

The formula for success

The relationship between leadership effectiveness, organizational learning and innovation

Innovation is more than just a buzzword now within the business environment. It may have started as a trendy topic and something only large multinational organizations aimed for, but it quickly became the standard within the industries. As consumers and other stakeholder needs continuously change and evolve, innovation becomes a necessity for survival. It is not just about what is new, but what better satisfies stakeholder needs. This means that innovation does not need to be revolutionary or result in an overhaul of business processes and systems. It can be as simple as a small upgrade on a service offered or a more streamlined process cycle. This takes the pressure off the organizations in that even with minimal resources, innovation is achievable. However, it is also not an automatic process. Even businesses that have been operating for many years must be intentional in their innovation goals. Some may assume that innovation happens like a light bulb moment when working. This can be the case at times, however, more commonly it is the result of directed efforts. Organizations hold the responsibility for innovation, and so they must take the appropriate measures. The leadership plays a critical role in this regard. They can either be the catalyst or put out the fire of innovation. Therefore, it is important to identify how the leadership can make the most of their resources to promote innovation. As a result, Nukpezah *et al.* (2026) investigated how innovation is influenced by leadership effectiveness and organizational learning.

Leading from the top

Leaders do not exist in the organization to just relay orders. Their role should be more proactive and take a step in directing business activities toward profitability. This can be a difficult task if the leader does not have the right competencies for this. One would assume that all leaders are well equipped for their roles, however, this is not always the case. In some cases, leaders may find themselves out of their element and unable to manage the business well. This means that not all leaders are effective, but they should be for the business to grow. An effective leader is one that can employ the business resources well. These resources can be financial, operational and even human. When a leader cannot do this, they should be willing to learn. Learning is not just for the workforce; even leaders need to engage in learning so they can propose plans to maintain business performance. Even longevity is not enough to save the organization from an incompetent leader. As the business environment changes, so too must the leaders capabilities. These changes must match what is required within the environment. This flexibility and agility is difficult to cultivate if the leader is prideful or unappreciative. An effective leader can also inspire greatness into their workforce. Employees seek a role model, and the leader should be one that can cultivate positive habits within them. An effective leader can cultivate a culture that understands and emphasizes innovation. This is essential for many business today so they can stay ahead of the curve.

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High risk, high reward

Innovation is creativity at its finest. It is also a risky endeavor as the outcomes are not always guaranteed to be positive. The business environment is home to many pressures and scenarios that keep businesses on their toes. Sometimes changes are predictable and other times they come from nowhere. Organizations may find it difficult to keep up with these changes, and in essence they shouldn't. The business should anticipate changes and act accordingly. Innovation offers organizations the route to staying ahead of things. It should not be a reactive exercise; although many times this is the case. It can be difficult to undo the damage if changes are not made quickly. Lost market share is difficult to regain. As innovation requires the organization to continuously improve then it can have positive contributions toward stakeholder satisfaction. For example, consumer needs are always changing, and if businesses cannot anticipate these changes then they risk losing brand reputation during that period of uncertainty. Brand loyalty is no longer a stable metric for business performance. People are always looking for better, and without investing in innovation this is impossible to achieve. There also needs to be the structure to support innovation. It is not an isolated task, so there should be integrated efforts for it to be successful. The right formula for innovation can include an effective leader, the right workforce and the right supporting infrastructure.

Even with all the right elements in place, the business can still face failure. There is no foolproof strategy or plan that makes a business immune to change. In certain cases, even if the market is unchanged, changes in unrelated fields can flow the organization. This is how volatile the business environment can be. In this case, it makes it even more necessary that organizations can cultivate their leaders so they can provide the strategic outlet in any scenario. This is not an overnight fix though, it still requires tremendous effort and resources to be effective. This is why it is not something all organizations can handle. It is a process of learning and even unlearning; and the cycle continues. Therefore, an organization can never be satisfied with their position in any sense. They must strive to continuously improve. Even if these improvements are minimal, every bit makes a difference in the long run.

Comment

This review is based on "Moderating role of leadership effectiveness in learning–innovation relationship" by Julius A. Nukpezah, Michael Ntow and P. Edward French, published in *International Journal of Public Leadership*.

Reference

Nukpezah, J.A., Ntow, M. and French, P.E. (2026), "Moderating role of leadership effectiveness in learning–innovation relationship", *International Journal of Public Leadership*, Vol. ahead-of-print No. ahead-of-print, doi: [10.1108/IJPL-11-2025-0191](https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPL-11-2025-0191).

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