



Intrapreneurship: Embracing Entrepreneurship In The Workplace

Description

[Intrapreneurship](#) refers to when employees embrace an entrepreneurial spirit within the organizations they work for. As a result, employees act more enterprisingly, creating an ecosystem of intertwined organizations within their employment.

Intrapreneurship essentially creates multiple entrepreneurship roles within the organisation. This comes with all the benefits for the business owner, benefits that are even more pronounced if the business is a small one.

These benefits include the following;

1. The business owner no longer needs to be the sole source of innovation within the business.
2. Multiple brand ambassadors invested in the growth of the business brand.
3. Multiple points of contact for various stakeholders invested in the business's success.
4. To an extent, sharing the risks and challenges involved in the entrepreneurial journey.

These benefits however don't just accrue to business owners. They need to make certain investments and sacrifices for an intrapreneurial culture to thrive. More often than not though, this intrapreneurial culture is a worthwhile investment.

Whatever the cost, who wouldn't want an employee who is self-motivated, proactive, and action-oriented who takes the initiative to pursue an innovative product or service?

It's rather very clear that intrapreneurship is of great benefit for both the employee and the organization, so we want to answer a few questions about it, mainly;

1. What exactly are these benefits, for both the employer and employee?
2. How can employers build an intrapreneurship culture?
3. How can employees make the most of a culture of intrapreneurship for their own growth?

Benefits for employers

For businesses, employers, or managers, intrapreneurship brings the indisputable benefit of innovation and growth. A workforce that consistently looks for opportunities for growth from within your business has the potential to see opportunities that the leadership of the business is not immediately exposed to.

When we discussed the various ways to [use data to improve business performance](#), we touched on the role of employee data in this process. After all, your employees interact with every touchpoint of your business regularly.

From clients to operations and everything in between, over time, employees develop a greater understanding of a company. It is from this understanding that growth opportunities emerge. These are usually the easiest opportunities for your business to pursue.

Just as an entrepreneur keeps an eye open for emerging opportunities for profit in the open market, intrapreneurs keep an eye open for opportunities for profit within the business.

Be it cost-saving opportunities, vertical or horizontal product expansions or even completely original ideas, intrapreneurs can help you grow.

Benefits for employees

For the employee, intrapreneurship goes beyond just the great feeling of accomplishment, it is a vehicle for career transformation and transitioning through different stages.

It is a sure method for career growth when applied within the right organisation. Whether you foresee yourself growing beyond your current employer or just growing in your current position, intrapreneurship prepares you for this transition and proves you are ready to take on greater responsibility.

For the entrepreneur to be, intrapreneurship allows you to explore the world of bringing ideas to life with the control of not having everything collapse on you if it does not work out.

That safety net, when applied correctly, can unleash your potential. Additionally, you get the support of an experienced team that can take you through the nuanced elements of entrepreneurship, like risk management. This is a great environment to skill up for your future ventures.

For the career-oriented, intrapreneurship gives more opportunities than is immediately obvious. Firstly, it puts control of your career in your hands.

Instead of waiting for an elusive promotion, create one for yourself, by leading a transformative project. By creating your product, service, department, or project, you can ensure you soon become a leader.

By creating your division, you ensure you become a division lead very soon. Most importantly, you demonstrate your value as an employee, and as such, make yourself an invaluable member of the team with lots of growth prospects and input to key company decisions

So if intrapreneurship is this important, what does everyone need to do so that it takes root and benefits all involved?

1. How can employers build an intrapreneurship culture?

Employers looking to build an intrapreneurial culture need to give their employees a sense of autonomy. Employees can only have the self-drive and self-motivation necessary for intrapreneurship if they have the freedom to make innovative changes.

Additionally, employees need to know that their innovative ideas have a good chance to see the light of day. When employees don't feel trusted to make even small innovations around their spheres, innovation is a pipe dream.

Finally, an intrapreneurial culture is completed by having the right reward structures in place for enterprising employees. Put together, a culture of intrapreneurship can be built by cycling through the following points;

1.1. Create a culture that fosters intrapreneurship

Companies have been known to create what are generally referred to as [SkunkWork](#) teams or projects. These are typically projects involving small teams or groups working to innovate and create outside the basic scope of the business.

This is one way in which companies promote intrapreneurship. Because these teams work on projects aimed at innovating a company's regular activities, the scope of their work usually requires employees to bring fresh ideas.

While SkunkWork projects require formal processes, secret R&Ds and so on, they should be a staple for your organisation. For example, [Google uses 20% time](#), a great innovation that gave successes such as AdSense, Gmail, Google Maps, Google News, and Google Talk.

During this time, employees are encouraged to work on projects they think will benefit Google. No direction, no instructions, just what employees can add to drive Google forward.

Employees should feel encouraged to create their own spaces to bring innovative ideas and work on them.

Not only that, but they also need to have the confidence that any innovative ideas they craft will be brought to life. And equally important, give credit to employees for their achievements.

Your company may own ideas developed on the company's time, but employees still need recognition for driving the business forward.

In a way, that's an opportunity for employees to own the fruits of their intrapreneurship. And remember that even the most innovative ideas don't always yield results.

As such, intrapreneurship and innovation cannot thrive in an environment where employees are vilified for failed ideas.

As an employer, you should be equally willing to accept the success of employee ideas as much as failure.

1.2. Reward your best-performing employees

When intrapreneurship works, organisations, big and small stand to benefit, a lot. Looking at Google's example, their 20% time has yielded some of their most recognised and profitable products.

But there's something else to learn from Google's example, recognition and credit. Google is not only proud of talking up their 20% time but also the employees using this to innovate and their innovations.

Your organisation should follow suit. In fact, lack of recognition can be one of the biggest risks that discourages intrapreneurship. It's natural to wonder, "what if I create something very innovative and industry-changing only to not be recognised for it?"

This very conflict has led to some companies losing their best innovators. As such, you need to reward enterprising employees. Firstly, grant them material rewards. No one wants to go the extra mile for just a thank you and a pat on the back.

Especially if their innovations yield financial rewards for the company. Pay employees for their intrapreneurship. Pay raises, perks, and bonuses should flow to your innovators.

But perhaps more important than financial rewards, reward your most innovative employees with recognition. Make sure that their colleagues and the world at large know of their achievements.

This will not only encourage their innovation but will motivate their colleagues as well. And because entrepreneurship isn't for everyone, you can unlock the employees who have special talents but were never going to go on to disrupt the industry.

With an opportunity to enjoy all the rewards of owning a business without the inherent risk of opening one, they may just apply those talents to your business.

After all, who wouldn't want to create something great without the risk and investment that comes with full-time entrepreneurship?

If you fail to build an environment conducive to intrapreneurship, you just might light a dormant spark that makes them your worst competitor.

1.3. Avoid performance punishment

Performance punishment is very common in entrepreneurship and could be the reason you are losing out on innovation from your team.

Performance punishment occurs when the best-performing employees are rewarded with even more work and responsibility without more reward or recognition.

On the other hand, poor performers get away with slacking as they are given less work to do without any punishment. Performance punishment could be the number one culprit culling your employees's instincts to be enterprising.

In that sense, performance punishment could be the biggest barrier to intrapreneurship. At their core, [your employees want to excel and perform great at their job](#). Being capable, worthy and impactful has had a huge bearing on our survival as humans and as such, we have evolved to feel good when we achieve this.

We are innately motivated to bring value to our workplaces. After all, these workplaces are attached to our survival, so why wouldn't we feel great building them up? In a lot of ways, employees may naturally be intrapreneurs.

All your team could be lacking right now is a culture and environment that fosters this innate desire. But it could be even worse, you are a performance-punishing leader.

Maybe you are the kind of boss who piles on your best performers, and rewards self-motivation and drive with more work.

At the very least, you've driven your best employees to not show their best. At the very worst, you have driven them out of the organisation completely. As such, your management style may have cost you the people even capable of acting intrapreneurially.

It can be easy to punish your best performers without even realising it. The best way to avoid this is to communicate. Genuinely.

Make sure your employees can take on more responsibility, and have the resources and support they need to do so. More importantly, though, hold slackers responsible and don't make good employees pick up their slack.

1.4. Share your broader vision with enterprising employees

As an entrepreneur, never allow an “us vs them” mentality to brew between the leadership and the workforce of your organisation. Once this occurs, it may be near impossible to motivate any of them to buy into the organisation’s goals and vision.

And without investment into your vision from employees, intrapreneurship is all but impossible. A lot of the time this state can occur due to poor communication.

When you fail to share an organisation’s vision with your workforce, only sharing it with a select few, you make them outsiders in their workplace.

They feel undervalued and will not realise how key they are to that vision. And, it can never be overlooked how your team is key to your success. Instead, show your team how much you want them to embrace this vision.

You should not only share it with them but allow them to help shape it. When your vision becomes their vision, that’s when true innovation begins.

Motivation and drive are easiest in the pursuit of a dream you believe in. Help your employees find the motivation and drive to be intrapreneurs by helping them embrace your vision.

2. How can employees make the most of intrapreneurship?

Employees stand to benefit from intrapreneurship as much as the organisations they work for. A lot of market-leading businesses today are a result of entrepreneurs from a great intrapreneurial background.

Even for employees not looking to own businesses, great careers have been forged because of the benefits of intrapreneurship.

Sometimes these benefits are accrued even without the benefactors being aware of the intrapreneurial culture they are working under.

As such, when an opportunity to be enterprising is presented in the workplace, employees need to embrace it.

Embrace the opportunity to be a goal-oriented self-starter. Embracing intrapreneurship for an employee can mean implementing some of the following points;

2.1. Look for opportunities to be enterprising

Intrapreneurs establish companies within the companies they work for, just like entrepreneurs would in the outside world. These "smaller businesses" can operate as sections, divisions or even branches of the company.

As such, intrapreneurs need to have an eye for opportunities just like entrepreneurs. Within your everyday duties, you should always be on the lookout for opportunities to improve the company you work for.

To succeed as an entrepreneur, one needs to be a very analytical thinker. While there's always some low-hanging fruit in business, opportunities to be enterprising are not always obvious.

They present themselves in various departments and they take on various forms.

Opportunities for intrapreneurship could be;

- Product or service development or improvement. It could even be the removal of a product hurting the brand name.
- Opportunities to cut down operational costs.
- Opportunities to develop vertical markets for the business to explore.
- Opportunities to partner with aligned businesses and improve the business's market/ service.

Because you work in your section regularly, you are in a much better position to identify these opportunities. Much higher than upper management and business owners.

It's important to remember to be systematic and intentional with your projects. Employers who encourage intrapreneurship are essentially bestowing trust and responsibility upon you.

You must reward that trust by investing that time productively. Fail to do this and you become a liability to your employer as opposed to an innovator.

2.2. Go above and beyond in the tasks you are assigned

Intrapreneurs are defined by their self-drive and self-motivation. As such, they are usually employees who don't need constant supervision. But true intrapreneurs go beyond just performing their tasks

well without constant follow-up.

They are driven to complete tasks in the best possible manner. To be the best there is, more efficient and effective than any else that could complete the task. To succeed as an intrapreneur, you must adopt this philosophy.

You must completely embrace the goals and vision of the business. If you can't align yourself with these, that's a good place to start as an intrapreneur. Explore this lack of fit with the organisation you work for.

After all, if ultimately you can not fully support what the organisation is trying to achieve, then you'll have a tough time thriving as an intrapreneur.

And if you are certain you can't reconcile the vision of the company with yours, then perhaps consider you are in the wrong employment.

But if you can, then pursue that vision feverishly and passionately. For every task, you approach, do it how it best meets your organisation's goals, not just how you are expected to do it.

With every task you complete, strive to do something that hasn't been done before, or do something how it has never been done before if that will improve your organisation.

2.3. Be a source of value for your organisation and its clients.

Intrapreneurship can empower you to help your organisation overcome the [innovator's dilemma](#). This is a very common phenomenon that has claimed a lot of successful businesses and will claim more yet.

The dilemma is this, does a company innovate in light of new technologies even though its core business is still driving results? Think of how Netflix overtook Blockbuster, how new brands overtook Nokia, the PlayStation and Xbox overtook Sega.

All these companies were out-innovated and went the way of the dodo. And while it may seem obvious now that these companies should have innovated, in the moment it's always difficult to invest resources in untrusted technologies that could or could not work.

This is especially true considering these resources would be taken from products or projects currently bringing in revenue. But for companies with employees who constantly look to add value, this need not be the case.

When you innovate and always look for opportunities to enhance your brand, your employer doesn't have to choose between the proven and the possible future.

Take a holistic look at your business. What developments have occurred that can make your products more valuable? Always keep your pulse on the industry, or even closely related industries.

This will put you in a great position to help your organisation not only defend its position as a leader but continue to grow its advantage. Generally, you are more flexible than your organisation as a whole, so make the most of this flexibility.

While organisations easily get stuck in their old ways because they work, you are more aware of shifting areas of value. Ultimately, intrapreneurship is a burning desire to protect and evolve this value.

2.4 Never miss opportunities to learn

In as much as [entrepreneurs need to constantly learn to grow](#), this extends to intrapreneurship. Intrapreneurship is almost impossible without a thirst for knowledge.

Intrapreneurship requires an acute ability to solve problems and that requires upskilling yourself.

When you invest in continuously improving your craft, you soon find yourself constantly thinking, "I think I can do that better". Fortunately for the modern employee, there is no shortage of opportunities to learn.

The traditional limitations of continuous skills development are increasingly overcome by the internet and similar innovations. For the modern employee, you never have to invest all your productive time as well as a small fortune to get the skills to progress.

When you identify a problem, even a quick YouTube search could make you the hero of your organisation. Even better for the aspiring intrapreneur, the tools you work with every day help you upskill.

Take advantage of the resources they provide to become an expert in the tools you employ and employ that knowledge to innovate.

Conclusion

Intrapreneurship is a great step towards entrepreneurship. This has potential benefits for both employers and employees.

The freedom to experiment that comes with intrapreneurship is a vehicle to unlock growth potential.

This is growth for the organisation in its field and growth for the employee in their career. But intrapreneurship doesn't just take root. It's a culture that needs to be cultivated and fostered.

Failing to recognise the opportunity to foster intrapreneurship in your organisation will cost your brand an easy win. If you aren't already, you need to start building this culture right away.

If you already have, we would love to know how you foster intrapreneurship in your own business.

Also, it would be great if you share all the ways it has benefited you.



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