

News You Can Use

Speaker's Resources

Could your organization benefit from programs on leadership, personal mastery, negotiating, career development, retention and self-marketing? KLI founder Paulette Gabriel has built a reputation as a dynamic speaker who combines extensive experience, best practices and scholarly research to share important messages that inspire and motivate groups and individuals.

She recently spoke to the Delaware Valley Regional Women's Group of St. Gobain, delivering an information-packed presentation on "Negotiating Skills for Women in Business."

From a Senior Executive:

"I wanted to thank you again for a wonderful presentation today. I have heard many positive comments - everybody wishes we could have had several more hours of you!!!!!"

Contact Paulette directly at info@keyleadership.com to find out more.

Accelerating Innovation

Jazz as a metaphor

Jazz as a metaphor for business change — too unstructured and spontaneous to be a sound tactic for your organization? It's not as far-fetched as you may think.

In order to succeed, organizations must innovate, improvise and create. Nothing new there. But some organizations and academic theorists are looking to new avenues for inspiring innovation. And they are examining the process of creating jazz in this endeavor, focusing on the way in which its musicians extemporaneously compose, yet do so within the overall structure of the composition.

Karl Weick is a preeminent organizational researcher who has explored jazz as a metaphor for innovation. In his article entitled, "Improvisation as a Mindset" ([Organization Science, 1998](#)), he explains the difference between being spontaneous and being improvisational. The former, he notes, is reacting in the moment. However, the latter mindset—being improvisational—allows for reacting in the moment intelligently and from a position of strength, because the discipline of practice, study and acute listening is already a part of the improviser. Emphasizing this focus on hard work and training, Wynton Marsalis, the great jazz musician, describes his key to improvisation in a recent [Fortune Magazine](#) article: "Practice, practice, practice."

Sometimes known as "extemporaneous composing" ([Schoen, 1987](#)), this form of innovation can be thought of as the surfacing, testing and re-configuration of ideas and experiences. In other words, improvisation brings to light the individual's basic knowledge and skills that have been accumulated and refined over the lifetime, and allows them to be reorganized, recombined and put to the test in new, often creative ways. It seems spontaneous but it's grounded in the experience of the individual.

A framework for improv

Much like a truly ingenious product or service can be sparked by an incredibly basic idea, interesting jazz improvisation often occurs from a fairly simple and basic structure—the melody. The melody serves as the framework for the transformation, allowing the musician to take a common element he or she has long used and turn it into something wonderful, new and exciting. In terms of innovation, the routine is viewed not as a constraint, but as the springboard.

In your organization, the mission and vision can serve as a melody—a common ground and anchor to the past, yet one that facilitates development of innovations and creative interpretations.

To do this effectively, however, you must look to the people within your company, and find and encourage those composers who bring their improvisational abilities to the table.

Individually driven but in concert with others

Taking the time to reflect has long been an important part of learning. Pondering former beliefs and examining them in relation to other ideas is essential to improvising. Doing so in groups broadens the reach of both memory and experience and can improve this whole process. The interplay of the individual and others in creating novel ways of doing things expands and intensifies the possibilities.

The active pursuit of new ideas that synchronizes individual contributions into the big picture is a powerful way to spur innovation in your company. However, the individual contribution itself can't be dismissed within this framework; your people will be encouraged to innovate even further if their distinct creative contributions are acknowledged.

Encouraging innovators: creative maestros or problem employees?

Some organizations may find, however, that there's some difficulty in encouraging the types of people who are likely to foster internal innovation. Individuals who have an innovative style are adept at re-framing a problem to bring about real change. They also can be seen as difficult, especially when viewed against employees with adaptive styles, who are more likely to adhere to the rules (and thus fit more easily within the corporate standards of behavior). Yet these types of personalities are more likely to create only incremental improvements for their companies.

Employees with an innovative style can be viewed as mavericks or undisciplined, with characteristics* that include:

- enjoys creating rather than improving
- has fresh perspectives on old problems
- juggles several ideas at the same time
- operates in a non-methodical way
- does not impose strict order or control
- avoids precise instruction
- seeks to bend rules
- risks doing things differently
- disagrees in a group
- acts without proper authority at times

The crucial thing for management to understand is that, when these characteristics can be recognized and positively harnessed, innovative-style employees can be tremendous contributors to the organization's success.

How can your company foster these elements and use them for its own long-term success? Two things are important to consider.

First, your organization must be willing to select the right people and to create favorable conditions for innovation to occur. Among these conditions, it's critical to make sure that creative individuals have challenging jobs and are supervised by managers who are supportive, but not controlling. Second, you must find ways to create excitement about the work being done and then encourage creative individuals to share this excitement with their colleagues.

By viewing innovation in a different perspective and by appropriately channeling those employees with innovative styles, your organization can create an environment where innovation, improvisation and creativity can flourish and lead to great things.

* From Kirton's "Adaptation-Innovation Inventory." For more information, go to: <http://www.kaicentre.com/>

Leadership Matters

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Our Mission Key Leadership Initiatives: Providing expertise to you and your organization in critical areas where business issues and people issues intersect.

Voice of the Customer

How to really, really listen

"If speaking is silver, then listening is gold." Turkish proverb

The voice of the customer (VOC) is a general term that refers to learning and understanding customer needs. Traditionally used to define direction for product development, VOC has usually referred to listening to the external population. Increasingly, however, businesses are discovering that getting the internal customer perspective is equally as important in setting the right strategy for service and support groups within the company.

What exactly is Voice of the Customer? The voice of the customer is a Six Sigma™ term that refers to the customer's actual—as opposed to assumed—product and service needs and wants. VOC is a process used to obtain the requirements/feedback from the customer in order to understand their stated and unstated needs and provide best-in-class service or product quality. The information can be captured in a variety of ways: direct discussion or interviews, surveys, focus groups, customer specifications, observation, warranty data, field reports, complaint logs, etc.

There's no single voice "Whatever your business is, talk to your customers and provide them with what they want. It makes sense." Robert Bowman

To be successful in uncovering your inner VOC, it's important to remember your organization's internal customers are complex and diverse; just like snowflakes, no two are alike. Not only do they vary greatly in what they need, they also differ in when they need it. Furthermore, most don't spend much time reflecting on the essence of their needs. They simply want what they want, when they want it.

This makes it more difficult to get information that is both useful and actionable. A quick survey method simply doesn't get to the heart of the matter and elicit the right information from your internal customers, with their many and varied perspectives. A far better approach is to go out and spend time with them and use carefully selected tools that can uncover their individual, bottom-line needs.

Get the right person "A good listener is not only popular everywhere, but after a while he gets to know something." Wilson Mizner

Our experience has shown that interviewing and observing are two common ways to broaden the picture and get results you can use. Spending time with customers is vitally important in finding out what the customer really needs.

But, spending time, in and of itself, won't get useful answers. Face it: not everyone is a good listener. It's vitally important to have people at the front lines who can think quickly, process the information they're getting and then, based on the answers they receive, probe deeper to get to the heart of the internal customer's needs and wants.

Another way of ensuring that the data collected is useful and complete is to engage the internal team itself in the process of information-gathering. In academic research, secondary "readers" are employed to ensure data integrity. In this business process, secondary team members can add multiple perspectives and come up with creative ways to interpret and respond to what is being said. Further, working with a team at this level fosters a more strategic view of how it can add value to the organization.

Use the right tools "Of all the skills of leadership, listening is the most valuable and one of the least understood. Most captains of industry listen only sometimes, and they remain ordinary leaders. But a few, the great ones, never stop listening. That's how they get word before anyone else of unseen problems and opportunities." Peter Nulty, National Business Hall of Fame, [Fortune Magazine](#)

Once you've selected the right people to conduct the information-gathering, you need the right tools and methods. And that means you need to supplement traditional surveys with more targeted types of information-gathering to get a complete and accurate picture.

Customers have and express preferences as indicators of what they value. Understanding these key indicators can be helpful:

- Does the customer value performance? Performance indicators suggest customers care about speed and solutions.
- When customers value innovation, they are looking for the "next big thing." Think of the Apple iPod. When it was first introduced, the early adopters—with their value of innovation—made it a must-have item.
- Customers interested in controls want to make sure everything is on-time and on-budget. Those who attach importance to protocol and documentation have a control orientation and are interested in facts, not possibilities.
- Relationships as a primary driver of behavior suggest a need to "get close to the customer." Internal customers who operate from a relationship focus are probably interested in the long-term, will contribute "skin in the game" and lean toward shared decision-making and partnership.

Interaction throughout the VOC process is critical. If you ask for feedback at the project's inception, you're likely to get a different answer than when you ask for it at the end. Both views are equally useful. It's important, then, to take the temperature at different stages in the process and use that information to differentiate capability and needs at different process points.



KEY LEADERSHIP INITIATIVES

Working at change that matters.

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Team Launch

Cross-functional teams: bane or boon?

Cross-functional teams: the positive intention is always there. Their outcome can be good, maybe even great. Cross-functional, or matrixed, teams can add value to the organization, but do they also they create overlap and redundancy?

More than ever before, today's value chain requires capturing and leveraging intellectual assets from throughout your organization. This convergence is a must if innovation is to thrive. Bringing together expertise from across the enterprise in matrixed teams can support the development of exciting, new products and services that meet market needs. And when they're assembled and functioning properly, these teams can deliver superior results:

- Innovation is enhanced, especially for new products or services, when inputs and problem-solving extend throughout functions and across typical boundaries.
- Broader, more inclusive perspectives can add a level of problem-solving just at the right time...when investments are balanced outputs.
- Single points-of-accountability and communication allow for stronger integration and a single point-of-contact for delivery.

So how do you avoid the problems of overlap and redundancy and help these teams to succeed? There are five essential tools that can turn the cross-functional team into a powerful asset for your organization.

1. Expertise. When a cross-functional team works like a well-oiled machine, it can make decisions on the spot. For this to happen, however, all of the key members have to be in the same room, working together. When the key members don't take this responsibility seriously, when they feel like it's not part of their "day job," it can compromise the team's success. Vital members of the team have to be on-site and involved in the meetings in order for their expertise to be useful in the process.

2. A Charter. No longer the province of "touchy-feely" types, charters are the essential guiding document for matrixed teams that have little daily contact but must converge on vision outcomes and ways of working. Having a clearly documented mandate is fundamental to the team's effectiveness. A charter also goes beyond serving as way to bring together the team and its perspectives. As time goes by and motivation starts to drop, a charter can provide the baseline for revisiting direction and for refocusing the team on what is important. To be most effective, it should be a living tool, not one that's developed and shelved.

A CASE STUDY IN :

Kicking off successful cross-functional teams

A large pharmaceutical company had in place cross-functional teams that were experiencing changes in their make-up. People were coming and going and membership was in a state of flux. These teams, however, needed to work together, closely and efficiently, to meet some tough timelines for their company's product development.

Specifically, the organization faced several problems within this scenario:

- new team members were bringing over existing mindsets, with unspoken expectations, from their previous teams or companies;
- existing team members simply didn't understand why the newcomers just didn't "get it about the way we do things here;"
- team roles were unclear and dated; and
- there was little consensus about vision and goals.

Key Leadership was brought in to work with the organization and help it solve these issues. With extensive experience in team-building, KLI assessed the teams using a variety of tools to uncover specific areas where change was needed. Particularly insightful was a survey tailored to this organization. Its purpose was to explore perceptions of importance and capability in specific areas critical to reaching business goals. The survey uncovered gaps that highlighted areas where items were seen as crucial, but the capability to achieve them was low. In one case, for example, setting and communicating the direction for the team was viewed as essential, but was inconsistently handled across the teams.

After analyzing the responses, KLI developed several solutions to overcome the company's barriers to team effectiveness. They included the development of a baseline measurement to allow for follow-up at some future point.

First, it began working directly with members of the various cross-functional groups to clarify and fine-tune their roles as individuals and as members of a team. Opening up the lines of communications among individuals and groups in order to clear up questions and issues proved to be not only useful but began to "glue" the teams together, helping them to form shared perceptions and goals.

As part of this meeting, KLI also introduced a series of exercises that would be used to integrate roles at the individual level. Specifically, these exercises were designed to help team members understand their individualized roles, work styles, methods of communications and expectations.

The level of enthusiasm and participation was strong—the teams in this pharmaceutical client plunged right in with active participation. As a result, benefits were forthcoming.

Specifically:

- teams found clarity and focus, resulting in higher energy and improved morale among individuals;
- participants began to synchronize their mindsets and understand their respective roles, which led to better communications and greater efficiency in completing their jobs;
- teams saw the importance of developing common visions and goals and believed they were prepared to move forward with these tasks; and
- the company had a defined framework in place for measuring the ongoing success of improving its cross-functional teams.

And, potentially using this framework, this company may revisit this area in the not-too-distant future to make sure that its teams are leveraging their talents—as individuals and groups—to achieve the productivity goals it has established.

Quotes

From Team Leader, Pharmaceutical Company:
"Thank you again for your active participation in yesterday's kick-off meeting. I found it very exciting to have the opportunity of working with a group of intelligent and diligent people like you. I have no doubt that we will be a productive and fun-filled team."

From a Clinical Project Manager at the Company:
"(A Senior Executive) wanted to let us know how appreciative he is of the work you and Paulette did for the group. He felt that having you and Paulette explain CT roles and responsibilities was a good idea because, as third parties, you presented an unbiased, neutral point-of-view. This objectivity was valuable in setting expectations of how this CT will work."

Finally, the document can help bridge the learning gap. Talent on cross-functional teams can shift. When new members come on board, the team assumes a level of understanding that just may not be there. People bring their own filters—"the way we did it at my old company," for instance—that may cause the team to lose focus. The charter should be used to bring new members up to speed quickly and ground the team in the present while enabling it to move ahead.

3. Empowerment. Team members should have the ability to get things done, both inside and outside of their functional areas. One of the biggest benefits of leveraging a cross-functional team is that its members can use their respective networks to get things done, garner support and obtain a variety of resources. It's not politics; it's effective networking with an essential, bottom-line purpose.

4. Leadership. While diversity is undeniably a strength of these teams, effectively leading with high levels of diversity can be tricky. A first step should be to develop the fundamentals—team vision, mission and goals—that can keep everyone on the same page.

Effective leadership also requires getting a handle on the types of diversity found within team members: their functional backgrounds, levels of experience and skills, and growth and development potentials will span a wide spectrum.

Leaders need to find the right balance of respect for the varied abilities and potentials, and yet be cognizant of designing ways to sincerely facilitate group interactions. To do so, leadership requires someone with skills in conflict resolution, influencing and consensus-building.

5. Teambuilding. Teams come together for an important purpose, yet they often fall apart within a short time. Why? Misunderstandings, old department rivalries and personality clashes are some of the issues that can damage, even derail, the most forceful teams. From an insider's perspective, it is far better to take a strong preventive approach than to implement damage-control measures after the fact.

Healthy team development, then, includes sessions where team members can express their differences in a forward-focused environment. If they have a positive, structured forum where they can lay their cards out on the table, they can address the issues and begin to move ahead.