuring out what they can build based on their own capabilities, and then they go look for customers for those products. By contrast, the heart of innovation for Amazon is solving problems for customers. We start with their problem and work backward. And when the solution doesn't exist, we get to go invent it on their behalf.

Molly

We see innovation as unbridled creativity brought to life with the potential to surprise and even fundamentally change the world. So what Amazon is doing is really spot on.

Mark

It's a great way to stimulate discussion and make sure a new idea is the right thing for our customers. So people read these documents and critique them, trying to find ways to make the idea better. As a result, the idea becomes considerably stronger and more appropriate for what the customer really needs.

In terms of timing, we have a bias for action. So if we're looking at a relatively low-risk project, what we call a "two-way door," we try to move quickly and improve the idea once we've started on it. If it's high-risk, a "one-way door" – as in, once you walk through it, you're committed – then we take more care before proceeding.

Jeffrey

So we've talked about working backward and two-way doors. Are there other phrases that bubble up in your innovation process?

Stephen

One of my favorite phrases at Amazon is "unless you know better ones", which encapsulates the whole concept of needing each other in order to make our ideas better. It's not about my idea, per se. I'm putting forward what I know: the data, the conclusions, and the reasons for those conclusions. We do that in a document because it depersonalizes the situation and makes it about the quality of the idea itself.

And this phrase, "unless you know better ones", is an invitation for critique. Those different perspectives we didn't have when we walked into the room are essential ingredients in terms of building the right product for our customers.

Molly

Atlassian has a similar model in that we fall back on our values. One of them is "Be the change you seek", which means that everyone is responsible for innovation. Everyone is responsible for noticing what doesn't feel right and finding ways to change it.

One example of that is ShipIt, our internal hackathon. Employees get to scratch any itch – something that needs to change or could be better. And for 24 hours, they get to work on that with colleagues across the company. Our ITSM solution, Jira Service Management, is actually an output of ShipIt.

Jeffrey

How are each of you maintaining your culture of innovation, even as all your employees are working remotely?

Molly

Atlassian was already globally distributed as an organization prior to the pandemic, and this has been a great opportunity to really lean into distributed work. Fundamentally, we believe that there's a better way of working and we believe that reimagining work will fuel our ability to deliver better products for our customers. We know we'll run into the same obstacles other companies face and can solve for those early, then share our successes and failures. Ultimately, we believe that this approach will allow us to build world-class solutions to effectively support how teams work today and how they'll need to work in the future.

Mark

One thing that we're finding with all of this virtual communication is that a lot of it can be informal, and so you get to know the people you're talking to. It's common to start a conversation with a fair amount of human bonding, and I think the same sorts of water cooler conversations are still happening in our virtual environment.

Molly

The difference is that every conversation is very intentional in a virtual environment. You don't just bump into people. So we do miss out on those moments of happenstance. And that's something we're trying to solve for around innovation. How do we create space for those sparks? We've seen pockets of success and are trying to build on those.

Stephen

I think documents can be a great vehicle for conveying ideas, and we've been using that at Amazon for exactly the purpose you're talking about. You have to be really clear in your writing, so it forces you to organize your thinking. And again, the depersonalization. It's about the validity of the idea, which becomes more apparent when you remove facial expressions and voice inflections, and all you have is the document itself.

The other thing about document culture is that your time zone becomes irrelevant. As you're adding feedback, everybody has the same weight of voice as they respond to the idea in written comments.

Jeffrey

This is a big shift from a meetings-based culture where the biggest voices reign. Would we expect to hear very different types of voices in an asynchronous culture based on writing?

Stephen

Definitely. The voices in the room now have changed because the conversation isn't dominated by those individuals who are centrally located. Everybody is on equal footing now.

Molly

I agree. I'd also add that who is "in the room" becomes trickier when there isn't an actual room. You may unintentionally leave someone out and not get the benefit of their voice. For Atlassian, again, it comes back to values and how they influence your rituals. We have an "open company, no B.S." value. And as a result, there are a lot of documents that are open for people to discover and chime in on. When you have that kind of expectation and a culture that values every employee's voice, then you can create that heightened participation.

Jeffrey

At Forrester, we see businesses that create centralized innovation organizations, and we see businesses that decentralize it. Which model do you follow, and why?

Mark

At Amazon, we have a very decentralized model. This is not to say that innovation can't happen centrally, but we have autonomous teams that are empowered to work directly with customers to understand their needs. And then, as we said before, to innovate on behalf of those customers directly without having to go up through a big management chain to get approval. This is a shortcut for long, difficult processes of vetting innovations. If it's based on customer needs, we know it's something we're going to want to do.

Molly

Atlassian's preferred approach is decentralized because our take is that innovation exists within everyone. And it's my job as a leader to create an environment where Atlassians feel comfortable bringing their ideas forward. A recent manifestation of this innovation mindset is a program we call Point A, which we've developed over the past year and a half. Point A allows Atlassians from any corner of the company to pitch ideas for new products. The best ideas get funded, and one product from our first cohort, Team Central, is now available. It's pretty exciting to look at customer needs, and then bring together the best ideas to meet them.

Jeffrey

So, with all that in mind, where should businesses start if they want to enable innovation?

Mark

A lot of it comes down to what the process is for getting a new idea into at least testing, and maybe into production. Companies surprise themselves when they

actually sit down and see how many people can veto ideas, how many people can say no, what hoops they make people jump through. So, how can you take the waste out of that process? How can you make employees feel empowered rather than make them run through a gauntlet of possible nay-sayers?

Molly

I think the leadership team has to fundamentally believe that innovation is critical to their success. If the leadership does not believe this, it turns into "innovation theater" with inspirational posters and mugs and what-not. And part of believing means that productivity can't be your only measure of success. It's giving people the time and freedom to innovate, knowing that some ideas will fail, and being OK with that. So the question I would ask is: Does your company have a culture that rewards people who challenge the status quo and that celebrates experimentation?

Stephen

Piggybacking on that, it's critical to ask how risk-tolerant you really are. One thing we do at Amazon is to decouple the achievement of specific business outcomes from specific compensation. I'm rewarded based on the work I do, but I have some flexibility as long as what I'm doing is delivering value to the customer. That's the more important thing, not whether I launched a project on time. When we manage toward those types of metrics, we disincentivize people from taking risks. We're, in effect, telling them to paint within the lines.

Molly

Part of that is being OK with failure – almost celebrating failure and showcasing that to some extent. Part of growth, whether for a person, team, or company, is to fail and then quickly find what's the next thing – and the next thing and the next thing – that you want to do.

ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS FOR INNOVATION

If you want creativity to thrive, start by establishing mutual respect, clear goals, and gentle guardrails.

The defining feature of an innovation culture is the belief that innovation is every employee's job, not the domain of a few PhDs or top executives. That belief has to manifest in the way the business operates day-to-day, too. Company leadership has to give people the autonomy to create something new. Failure-while-innovating can't be a punishable offense. In fact, it should be celebrated.

Atlassian's mission to unleash the potential in every team starts at home, helping our own teams unleash their potential to break new ground. Our approach to operationalizing innovation can be summed up in five points:

1. Innovation and creativity exist in everyone (it's just that most of us have learned to suppress it).
2. Diversity of thought, skill, and background is essential for innovation.
3. Innovation can't be forced.
4. People need time and space to let their creative juices flow.
5. All great human achievements are accomplished by teams.

With this philosophical underpinning in mind, let's step through the more tangible ingredients you'll need to create a work environment where innovation can flourish.

Shared values

Structured innovation works differently in every organization depending on your industry, history, local traditions, and rituals. For companies like ours, spread across five continents with most people working from home at least a few days per week, the innovation culture differs a bit from region to region. That's why having a strong set of values is so important for innovation: they are the common foundation tying the culture together.

Note that this is not the same as people who share your interests or are "like you." Emphasizing shared interests just leads to homogeneous teams and homogeneous thinking.

Atlassian incorporates a values interview into our hiring process to ensure all employees are aligned on values, even if our backgrounds and personalities differ. (Which, hopefully, they do.) When it comes to aligning the people you already have, start with your team or department. Lead them through an exercise around discovering or codifying what your collective values are. Ask yourselves where curiosity, innovation, change, and risk tolerance sit in your world. For example, Atlassian's "Be the change you seek" value underpins our desire to challenge the status quo and legitimizes dedicated time for exploring wild ideas.

Multi-part harmony

What do you see when Neil Armstrong steps on the moon for the first time? Not his face. You see his moon suit. The suits for the Apollo 11 mission were created by an unlikely team: a seamstress, a pedigreed engineer, and a manufacturing expert.

The seamstress could explain what the fabric could do, the first engineer could explain what a stainless steel fitting could do, and the manufacturer would conceive a plan to ensure the suit could withstand environmental challenges in space. Bringing these three areas of expertise together was the key to creating a solution for a highly complex problem that nobody had tackled before.

The story of the Apollo 11 moon suits underscore the need for both cognitive diversity and cross-functional collaboration. Bringing people together from different disciplines is straightforward enough, but it's not as if we can magically manufacture diversity of thought on our teams.

However, thanks to a growing body of research, we know that demographically diverse teams tend to generate more creative solutions and stronger outcomes. Experts suspect that this is because demographic diversity acts as a pretty decent proxy for cognitive diversity. So your best bet for achieving multi-part harmony is to have people with a variety of identities, life experiences, and skills on each team.

“Just enough” structure

The idea behind structured innovation is to add a small number of constraints that actually make you more creative. What? Yes. Research shows that we get the most creative when we’re constrained – “necessity is the mother of invention”, and all that.

Teams can build their innovation muscle by making small improvements that are aligned to a theme: how the team works, how the team engages with customers, an opportunity to improve the product or service, etc. Give them space and dedicated time for creative thinking. The constraints of topic and time-limit provide enough freedom to think of wild ideas that would be impossible to implement, along with a sense of urgency around converging on ideas that are feasible.

We’ve seen exercises like this generate ideas that have a direct impact on Atlassian teams. Often, the team identifies a problem that was bound to bite them in the arse eventually, then solves it before it causes any real trouble. Empowering a team to improve their working environment or a part of the product within their sphere of influence moves them from “whinge mode” to “accountable mode”.

Autonomy

“Humans don’t do their best work under conditions of control,” declares best-selling author Daniel Pink. Knowledge work has traditionally been organized the same way factory work is organized, with lots of regimented processes. The idea is to free up employees’ brainpower for work that can’t be standardized. The trouble is that too often, leaders resist giving their teams autonomy over non-standard work, too.

Research Atlassian conducted found that autonomy, mastery, and purpose are strongly correlated with better performance. Giving employees agency over how they get their work done is less efficient than laying out a plan where every task is already prescribed, but more effective for breeding creative thinking in the long run. As Pink laid out in his landmark book “Drive”, tapping into humans’ innate desire for independence boosts employee morale and engagement. And it doesn’t take a genius to figure out that engaged, happy people are the ones most likely to bring novel ideas forward.

Clarity, focus, and guardrails

There's nothing like a crisis for bringing multi-disciplinary groups of people together. Consider the case of the 33 Chilean miners who found themselves trapped 700 meters below ground after a collapse near their worksite in 2010. A crack team of specialists from the mining company, the Chilean government, the Chilean Navy, geological organizations around the globe, and even NASA assembled virtually overnight. They worked around the clock for over two months until every miner was back above ground and reunited with their family.

Fortunately, when most of us engage in cross-disciplinary work the stakes aren't nearly so high. But the clarity of the team's mission gave them the mental freedom to dream up novel approaches to the problem. They also had guardrails in place that helped them make decisions about trade-offs. Everyone on the rescue team understood they needed to optimize for speed and the safety of the miners – even if that meant spending a lot of money or damaging the landscape in the process.

Psychological safety

On the eve of the Constitutional Convention of 1787, the French minister to America wrote his to colleagues in Paris: "What part of the United States would you like to take when it falls apart?" The Articles of Confederation – America's original post-independence document – weren't working thanks to disunity between states, a faltering economy, and active rebellions. The fledgling country needed an overhaul of its core principles.

In creating the U.S. Constitution (a landmark innovation in its own right), the founders applied what we now call psychological safety: a powerful tool that allowed delegates to speak their minds and consider other viewpoints without fear of outside judgment or reprisals. By keeping the Constitutional Convention closed, they created a safe space to work in.

A psychologically safe environment encourages people to voice "wild ideas" and ask "stupid questions" – both of which are seeds of innovation. In today's workplace, psychological safety manifests in a few different ways:

1. Learning from failure instead of punishing it.
2. Fostering a sense of belonging and well-being.
3. Weeding out people who behave like jerks, regardless of how brilliant they are or where they sit on the org chart.

Cognitive diversity + curiosity + freedom + focus = innovation

When you truly build an environment and adopt practices that support a culture of innovation, your teams start to take on the impossible. Your business starts to feel like a laboratory that celebrates experiments, generates new ideas, seeks constant feedback, and nimbly evolves to delight your customers and squash your competitors.

Next time you think “prove it,” say “try it” instead. Open doors to creativity and innovation in your teams. Help them unleash their potential.

This way, down the rabbit hole...
Dig deeper into some of the topics mentioned in this article:

- Interviewing for values alignment
- Autonomy, mastery, and purpose (intrinsic motivation)

CUSTOMER SPOTLIGHT

Laying the groundwork for innovation at ANZ Bank

To stay competitive, ANZ embraced iterative processes and gave decision-making power to individuals at all levels of the org chart.

“ANZ is a proud, 180-year old organization. And the state of banking, internationally, is going through change,” explains Gerard Florian, the bank’s Group Executive for Technology.

For the better part of its history, this venerable financial institution grew its reputation by staying the course. But the tides have shifted in the financial services industry. Today, it’s about speed and flexibility. What works for a time can suddenly not work anymore.

When CEO Shayne Elliott took over in 2016, he saw signs of competition everywhere, mostly from smaller companies with new technology and new ways of operating. To stay competitive, he knew ANZ would have to offer the same level of innovation as their more nimble competitors. That meant embracing iterative processes and constant feedback so they wouldn’t be left in the wakes of these fleeter vessels

Step 1: Ditch your old way of working

At its core, ANZ’s transition centered on moving from bank-driven processes to a way of working driven by customers’ needs. “One of the first things Shayne did was to re-establish our purpose,” recalls Florian. “And that purpose at ANZ is to help share a world where people and communities thrive.” This meant all levels of the business had to be closer to the customer to deliver faster, more useful products.

According to Suresh Sundararajan, Sr. Manager for Global Collaboration and DevOps, their old style of working meant time horizons of months or years: “A year from now, you deliver something that’s actually sub-optimal.” So they stopped polishing products until they were so late that nobody wanted them anymore. Now they focus on shipping early and iterating. “Bringing in agile and integrating the tools really makes for quicker delivery,“ he says.

Step 2: Give power to the people

The shift Elliott wanted required the entire ANZ team to adjust. That didn't mean simply handing down a new rulebook. It meant the new rule was that teams – not executives – would make decisions about what worked best.

"The people responsible for doing the work have the knowledge to make decisions," explains Darren Pratt, Technology Lead for Customer Engagement. "This is about breaking up hierarchical ways of doing things." With leadership backing them up, teams were suddenly free to experiment with new ways of delivering value to their customers.

Step 3: Use the right tools for the job

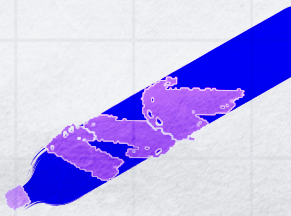
A transformation at this scale eventually requires some technology to support and accelerate that change. "Banks have traditionally been slow-moving organizations," says Alicia Aitken, Head of Investment Management and Delivery. "Using tools like Jira and Confluence where we're not restricting access, and allowing people to look at our work has helped us to do this together en masse."

She notes that having the right toolset feels like the gift that keeps on giving. Information becomes more powerful when it's shared and becomes the entire community's knowledge.

Step 4: Trust in the team

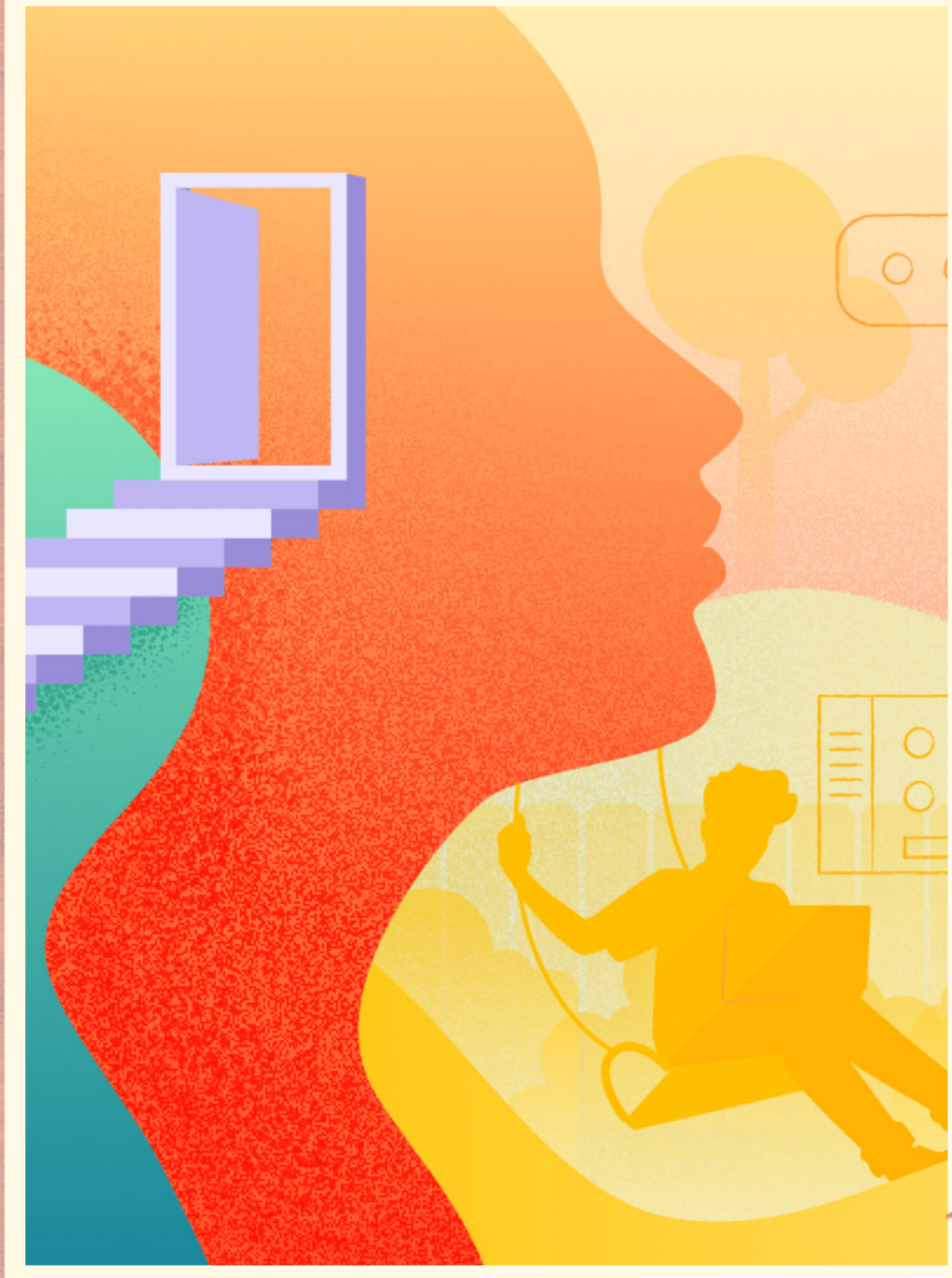
Because Elliott wanted to enable communities and enable ANZ's staff to thrive, he made sure they felt supported as they made changes. This was critical as the way they were working looked quite different quarter to quarter or even month to month. By all accounts, the pace of change scared the bejeezus out of teams half the time, but they pulled through and are stronger for the experience.

As Aitken points out, banks have traditionally been "risk-averse, slow-moving organizations." But if ANZ can change the way their 50,000 employees work, chances are, your company can too.



THE IMPORTANCE OF AN OPEN WORK STYLE

Openness predicts a team's strength and capacity for finding creative solutions.



We surveyed more than 1,000 team members across a range of industries and found that trust and transparency lead to higher achievement. Open teams are effective teams, and teams with an open work style are 60 percent more likely to accomplish bigger goals faster, and 80 percent more likely to report high emotional well-being.

According to our research, teams with high emotional well-being are better able to own their mistakes and learn from them. And 69 percent of high-achieving teams say they give each other candid feedback on a regular basis. In other words, an open work style positions teams and individuals to aim higher, tackler ever-more-complex problems, and find creative new solutions.

What does open work look like, anyway?

1. The freedom to share information and ideas with colleagues
2. Two-way feedback between people and their managers
3. Opportunities to weigh in on decisions
4. Strong interpersonal connections with teammates

An open environment encourages collaboration across teams, with a focus on sharing knowledge and data. Similarly, giving teams agency in how they work together fosters belonging, trust, respect, and connection. This is the kind of environment where the seeds of innovation can begin to germinate.

With such strong incentives, you'd think there would be nothing stopping teams from embracing these practices, right? Well, not quite. Gaps in understanding and perception between leaders and individual contributors are getting in the way for many teams. Managers are not only more likely to see the value in open practices, but they also perceive their teams as more open than individual contributors do.

Consider that 37 percent of managers we talked to say their teams have easy access to the information they need. Only 20 percent of individual contributors agree.

But there's hope.

We analyzed more than 100 specific behaviors to uncover which ones make the biggest difference. We found loads of ways teams can make a significant positive impact on their performance, well-being, and capacity for innovation. Here are a few that ranked highest:

- Making time for dedicated brainstorming sessions with teammates
- Ensuring each team member has a mentor they can reach out to for help or just bounce ideas off of
- Celebrating wins (even small ones) that were scored in novel new ways

And that's good news, regardless of whether your team is struggling or soaring. It means any team can improve their health and performance by shifting the way they work. Small, incremental changes can make a big impact. Long-lasting changes are often born of evolution – not revolution. So don't worry about kicking off a massive "cultural transformation" initiative. It's all about the journey. Enjoy the ride.

This way, down the rabbit hole...
Dig deeper into some of the topics mentioned in this article:

- Atlassian's original research on open work
- Tips for encouraging transparency
- Bridging the perception gap between managers and individual contributors
- 6 behaviors that make teams more effective

CUSTOMER SPOTLIGHT

Transparency in action at HubSpot

With a market cap of $21B and growth that just won't quit, this CRM maker might be onto something.

Transparency within an organization is an essential ingredient for strategic innovation that makes an impact on your business. The easier it is for employees to learn what the company's top priorities are – and, just as importantly, what the company is choosing not to focus on – the better they can connect those priorities to their own roles and imagine new ways to contribute. Transparency also breeds trust, which, in turn, breeds both engagement and personal connections. Taken together, these ripple effects encourage not just creative thinking, but the confidence to share those ideas and work with teammates to bring them to life.

CRM maker HubSpot embraces transparency as a tool to help them scale effectively and to create an environment where employees feel empowered to contribute beyond what's defined in their job description. That's pretty special, but it doesn't have to be as rare as it is today.

Kaite Burke, HubSpot's Chief People Officer, has observed that more and more companies are playing it safe in the culture space. "They try not to offend anyone," she says. "They don't want to step on anyone's toes." While that seems sensible on the surface, the downside is a culture where employees feel they have to play it safe, too. Not exactly a recipe for inspiring bold ideas.

According to Burke, transparency is the cornerstone of HubSpot's culture – and that's by design. "The first reason that we actually believe that transparency is so important is we fundamentally believe that sunlight is the best disinfectant," she says. Transparency, she notes, is easiest when things are going along just fine. But it's most important when times are hard.

“The reason for that is very simple, Burke explains. “Your employees don’t expect perfection. They expect humility. They expect trust, and they expect transparency.” Like Atlassian, HubSpot has set up Confluence to be their go-to platform for open communication. When things go wrong, their leadership team makes sure the company hears directly from them through internal blogs, where employees can then share their thoughts in the comments. “We see their feedback in real-time,” she notes.

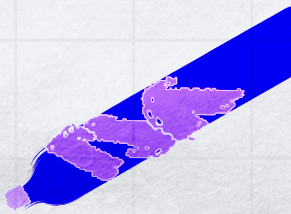
Another reason they embrace transparency is alignment at scale. In most companies, you have to work directly with the executive team to know what their priorities are, or wait for an all-hands meeting to roll around in order to learn about top-level strategy and direction. At HubSpot, that information is available to every person in the organization from their very first day. Instead of putting strategies and plans in Word docs tucked away on a private network drive, HubSpot put it on Confluence pages that are open for anyone to discover, read, and comment on. Rarely do they make pages private.

“The impact of doing this is that, from their first day, everyone knows what our strategy is,” Burke says. They also see what they’re not prioritizing. “As a result,” she continues, “they can focus on core priorities. The very act of posting more [information] allows us to align at scale and not waste time retracting work that is out of line with where we want to go as a company.”

Essentially, transparency unlocks smarter, more strategic innovation. “As we post all these things for people to see, they actually start to think like an owner of the business,” says Burke. “You create more ownership of your own decisions and of the future of the company. Transparency makes your employees better entrepreneurs, which we think is a huge win.”

People at every level of the organization contribute to HubSpot’s culture of openness and free-flowing information. 95 percent of their employees log into Confluence on a regular basis, and 40 percent are contributing content (page, blogs, comments) regularly. That’s a sharp contrast to most companies, where only those at the top have permission – or feel like they have permission – to be part of the conversation.

“One of the best-kept secrets of [our Confluence instance] is that it’s a place where constructive conflict happens at scale almost daily,” she beams. “Many of our most popular posts come from new employees with new perspectives to share. Maybe they don’t get to see our cofounders every day, but they do get an opportunity to engage them in thoughtful debate or discussion early on in their HubSpot career. We want individual contributors and new employees engaging early – getting off the sidelines and into the game.”



Now, you may be thinking that all this sounds well and good... if you're a tech company. Maybe you're in banking or cybersecurity or finance, and think your organization can't afford to be as transparent as HubSpot is. If so, Burke has a message for you: start small

"You don't need to make everything radically transparent to reach the level of transparency that builds trust with your employees," she says. "For example, we share compensation bands, but we don't share individuals' personal compensation."

Being more transparent involves some risks in addition to offering big rewards. Burke recalls when HubSpot was preparing to go public, their CEO wanted to continue sharing performance data like financials and monthly sales with the entire company. Their bankers and lawyers, as you might imagine, thought this was madness.

"Five years later as a public company, we've certainly had instances where employees didn't exercise the best judgment," she admits. "But we also certainly have instances where the upside of sharing all that information has made our employees, our company, our customers, and our partners better.

She also has a challenge for any executive who likes a good thought exercise. "Think about three things you don't currently share with all employees, then think about all the wonderful things that could happen if people had just a bit more information and context for their day-to-day job."

Burke notes that Harvard and MIT, two of the most prestigious and expensive educational institutions, can share their course materials online at no charge, surely any organization can open up in some way. "If they can do that, you can nudge yourself a little be on the transparency spectrum.".

FIRESIDE CHAT

Emerging communication and collaboration trends

To stay competitive, you have to become more agile. That's what three-quarters of respondents told Forrester in a recent survey[1]. Under increasing pressure to introduce new products and services, today's most innovative companies are uncovering creative new ways to use their collaboration and communication tools.

Atlassian recently hosted a session moderated by Forrester's Jeffrey Hammond and including Brian Elliott, VP for Platform at Slack, and Atlassian's own Work Futurist, Dom Price to find out more about the communication and collaboration trends they're seeing out there. (Note: remarks have been edited for clarity.)

Jeffrey

How else have you seen the work environment change as we've transitioned from physical to virtual?

Dom

Remote was something Atlassian thought we knew how to do – before the pandemic, our third-largest office location was "home." We made the mistake of copying and pasting the workweek from the office to home. Then were confused about why work was suddenly very transactional and stressful. We hadn't accounted for how different the working environment was. And that wasn't a technology problem. That was a "ways of working" problem.

So we thought, ok: now we have to innovate. How do we get people and technology working together so we can be creative? How can we do unstructured collaboration in a distributed environment? It's taken a lot of experimentation to get the foundational human behaviors right.

[1] A commissioned survey conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Atlassian, May 2020.

Jeffrey

Is that because you associated creativity with colocation?

Dom

Remote was something Atlassian thought we knew how to do – before the pandemic, our third-largest office location was "home." We made the mistake of copying and pasting the workweek from the office to home. Then were confused about why work was suddenly very transactional and stressful. We hadn't accounted for how different the working environment was. And that wasn't a technology problem. That was a "ways of working" problem.

Brian

I think you can build those muscles to be even stronger. Slack had the same sort of norm everybody else did: the creative innovation stuff needs to happen in an office, at a whiteboard. We got about two months into remote work and noticed we were actually picking up the pace of our product releases because teams were doing things differently.

When you put a blank whiteboard in front of a bunch of people, it can go reasonably well – if you have a good moderator. If you don't (and most people aren't) you can end up with groupthink. You end up with the dominant white guy or the most extroverted person leading the charge while everyone else sits on their hands. In a virtual space, however, it's a more level playing field. People come up with ideas separately, then put them on the table at the same time. And then they have a conversation. It's a net benefit in terms of bringing in more voices.

Jeffrey

It's almost like we forgot how people innovated and created before high rises came into being, you know? But people did.

Dom

We not only forgot, we've become very nostalgic. A senior leader asked me, "How are we going to innovate without a water cooler?" Like, I've been working for 21 years and I have never innovated near a water cooler. I've gossiped and talked about last night's TV, but I've never innovated. I've never created a product at a water cooler.

You have to remember what innovation truly is: the spark of ideas. And to and to Brian's point, an asynchronous world is a more level playing field. Everyone gets to share on their own time and through their own format medium, so it's more inclusive.

Jeffrey

What does the shift to asynchronous entail?

Dom

To be clear, I'm talking about knowledge workers. There's no correlation between time spent at a desk and the brilliant work that they do because they don't need to physically be at a desk to do that work. And if they don't need to be at a desk, then what other constructs can we challenge? How about the nine-to-five construct?

We believe that for complex problem-solving and collaborative teamwork, we should be online at the same time. But there's a huge amount of work, about 50 percent, that is deep work. It could be your tasks, could be thinking time, innovation time, reading time... it's where you are essentially working by yourself. Which means you don't have to be in that nine-to-five window.

So we look for four hours of synchronous overlap within our teams when they work together, and four hours of asynchronous work that you can do whatever you want. If you're a morning person, get up at 5 am, do your pilates, and then get to it. I'm a night owl, so I get my creativity at about 7 pm. So flexibility has allowed me to be more creative. But so many companies are stuck because they're forcibly recreating the office in a virtual world when they don't need to.

Brian

We've done two rounds of research involving 9,000 knowledge workers around the globe, and we've seen the value of flexibility proving out. The benefits are clear in terms of boosting people's productivity, as well as improving the work-life balance, their ability to manage stress. And, if you think about the last year, it also carries extra benefits for certain groups. Parents, particularly mothers, are dealing with child care situations at home, and need that flexibility literally just to be able to deal with life and work at the same time.

We've even structured some of this into how we work. For example, the first round of research we did resulted in a 120-page report. We took a working group of seven people and said, over the course of the next week, take at least

two hours, two hours of heads-down time with all of your notifications off. Go through this and pull out what you think are the three to five most important points. Toss those points into one Google doc. Then we'll come together, everybody will read everyone else's stuff, and we'll talk about it.

Combining asynchronous and synchronous brings in the best of both worlds. You get all the ideas and insights out of people individually. But then you come back as a group and decide what to do with it. If you're thinking about how creativity and innovation happen, it's through those interactions that cut across disciplines. It's when you bring together a researcher, a marketer, a PR specialist, and a business owner, and say, "What are we learning?"

Jeffrey

One of the things I'm hearing here is the technology part is comparatively easy. The tools are there and they can be brought to bear. It's the culture and mindset which are really the biggest impediments to moving forward. Is that right?

Dom

I've often said that a fool with a tool is still a fool. You've just made them faster. Slack is an amplification tool. If you've got bad communication behavior, Slack will make things really noisy. If you first get the behavior right, however, it's super powerful.

We can be more innovative, more diverse, and more inclusive. The thing is, we've got to change a lot of old habits. I think the challenge, particularly for heritage organizations, is not striving to be like Atlassian or Slack, but to build a better vision of their company. I don't think it's an expensive change, but it's a change. And that takes bravery and leadership.

AVOIDING GROUPTHINK AND MAKING SPACE FOR RESPECTFUL DISSENT

Crowdsourcing is great – as long as the crowd doesn't think alike.

For its first 70 or so years, the Seiko watch company relied on technology borrowed from those mighty makers of the world's most trusted timepieces, the Swiss. Sounds like a shortcut to greatness, right? Except that's not how it was working out. By the 1950s, Seiko watches had become so unreliable, they often stopped running ***while being tested***.

They changed their fortunes with a two-pronged approach: first, stop copying the Swiss; and second, put two of their own factories into competition with each other to see which factory could beat the Swiss at their own game.

Making everything from scratch allowed Seiko to innovate from the ground up. Then, bringing the R&D from each factory together, they went from being an industry failure to being a respected watchmaker who still commands an impressive share of the global market. All by changing the way they worked.

The moral of the story is that if you're always following the leader, you'll always be a step behind.

With competitors multiplying like fruit flies on last week's banana, the key to getting and staying ahead is to forge your own path. The trick is to avoid succumbing to groupthink within your company, which will kill your chances of coming up with truly fresh ideas – and slowly kill your business in the process.

Amazon, for example, has a novel approach to fighting groupthink: defaulting to "yes." New ideas tend to need a business case, whereas continuing on the existing path doesn't. And who wants to spend their free time working up a business case? Nobody. That makes it too easy for the status quo to persist, and too hard for new ideas to grow. So managers at Amazon are encouraged to get on board with new ideas right away, rather than hemming and hawing about feasibility. Working out how to make the

idea viable (or abandoning it if they can't) is step two. They essentially have to argue their way out of a "yes" instead of into it.

The corollary to avoiding groupthink is building a culture of respectful dissent. It's not enough for the top brass to have an open-door policy, although that's important for setting the tone. CEOs and individual contributors alike should feel empowered to ask tough questions about what's happening on their team, in their department, and across other areas of the company.

The thought of openly challenging a strategy, an initiative, or deeply ingrained ways of working might make you feel uncomfortable. It might even seem like sacrilege in the context of your company's culture. But small changes add up over time. You don't need a full-blown transformation program to reap the benefits. Start experimenting with these five tactics today and make a habit out of the ones that work for you and your teams.

1: Designate a dissenter

The Wright brothers used to argue profusely, but also turned their differences of opinion into a game. At lunch, they'd swap roles and have to argue for the other brother's point of view.

We can apply this concept to every meeting whose goal is to generate ideas, solve a problem, or make a decision (which, ideally, is all meetings). Assign someone the role of provocateur. Their job is to offer constructive criticism and ask questions like:

- What if this assumption we're making proved false?
- How could that fail?
- Who are the people this wouldn't appeal to, or wouldn't work for?
- Why is now the right time for this idea?

They can also look for flaws in the logic and call out assumptions that should be validated before they're acted on. If you've got a natural cynic sitting at the table, this is a great way to parlay their negativity into a positive force.

2: Build a diverse, balanced team

Atlassian's resident Work Futurist, Dom Price, likes to tell the story of a time he brought an idea to a Monday meeting. He loved that idea. He'd been refining it all weekend. When he raised it with the group, they spent the

next hour tearing it to shreds. But what emerged was an idea that Price liked even better. The group's diversity meant that they saw it from all sorts of angles he hadn't, which uncovered both new opportunities and edge-cases he hadn't considered.

Or consider the story of the airbag. When it was first released, it actually injured average-sized women and children. Why? It was invented by a team of seven men and tested exclusively on men.

One person's edge case is another person's primary use case. But without empathy for the "other," you'll never see them. That's why it's critical for teams to be two-dimensionally diverse: demographically (age, race, etc.) and experientially (military service, multi-lingual, etc.). The more perspectives you can bring to the table, the better your chances of coming up with a breakthrough solution.

3: Embrace your skeptics

You know who your skeptics are – that one guy on your team who's always playing devil's advocate or that particularly contrarian friend. Before getting deep into a project, run the idea past them and ask them to poke holes in it. One of three things will happen: you'll strengthen the idea in ways that account for the faults they find; you'll scrap the idea altogether and turn your attention to something else; or, you'll pursue the idea as-is, but add a plan for responding publicly to critics. Regardless, you win.

4: Disrupt your neuropathways

Group brainstorming is held up as the ultimate way to come up with fresh, innovative ideas. But the longer the group has worked together, the more they think alike. (Not exactly a recipe for ideas that stand out from the crowd.)

Putting constraints on brainstorming counteracts this. Although it sounds counterintuitive, having to work around a constraint forces your brain out of its usual ruts and makes it form new neuropathways. If you need to improve brand recognition, for example, have the group spend five minutes generating brand campaign ideas that use humor. Then five minutes on ideas that play on people's curiosity. Then five minutes on ideas that hinge on rich imagery. And so on.

At the end of each round, have everyone in the room remove any idea they think is only so-so. This not only creates a safe space for dissent but also means you'll be left with only the truly excellent ideas. They'll be few in number, but that's OK. All you really need is one.

5: Talk to your customers

Yep, talking to customers is scary. They're the ultimate dissenting voice. They're also a goldmine of actionable information and insights. Your customers view your product from a variety of different angles and they won't hesitate to be candid about what they like and don't like about your product or service. In fact, they'll probably tell you ten ways they're using it that are wholly different from any use case you ever imagined.

In the future, robots might save us from groupthink

A report from UC Berkeley and Tata Communications notes that in the not-so-distant future, artificial intelligence will help save us from groupthink. Soon, AI may be able to offer contrarian opinions that prompt more meaningful discussions and improve decision-making, or analyze meeting notes and call out where assumptions are being made.

In the meantime, however, we'll have to seek out creative friction the old-fashioned way.

This way, down the rabbit hole...
Dig deeper into some of the topics mentioned in this article:

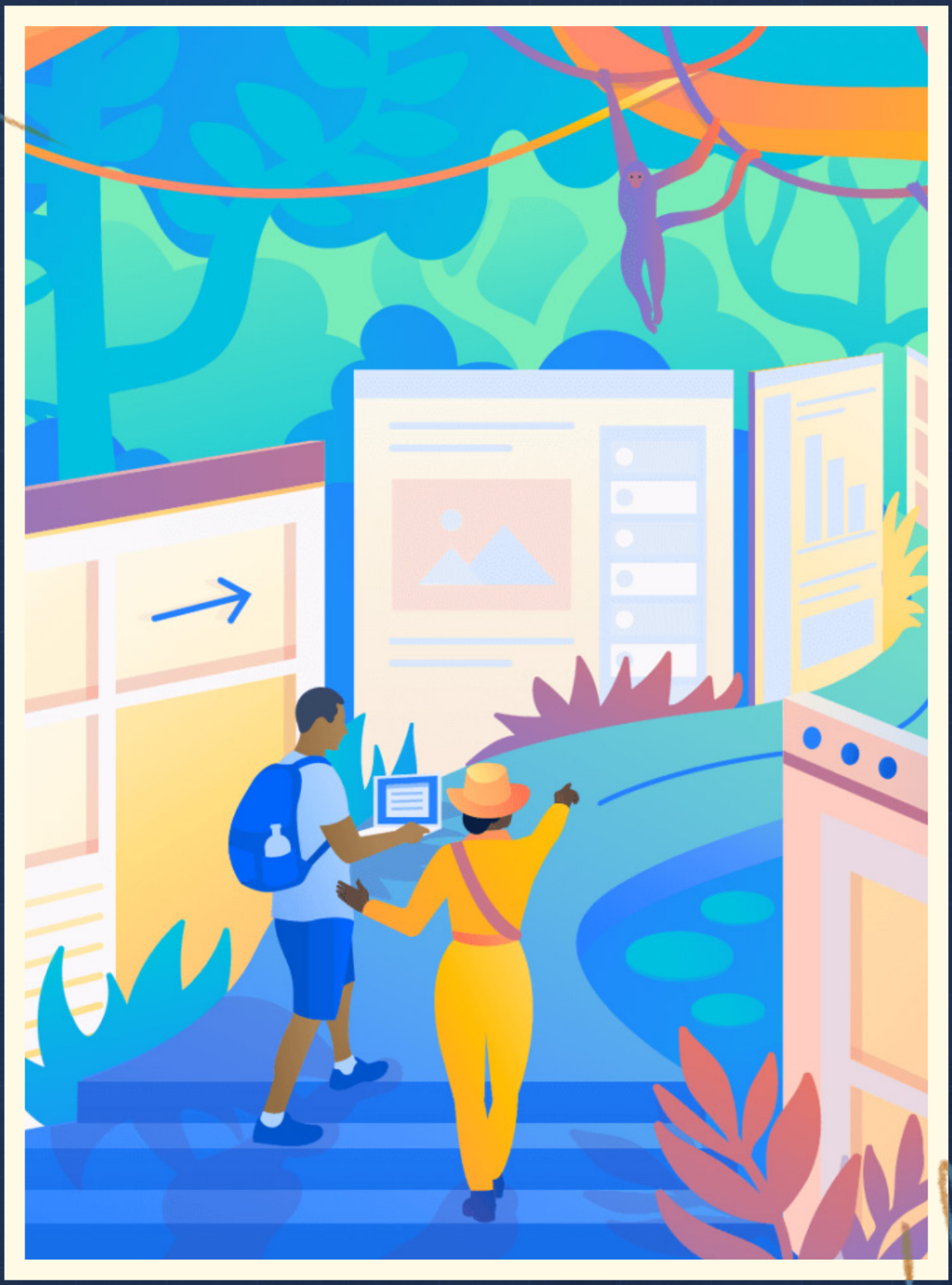
- The DACI framework for decision-making
- Neuro-disruptive brainstorming

02

AN OPERATING MODEL FOR HOME-GROWN INNOVATION

SETTING THE TONE FROM DAY 1

Welcome new employees with an inspiring message on their first day.



New hires are a tragically underappreciated, untapped source of innovative ideas. They ask lots of questions. They don't yet know what they don't know. They're immune to "that's how we've always done it here" thinking because they've only just arrived.

Trouble is, many new hires don't think they have permission to suggest changes or offer radically divergent ideas. And by the time they feel they've earned that right, the moment has already been lost.

A welcome letter sounds like something out of the last century but can actually inspire new hires to do the most innovative work of their lives. Here's a template our Security team has developed over the years, along with the rationale behind each point.

> Dear <name>,
>
> Welcome to the team! I'm so excited you'll be joining us. While your laptop, logins, etc. are being prepared, I want to share a few thoughts as you get ready for your first day here.
>
> We believe in you and know you'll do great things. We don't hire anyone we don't think is going to have a massive impact on the team and the company as a whole. I hope you feel proud of that. That also means our expectations of you are high, and yours should be too. But don't worry: we'll invest in your growth and equip you with the tools to do your best work.

RATIONALE

The goal is to set the bar high and give new employees the confidence to reach for it. Once this has been acknowledged, the question "Is this the best work of your life?" can be used to challenge and inspire. Similarly, "That's exactly why we hired you!" can be used to recognize outstanding performance.

> You're unique, and that's important. Don't hide the things that make you you – take advantage of them. You have different skills, different knowledge, a different background. The way you think about problems shouldn't constrain you, it should fill in the gaps we don't even know we have.

RATIONALE

There's a ton of research out there showing that teams with diverse perspectives and experiences produce better results. If, that is, team members don't feel pressured to downplay the things that make them unique.

> You were hired to help push us forward as a team and as a company. We want you to challenge the status quo and **ask "why?"** a lot. The fact that we've always done it a certain way is the worst possible reason to keep doing it that way. Use your unique talents and experience to suggest improvements and make them real.

RATIONALE

This not only makes the new hire feel safe questioning the status quo, but it also sets that up as something we expect of them. Continuous improvement is especially important as companies grow and face challenges around scaling. What got us here won't get us there.

> We're going to disagree. And that's a good thing! Respectful dissent is a gift. In fact, if we ever stop disagreeing, that should set off alarm bells. Constructive critique and debate are how we grow. They help us make better decisions. Your teammates and I are excited to hear your views.

RATIONALE

When you combine passion with humanity's general aversion to conflict, resentment can build up and that's a recipe for disaster. Plus, having agreed that disagreement is nothing to fear, we can remind ourselves of that mid-disagreement. If you start to notice people saying "Hey, you know we're not required to agree, right?" then you're on the right track.

> You won't like all my decisions. Sometimes I'll make decisions you don't like. Other times, the team will make decisions I don't like. When that happens we'll need to agree to disagree and commit to making the decision as successful as possible. Regardless, you should always understand why a decision was made. If you don't, don't be afraid to ask more questions.

RATIONALE

With all this disagreement going on, there has to be a way to remain productive. Explicitly asking, "Should we disagree and commit?" can halt unproductive discussions and put the focus on moving forward. The danger with this approach is it can become a crutch, and unique viewpoints aren't truly heard. Two questions that can help avoid this are, "Do you feel like you've been heard?" and "Do you understand why?"

> I'm not here to punish you. You're going to make mistakes. I promise I will, too! The only reason your mistakes will upset me is if you don't take ownership and learn from them. You are empowered to take calculated risks, and I will happily back you up on them, even when things don't go the way you thought they would. Your failures are my failures too, but you will always get proper credit for your successes.

RATIONALE

Psychological safety improves engagement, innovation, and general performance. When leaders explicitly call this out and make good on this promise when $#!t hits the fan, people are more likely to act on new ideas.

> All these things I expect of you, you should expect of me. If ever you catch me not practicing what I preach, hold me accountable just as I hold you accwountable. I'm not going to be an effective leader and our team is not going to follow me unless I'm setting the standard.

RATIONALE

As leaders, holding ourselves to the same standard we hold our teams to makes us stronger as a group. It's also just fair play.

> Let's do great things together.
>
> Sincerely,
>
> <your name>

Sure, you could lay everything out during a conversation on their first day. But a letter has some advantages. It gives you time to collect your thoughts and make sure you're expressing them the way you want to. Plus, a conversation would need to wait until their first day – when they also have administrative paperwork and introductions to think about – whereas a letter can be sent in advance so they can absorb everything with a clear head.

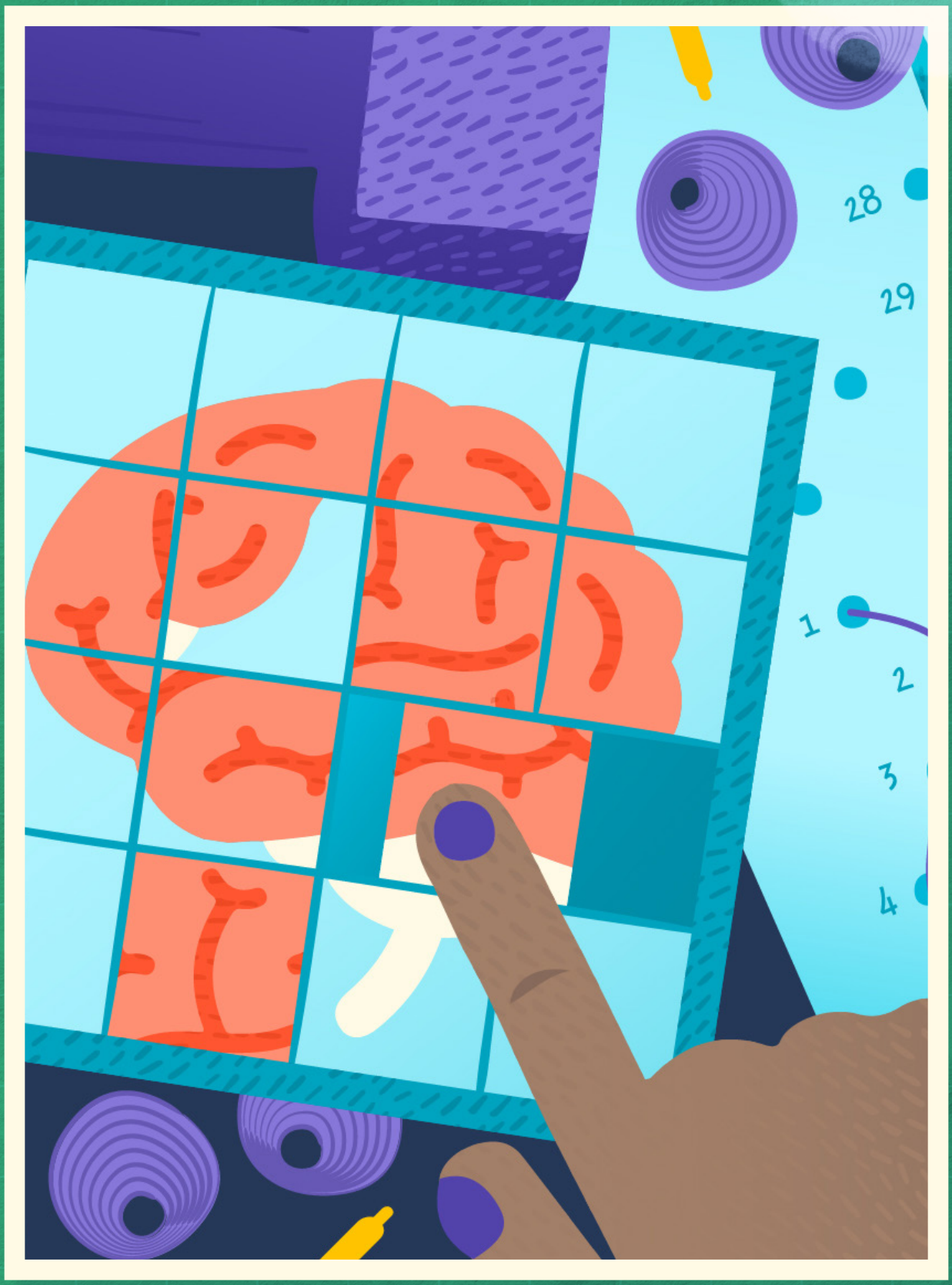
So next time you're welcoming a new team member, give this tactic a try. And make it count.

This way, down the rabbit hole...
Dig deeper into some of the topics mentioned in this article:

- Why it's important to ask "why?"
- Respectful dissent

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS OF OPPORTUNITY

A chance to develop that dream feature, smash your nemesis bug, or maybe just upgrade the racks in the bike room.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Every quarter, we run a 24-hour hackathon called ShipIt, where we drop everything to make something awesome. It embodies our culture of innovation and puts weight behind a sacred company value: "Be the change you seek."

For many companies, innovation is focused on technical teams. At ShipIt, people from every department – from engineering and design to legal and finance – form ad-hoc teams to pitch in on the push for innovation.

Think of ShipIt as 24 hours of unbridled opportunity. People at every level participate, from last week's hires to senior executives and our co-CEOs. And we're all given the same challenge: drop our day-to-day work, identify a problem, and solve it. Projects can be technical or non-technical, of any shape and size, applicable to small teams or to the entire company.

And it's exciting! Teams often pull long hours for the thrill of chasing an idea and collaborating with people they don't work with on a daily basis. ShipIt builds camaraderie across the company and injects creativity into our products, operations, and processes.

From all-night hackathon to quarterly creativity fest

What started as 14 developers arguing over bug fixes in a cramped Sydney office has now evolved into a bona fide global innovation contest, with thousands of Atlassians participating.

The core ShipIt principle remains the same, though. Small teams are formed, often consisting of colleagues who don't usually collaborate, and a specific problem is tackled. "Find what inspires you," say the official instructions. "Develop that dream feature. Smash your nemesis bug. Or, maybe just upgrade racks in the bike room."

At the end of the 24 hours, each team creates a three-minute presentation for their project. Finalists are then chosen by popular vote to compete for a selection of awards, including the coveted Founders' Prize and People's Choice Award.

"It's a quarterly event, and we've just completed our 50th contest," says Philip Braddock, Atlassian's Global Lead for ShipIt. "The basic premise is that you can fix any problem related to the company. It can be customer-facing or internal-facing, and anything is fair game. Once, somebody invented a clever tray to hold your laptop in the restroom, while another time, a team came up with a prototype of Jira Service Desk (now rebranded as Jira Service Management). That was genuinely a ShipIt project, and it went on to become a major revenue-generating product for the company."

Those aren't the only standouts from past ShipIts. Veteran Atlassians talk wistfully of the "Stache Bar" – an empty storage room converted into a stylish speakeasy concealed behind a fake bookcase. Other big successes include ethically-sourced clothing for the Atlassian Foundation and the creation of ex-pat guides for newly transferred Atlassians. As well as all manner of software successes, naturally.

Adapting for the age of distributed teamwork

While the principles behind ShipIt have remained the same since the beginning, the logistics have changed significantly.

A recent study commissioned by Atlassian found that an "innovation drought" is a very real threat for distributed workforces. A separate study from the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton Business School warned of a widespread "innovation deficit" – with potentially company-crushing results.

According to the Atlassian study, a major contributing factor is the dramatic decline in day-to-day organic collaboration since March 2020. Sure, we're jumping on video calls. But what we're missing are the organic encounters made within a physical office space, and that's having a knock-on effect in terms of innovation too.

"Take the lack of chance hallway meetings and watercooler discussions, for example," says Leisa Reichelt, Atlassian's Head of Research and Insights. "These may seem frivolous but there's a feeling these serendipitous moments often lead to innovation opportunities."

“When everyone started working from home, a lot of companies adopted a ‘lift and shift’ approach,” notes Christine Dela Rosa, Atlassian’s Brand Lead for Ways of Working. If a company was doing A, B, and C before the pandemic, they focused on doing A, B, and C remotely. As Dela Rosa explains, Atlassian took a different approach. “We started making changes to our team-building activities, habits, and rituals in order to get to the same results, even if it involved doing D, E, and F.”

According to Braddock, some of the adjustments we’ve made have worked out so well, we’ll keep them even when our offices are open. “ShipIt had to go completely remote, of course, but that means you can now literally join any team in any office anywhere, from the U.S. West Coast to India,” he says. “We’ve now mandated pre-recorded presentations at the end of the 24-hour period too, which makes them better. Plus, it gives us a repository of ideas to go back into and mine in the future.”

Since going remote in the first quarter of 2020, ShipIt has continued to produce a number of genuinely useful prototypes. For example, the Answers Anywhere Chrome extension makes it easier to get help within a browser without switching contexts. Using an extension for Chrome, users can search for answers to frequently asked questions, contribute their own answers, or even open a ticket.

There’s also one of Dela Rosa’s personal favorites from past ShipIts: a nudge bot that tells you when to take breaks. “Without colleagues physically around you, it’s tempting to work longer hours and never take proper breaks,” she says. “This fixes that.” The bot pings you when you’re due to step away from your computer. Although it was built as an extension for Slack, the same idea could easily be incorporated into Atlassian products like Jira or Bitbucket as a value-add for customers.

“The really good technical projects end up on teams’ road maps for future development,” says Braddock. “ShipIt is a cultural strength for us, but it’s also a business strength. It makes cash in the long term because many of these ideas are viable in the marketplace.”

“Even before Covid, innovation was important to Atlassian, because when you stop innovating, you stop growing,” says Dela Rosa. “Covid was another challenge to get through, but we realized that ShipIt wasn’t going to be a part of the problem. In fact, it could actually provide a number of solutions.”

This way, down the rabbit hole...
Dig deeper into some of the topics mentioned in this article:

- Atlassian’s company values
- Reworking work: a global study on the impacts of COVID-19 on collaboration
- Virtual team-building activities

TIP SHEET

7 ways to help your distributed workforce innovate

Use these tactics to support creativity, whether your teams are co-located, remote, or somewhere in between.

1. **Fill your collaborative tool kit**

   Don't limit your team to just Zoom or email. Introduce multiple platforms (like Slack and Trello), so each team can find what suits their communication style best.

2. **Pinpoint and share problems**

   That's the quickest way to focus on innovating solutions. For example, before coming up with the Answers Anywhere extension prototype for Chrome, the ShipIt team was trying to ease the pain point of having to leave an app to search for help.

3. **Create innovation time**

   Google's "20 percent time" and Atlassian's 24-hour ShipIt are successful for a reason. Declare and defend innovation time to give your staff freedom to create.

4. **Embrace asynchronous working**

   Distributed work allows for a wider array of people to contribute: not everybody has to be sitting in the same meeting at the same time. Pre-recorded videos with asynchronous feedback in a Google doc or Confluence page (on a deadline to ensure input) is one way to try this.

5. **Create a safe space to approach leaders**

   A key issue with remote working is that both leaders and employees feel more distant from each other. Creating a safe space to approach superiors with innovative ideas goes a long way toward solving this.

6 Praise liberally

It's hard for people to innovate and produce good work when it seems invisible. Digital pats on the back and public recognition remain just as valuable in a remote workplace. Of course, tangible tokens of appreciation like a gift certificate or an extra afternoon off are always welcome, too.

7 Make work-in-progress more visible

Platforms like Confluence, Google Docs, and Trello can help streamline innovation, alongside digital whiteboarding tools like Miro and Mural.

In an ideal world, we're able to stumble onto colleagues' work in the digital realm just like we catch it out of the corner of our eyes as we pass their desks. This also means resisting the temptation to restrict access to documents unless it's absolutely necessary to keep them locked down for legal, personal privacy, or security reasons.

Remember that great ideas can come from all over the company. Make it easy to find them, share them, and build on them.

CUSTOMER SPOTLIGHT

Innovation weeks at Bright

A bite-sized investment with big-time payoffs.

Twenty-four hour innovation fests are all well and good. But some ideas need more time to germinate and take root. That's why teams at Bright, makers of digital asset management software, do "innovation sprints" (originally pioneered by Google Ventures and also popular among Atlassian's technical teams). Although sprints can be as short as one day, they are typically three to five days of dedicated time for structured creativity.

"Staff break into groups of six to eight for the innovation sprints," says Caroline Collyer, Head of People at Bright. "The whole purpose is to step outside the day-to-day and focus on the innovative."

Innovation sprints predate the coronavirus pandemic, but they've gained momentum since then. "People used to talk over the desk a lot, having little huddles to solve problems," Collyer notes. "This is really a response to that gap in their working lives: the natural innovation that would happen organically."

Because uncertain times encourage risk-averse behavior, they've had to create an environment where people feel comfortable taking calculated risks. According to Collyer, Bright looked to their brand values – inventiveness and supportiveness chief among them. "You want an environment that's biased towards trying new things," she explains. "Leadership needs to genuinely prioritize experimentation."

Bright also runs knowledge-sharing sessions every Thursday, which are great for sowing the seeds that can later grow into products or new practices. There's a school of thought that says artists and other creatives need to be isolated in order to do their best work, but Collyer pushes back on that notion: "I think, especially in a work context, that is wrong. Innovation is a collaborative process. It really thrives on feedback. Innovation doesn't just magically appear, already complete."

With everyone in different physical places, they've adapted the structure of innovation weeks to rely on chat and video rather than in-person collaboration. But the core tenets remain the same. "The values have to be trust and treating people like adults," Collyer insists. "That's going to lead to people feeling safe and lead to creativity."

This way, down the rabbit hole...
Dig deeper into some of the topics mentioned in this article:

· What are sprints?

FROM CONCEPT TO CUSTOMER: HOW TO NAVIGATE INNOVATION'S LAST MILE

Meet Atlassian's new approach to home-grown innovation.

Jira Service Management wasn't built in a day. But its predecessor was. Here's the 30-second version of how it went down.

A small group of engineers and designers noticed how many fields Jira issues tend to have – help desk tickets for the IT team, in particular. They wanted to make issues appear simpler for some users, without losing the granular information other users might need. So when our quarterly 24-hour hackathon rolled around, they banged out an add-on for Jira and named it Viewport. Not only did Viewport win the grand prize that quarter, it grew up to be Jira Service Desk (now rebranded as Jira Service Management). The scrappy little hackathon project is now a multi-million dollar business.

As simple as JSM's story sounds, the reality was anything but. There were a thousand points along the way where things could have gone off the rails, and looking back, it's a minor miracle they didn't.

Hundreds of companies have stories about "innovation labs" that are intended to crank out successes like JSM on repeat. Most also have stories about why their programs failed. Maybe the lab's strategy wasn't aligned with the rest of the business. Maybe it was staffed with the most skilled craftspersons instead of the most creative thinkers. And in any case, bringing an idea to life is one thing. Bringing it to market is a whole other story.

While growing your product portfolio through acquisitions is a proven strategy (one that Atlassian has employed several times), innovating from within is still a critical capability. Like a nation's energy policy, you need to generate your own growth: market conditions may not allow other options, and investors take a dim view of companies that appear to lose their creative streak. Plus, a steady cadence of exciting new opportunities is key to retaining your most inventive employees.

The trick is to develop a repeatable process for taking new products from concept to customer, which is what Point A by Atlassian is all about. Incorporating lessons learned from other organizations, we set out to establish a program that gives teams the tools and resources needed to validate new ideas and bring them to market, with an eye towards rapid iteration and incremental investment. One year on, with 35 projects under our

belts – four of which will soon be launching as new products – we believe it's a model that companies in many different industries can learn from

Guiding principles for a grassroots innovation program

To be a 50- or 100-year company, you have to invest in new products. As the core business matures, you need new revenue streams to stay viable and new career paths for your team. Outside your walls, customers' needs are changing and the very nature of work itself is evolving. If you're not building for the future, you'll soon be a thing of the past.

With existing company-wide programs like ShipIt, our quarterly hackathon, and individual teams running ad-hoc "innovation weeks," Atlassian has a stockpile of cool ideas and prototypes. The business of turning them into sellable products and getting them out the door is where we were struggling. "The point of the Point A is to smooth the path in that last mile," says Steve Goldsmith, Head of Product Management. So to streamline the process, we established three guiding principles.

1. **100 percent home-grown** – Product acquisitions and entrepreneur-in-residence programs both have their place. But this isn't it.
2. **New products only** – Features and add-ons are too small. This program is strictly for product ideas that are so big, they could be their own company.
3. **Be OK with failure** – We expect half of the projects that make it through the exploration phase will fail somewhere in the development phase.

The emphasis on thinking big comes from a desire to rebalance our product portfolio. Before this program, roughly 80 percent of our portfolio was composed of products we're already selling, with the remaining 20 percent being products that were launching soon. That left a gap in terms of visionary products with a longer time horizon. Now we're moving closer to a 70/20/10 ratio.

How the model works, phase by phase

Letting your most creative minds run wild, free from the constraints of red tape and "that's how we've always done it" thinking, sounds great on the surface. But too little structure is a common reason why innovation labs and internal incubators fail. A successful program has guardrails that keep teams focused on specific business outcomes, and regular checkpoints to minimize the risk that resources are being wasted on an idea that isn't viable.

Point A consists of several phases. In the first phase, someone with a good idea (and anybody in the company is eligible to be that "someone") teams up with one to two interested people to explore a problem space and conceptualize a product that addresses it. They'll also seek out an executive sponsor, who will stay with them throughout the process. As the team develops their concept, they ask themselves:

1. Is this aligned with one of the company's strategic priorities?
2. Do we believe this could be a $100 million business in five to seven years?
3. Where do we play and how do we win?

From there, they prepare to pitch their concept to Point A's selection panel: our company founders (and co-CEOs), plus leaders from Product Management, Engineering, PR, Marketing, and Operations. In preparing their pitch, they think through a matrix of questions around product-market fit.

The panel assesses the pitch based on whether the problem is worth solving as well as similar considerations around product/market fit and strategic fit for the business. "Focusing on ideas that can have a massive impact doesn't just tighten the selection criteria for Point A," says Goldsmith. "It also helps us, as R&D leaders, parse which capabilities we should build in-house vs. what we could bring in through an acquisition."

Within two weeks, the panel informs the project team whether they'll be funded through the next phase, along with specific concerns they need to address.

THE ROLE OF THE SPONSOR

Executive sponsors meet with their project teams on a weekly basis to give actionable feedback on the product and guidance on advancing through the process. They also help prepare the team for checkpoints with the selection panel by sparring on the presentation and vetting the product decisions they've made so far.

For the development phase, the team gets an initial allocation of three to six members, whose roles are backfilled using contractors or our internal mobility program. For one of the Point A teams, early members were hand-picked by the project's lead, while others were attracted by internal advertisements. "I was originally interested in a transfer to the Jira team,"

recalls Andrew Freedman, the team's product manager. "But [a VP of engineering] thought I'd be a better fit here. So credit to him for spotting people with the right blend of skills at the right stage."

Teams then spend three months working with customers and building prototypes to prove their idea is viable. During this time, they meet with their executive sponsor regularly and course-correct based on their feedback. At the end of the three months, they present their prototype to the same selection panel. Passing this milestone means they're a "go" for expanding the team and building the product for real, typically with a goal of launching in six months.

At that point, customers have a chance to be part of Point A by participating in the product's beta program. Along with early access to the product, they have the opportunity to give feedback to product managers to help them fine-tune as they prepare for a general availability release.

There are no failures, only opportunities to learn

As of now, a total of 35 projects have come through the Point A program, of which nine were funded. Team Central and Jira Work Management are already in the hands of customers, thanks to their beta programs, with two other Point A products eyeing beta later this year. But even when an idea advances to the final phases, Freedman describes feeling like things could go sideways at any moment as "the default position."

"Because you're operating in such an uncertain environment," he explains, "your frame of what success means and what the launch should look like is constantly changing." The original idea he was working on was intended to be an add-on for Jira before it entered the Point A program. But as the project took shape, the team realized they actually had a stand-alone product on their hands. "That adds six to twelve months of work we hadn't accounted for."

Meanwhile, competitors were entering the market and gaining traction. "And you wonder how far they'll have run in a year while we're still putting our shoes on," Freedman recalls. "The confirmation that your idea is something people will pay money for is really affirming, but it's also alarming when you're the one who'll have to catch up."

Sometimes the competition even comes from within. Steen Andersson, Head of Product Management for Atlassian's teamwork platform and one of Point A's first participants, saw this first-hand. Unbeknownst to him, Trello

was developing its new list view feature, which allows users to see their Trello cards in a way that mimics a spreadsheet.

“We were pitching a new product that was basically the same as that,” he remembers. “We were all disappointed, but nobody was too fussed about it. We were one of the earliest teams to go through the process, so we got to validate that it works and that in itself was a success.”

Innovation that includes everyone

Despite the program’s similarities, both to innovation labs and startup incubators like Y Combinator, Goldsmith is adamant about breaking away from those models. “The easy way to do this,” he says, “is to create sort of a ‘Department of Innovation’ where you have a single leader, and you put a bunch of people in there and tell them to go create some new stuff.”

The trouble with that is two-fold. First, it absolves the rest of the company from having to think about it and may even dissuade people from outside the sanctioned innovation team from bringing their ideas forward. That’s why Point A was designed to be a discovery process – a megaphone for delivering novel solutions to customers.

Second, dedicated labs or teams don’t scale. According to Goldsmith, the real art is in “enabling scalable, distributed innovation that can match or beat the pace of the rest of the company’s growth.” In that sense, the program itself is an innovation.

“To me, that’s the most exciting part”, he says. “Finding a way for everyone in the company to be a part of product innovation is harder, but better in the long run.

This way, down the rabbit hole...
Dig deeper into some of the topics mentioned in this article:

- Atlassian’s terms sheet for mergers and acquisitions
- Tips for giving granular, actionable feedback

03

THE INNOVATOR'S TOOLKIT

TEMPLATE

Customer personas

Understand your target customers and how to meet their needs.

Personas are a valuable tool to help you get to know your customers, as well as how you can meet their needs or solve their problems. With detailed personas in place, everybody has a more consistent overview of your target audience. Plus, you're better equipped to provide empathy and insight when discussing features and product changes. Use this template to outline need-to-know information about your customers and take your marketing to the next level.

How to use this worksheet

Step 1: Cover the nuts and bolts

Give each persona a name and some information about their career: job title, a brief job description, details about their industry, and the company they work for.

Step 2: Outline each persona's demographics

It's probably not going to be a perfect descriptor of every single customer that falls into this bucket, but taking your best guess at these details gives you a more complete picture of who this person is.

Step 3: Align your personas to reality

This section is all about connecting the hypothetical to what's real about your customers. Where did they come from? How did they end up in their current role?

Step 4: Describe what makes them tick

Think through the ins and outs of what drives and frustrates your target customers. How can you help them overcome challenges or achieve their ambitions? Where do they get their information? (That last bit provides clues as to the outlets where you can reach them.)

> **TIP**
>
> You can edit the worksheet right here in this guide, print it, or create a Confluence page using our handy template – get it here.

TEMPLATE

Customer personas

Persona name: _____

Persona role: _____

Job description: _____

Company

Company name
Company size
Industry

Demographic information

Age
Gender
Income
Education level
Residential environment

What makes them tick

Personal quote
Backstory

Professional goals	**Motivators**
•	•
•	•
•	•

Challenges	**Sources of information**
•	•
•	•
•	•

TECHNIQUE

Empathy mapping

Encourage a greater awareness of, and empathy for, your customer personas.

IN-PERSON SETTINGS

- Empathy mapping template (download it here)
- Whiteboard
- Markers
- Timer

VIRTUAL SETTINGS

- Empathy mapping template (download it here)
- Video conferencing tool
- Timer

Instructions

Step 1: Select personas (15 min.)

Select 1-3 personas to explore during the session. They can be closely related, or wildly different. It's up to you to determine what's best suited for your team. Include a link to the personas you've selected and any user research or data you have for everyone to review prior to the session.

Step 2: Set the stage (5 min.)

Explain that your task for the next hour is to immerse yourselves in the target personas. This isn't a tick-the-box exercise you can sleepwalk your way through – really step into their skin and imagine how they feel.

> **TIP: GOOD INTENTIONS**
>
> You're about to share opinions and disagree with each other. Remember it isn't personal. It's about serving your customers better.

Step 3: Demonstrate by doing (5 min.)

Before you dive into mapping, detach yourselves from your biases as much as possible and prepare to morph into your customer persona. To get into the mood, choose an example persona that is unrelated to your product or service and run through a quick role play.

For example, you could choose "a 42-year-old who likes breakfast cereal". Walk through the sections of the empathy map. What is that persona...

- Thinking and feeling about their worries or aspirations? (E.g., "Wants to stay healthy. Worries about their cholesterol level.")
- Hearing while using your product or service, from their friends or boss? (E.g., "Friends say high-fiber cereals are bland and tough to chew.")
- Etc...

Step 4: Fill in the empathy maps (15 min.)

Assign each person a persona and set them to work filling out their map. Pay special attention to pain points. The whole point of your project is to improve a product or service, right? Think about what the persona hears from friends or says about the product in terms of the pain they experience when using it.

> **TIP: MAKE IT FUN**
>
> Bring in props like a hat, mask, or shirt to wear to help get into the persona's mindset.

Step 5: Present the empathy maps (30 min.)

As each person presents their map, encourage the full group to raise questions or items for discussion. What insights does the map reveal? What assumptions are you making that need to be researched? Where do you have gaps in knowledge?

TEMPLATE

Innovation sprints

Run a well-planned sprint, understand the problem space, and brainstorm solutions.

Complex design problems can't be solved by one person alone. Innovation sprints give you and your team the tools you need to understand user needs and constraints, sketch out potential solutions, and align on an approach.

This worksheet comes from our pals at Figma, a collaborative design platform for product teams. Use it as a template for sprints lasting anywhere from one to five days.

How to use this worksheet

Step 1: Get organized
Start by identifying your goals for the sprint. Then finalize your schedule and work your way through the tasks on the design sprint checklist. Make sure you know who is facilitating each part. Finally, fill in the pre-work section with links to any necessary background reading and send the page out to participants.

Step 2: Run the sprint
On the day of the sprint, assign a timekeeper who will ensure you stay on track and a journalist who will take notes and pictures. Then work through the activities in order.

- For **How might we...**, your goal is to come up with as many questions as possible that can help you understand the customer problem, group the questions together, and vote on your favorites.
- For **Experience mapping**, you'll create mini-personas for the users you're focusing on, including their goals, pain points, and motivations.
- For **Crazy 8s**, you'll rapidly iterate solutions with your team, coming up with as many ideas as you can in the allotted time.
- Finally, for **Solution sketch**, you'll take your best idea from Crazy 8s and flesh it out.

Step 3. Hold a retro

Capture what went well, what could have gone better, and what should be changed next time, and discuss it as a group.

> **TIP**
>
> You can edit the worksheet right here in this guide, print it, or create a Confluence page using our handy template – get it here.

TEMPLATE

Innovation sprint

Driver:

Participants:

Sprint dates:

Goals

-
-
-

Sprint pre-work

- ☐
- ☐
- ☐

Sprint schedule

09:00 AM

TEMPLATE

Innovation sprint

Understanding the problem

How might we... EXERCISE

To help you understand the problem space, draft a series of “How might we” questions to set up future brainstorming sessions.

1. Start by writing out your problem statement. This could be something like, “New designers need better mentorship to help them understand the design process.”
2. Draft as many questions that relate to the problem as you can in the time allotted. Begin each question with the phrase “How might we...”
3. Group related questions together, then vote on your favorites. You’ll turn these into user experience maps in the next section.

How might we... OUTPUT

Experience mapping EXERCISE

1. Define who you’re building this solution for. Who are they? What are their goals and motivations? What are their pain points?
2. Once you’re done brainstorming, vote on your focus for the rest of the session and document the results in the experience mapping table, below.

As you start to imagine how your particular solution will solve the problems of your customer, ask yourselves questions like:

- How are you reaching or serving users?
- What is the end-to-end user experience?
- What are the key moments or touch-points along the way?

TEMPLATE

Innovation sprint

Experiment mapping table OUTPUT

What user or users will you focus on?
What key moments or pain points do you want to sketch around to have the most impact?
What solution will you focus on?
What does success look like?
How will you measure it?
Will you require additional tools?

Understanding the problem

With a specific pain point and persona being agreed upon, each sprinter should look for new ideas outside of the current line of thinking, and sketch out eight solutions for the newly agreed-upon problem.

Crazy 8s EXERCISE

1. Fold a blank sheet of paper vertically in half, then horizontally into quarters, then into eighths.
2. Sketch eight quick ideas each in eight minutes. Sketch one idea in each rectangle rather than creating a storyboard. Aim for quantity – don't worry about making your sketches beautiful.
3. Share your sketches with your fellow sprinters.

Solution sketch EXERCISE

1. Each person selects their best idea and sketches it out showing multiple states of the idea. Feel free to include words in the sketch that can communicate on their own. Then add a memorable title.
2. Share your sketches with the rest of the group and give each other feedback.

Wrap it up! EXERCISE

Wrap up your design sprint with a team retrospective. Reflect on what went well, what could have gone better, and what to change for next time.

TECHNIQUE

Problem framing

Take a step back to get a holistic look at the problem space you're working in.

What you'll need

IN-PERSON SETTINGS

- Whiteboard
- Markers
- Sticky notes
- Timer
- Trello board template (optional)

VIRTUAL SETTINGS

- Video conferencing tool with screen share
- Timer
- Trello board template (optional)

Instructions

Step 1: Prep (5 min.)

For remote teams, create a collaboration document using one of the templates above. Share the document in advance with your team.

For in-person teams, book a room and prepare sticky notes and markers. Divide the whiteboard into four quadrants: who, what, why, where.

Send any relevant supporting data you have in advance to the team.

> **TIP: YOUR CUSTOMERS' SHOES**
>
> If the problem is around your customers, prepare the team by gathering and sending them as much relevant customer information as possible.

Step 2: Set the stage (2 min.)

Let your team know that the goal today is to understand and define the problem, not to solve it.

Step 3: Brainstorm (10 min.)

Ask the team to take a step back and think about the problem as a whole from the perspective of the people affected by it. Add ideas to the collaboration document or on sticky notes to the whiteboard.

- What is the nature of the problem? What signs point to there being a problem?
- Who is experiencing this problem? How do we know that they are experiencing it?
- Why is the problem worth solving? What's the impact on the people experiencing the problem? What happens if we don't solve it?
- Where is this problem occurring? What are the circumstances?

Step 4: Summarize the problem (10 min.)

Using the ideas generated by the team, craft one concise problem statement that sums up the issue from the customer's perspective.

The problem statement should include who is affected, what is affecting them, why it needs to be solved, and where the problem is happening.

> **TIP: MAKE IT VISIBLE**
>
> Put your problem statement at the top of shared documents, on a poster near your team's workspace, etc. so the problem stays top-of-mind for everyone.

TEMPLATE

New product concept

Streamline your process and improve your business.

Your teams are full of ideas for new products and services. But they might not know how to vet their ideas and present them to leadership. Using this worksheet, developed as part of Atlassian's Point A program, anyone in your organization can sort through their thoughts and easily share them with others for feedback.

TEMPLATE

New product concept

Age	Question	Response
Product	**What is the problem**	*Describe the pain of the customer. Outline how the customer addresses these issues today and why it is a highly valuable problem to solve.* ☐ *Have you found a pervasive problem that needs new solutions?*
	What is your solution?	*Outline your proposed solution and how it makes customers' lives better.* *Include a value proposition: a clear, compelling message that turns an unaware visitor into an interested prospect. Why is X better?*
	Why us?	*Why is this particular problem something that we should own? How does this fit into our product portfolio and business model?* *Why will the customer trust us to solve this problem? Do we currently have trust/permission to play in this market? Who is the buyer at the customer? Will they buy from us?* *What's differentiating our solution and can't easily be copied or bought? What is our unfair advantage?* ☐ *Is this aligned with one of our strategic priorities?*
Market	**Customer segment**	*Who are your target customers? (startups / SMBs / enterprises, specific verticals, personas...)*
	Competition	*Are there any similar tools in the market? What are their strengths/weaknesses?* ☐ *Who plays in this market and do we have a competitive advantage?*

TEMPLATE

New product concept

	Total Addressable Market (TAM)	*Create an approximate market size and explain thinking. How much value are we creating for the customer by solving their problem and what might they pay us? How much of this market has already been taken by the competition?* ☐ *Do you believe this could be a substantial business in 5-7 years? What is the market, and is it growing? Why now?*
	Business model	*How should we monetize the idea (if at all)? Freemium, per-user subscription, strawman pricing idea...* ☐ *Does this solution work with Atlassian's low touch, flywheel, no-sales-team model?*
Team	**Founding team members and roles**	*List the current list of founders and roles* *What gaps exist in the founding team?*
	Where are you at?	*Which stage is this at right now? Provide a project timeline. Non-financial gates that will serve as checkpoints for the continuation of the initiative*

TECHNIQUE

Sparring

Get quick, honest feedback from your colleagues in a structured and safe setting.

What you'll need

IN-PERSON SETTINGS

- Printouts or screen share of your work
- Whiteboard
- Markers
- Sticky notes
- Timer
- Trello board template (optional)

VIRTUAL SETTINGS

- Video conferencing tool with screen share
- Timer
- Trello board template (optional)

Instructions

Step 1: Prep (5 min.)

For remote teams, start by creating a new collaboration document, using the template above.

Send this document and any other documents that need to be reviewed before the meeting to your attendees. Make your content available digitally, and be prepared to share links or your screen for sparring.

For in-person teams, send any documents that need to be reviewed before the meeting to your attendees. Find a whiteboard, markers, and sticky notes. Print out the content you'd like to spar on as large as possible to allow for easy reading and markup.

> **TIP: ADVANCED READING**
>
> Sparring is intentionally short to get a lot of feedback quickly. Send context in advance for attendees to read up on, like customer data or competitive analysis.

Step 2: Set the stage (2 min.)

Start the meeting by:

- Briefly describing what you're working on
- Explaining why you're looking for feedback and how you'll use it
- Outlining what areas you're looking for feedback on (and what areas you aren't)

> **TIP: OUTSIDE PERSPECTIVES**
>
> Invite a mix of people – some who are familiar with your work, and some who aren't. Outsiders bring fresh perspectives.

Step 3: Gather feedback (10 min.)

Set a timer for 10 minutes. Have attendees review your work and add feedback. This could be things they like, things they'd change, anything they'd get rid of, or any questions they have.

Encourage them to mark up the work itself with markers, sticky notes, or comments. Or, gather notes using the template above.

Step 4: Discuss (10 min.)

Review the team's feedback. Identify any recurring themes, and discuss your understanding of the feedback to ensure you're all in agreement about what the feedback is referring to.

Discuss your reasoning behind choices you made in the work, and be open to new ideas for improvement from the team.

> **TIP: CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM**
>
> When giving feedback, acknowledge the positives and provide specific recommendations for how to improve the work.

Step 5: Wrap it up (5 min.)

Thank attendees for their participation and feedback. Let them know the next steps you'll be taking with your work and when they can expect to hear back on your next iteration.

04

ROLL CREDITS

THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THIS GUIDE. LIKE EVERYTHING WE DO AT ATLASSIAN, IT WAS A TEAM EFFORT.

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