



The No Limits Workplace  
Aligning Work with the Human Spirit  
Yielding Enduring Prosperity and Individual Reward

Creating the Creative and Innovative Enterprise

INTRODUCTION

We're truly in the knowledge and idea economy. And not surprisingly we're finding that regardless of industry, companies that are strategically developing systems and processes for managing knowledge and for generating and implementing ideas are winning. As this article makes clear, going forward it's likely that the greatest differentiator between leading organizations and their less successful counterparts will be the effectiveness of their knowledge management and idea generation and implementation strategies and systems. We'll see that companies doing these things well will outperform others in doing "regular / day-to-day work", as their business processes and the task elements within them will be more stable and efficient. And they'll really put distance between themselves and others when it comes to speedily and continually upgrading and improving the way they do work. They'll both manage external change more effectively (responsive and adaptable) and they'll lead in driving change (creativity and innovative). And to top it off, for numerous reasons these will be the companies for which the most creative and innovative people will want to work. Those who miss this opportunity will lag in all three areas.

Yet as important as this is, at this point in time very few business leaders have an in-depth understanding of this issue let alone conceptualized or implemented knowledge management and idea generation and innovation strategies, systems, and processes. And when they turn to the traditional organizational model and historic business training and experience, answers are lacking.

So where does one go to find answers to questions such as... How do you create a creative and innovative enterprise?

Well, that's right up our alley here at the No Limits Workplace. We exist to develop new organizational models that match today's realities and promote performance characteristics that traditional business models either don't promote or in many cases defeat. Creativity and innovation being a good example. So the aim of this article is to provide, in as tight a space as possible, the start to finish information for creating the creative and innovative enterprise.

We'll do that in four sections as follows:

1. Explain why knowledge and ideas are continuing to become the currency of success

This is the takeoff point because if we fail to see the importance and urgency of this issue then it's unlikely that we'll act on it. We'll offer a description of the current and continuing reality that make the criticality of this issue clear.

2. Provide a definition of creativity and innovation

We need to understand these performance characteristics in more detail if we're to build supportive systems and processes for promoting and fostering them. Promotion of these things takes much more than just asking or demanding that they exist. We'll break them down into their components which will set us up for sections 3 and 4.



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### 3. Explain what causes people to be more creative and innovative and what works against these things

The source of creativity has always been a somewhat cryptic area. We'll supply some keen insights in a practical and actionable form that take the mystery out of this subject. That will set us up to tap into the type of creativity we need to greatly improve business performance while simultaneously upgrading the quality of people's workplace experience. This is the "why beneath the what".

### 4. Define the workplace structures, practices, etc. that need to be put in place to promote idea generation and implementation.

This is the "what", the physical / structural how-to. It's what a creative and innovative enterprise looks and acts like. Though every organization is unique, there are basic structures and practices that are universally consistent for building a creative and innovative enterprise. A general implementation schedule is provided though every situation requires significant tailoring to fit.

## SECTION 1 - Why knowledge and ideas will continue to become the currency of success

The knowledge and idea economy is both parent and child to three trends. They are increasing complexity, faster change / shorter cycles of everything, and more competition (what we call the Three C's). These trends have been emerging for decades and will continue to increase in pace and intensity and their implications are mighty. Tenet #1 of the No Limits Workplace and other NLW articles explain these implications in more breadth and detail. But for our purposes here we want to know that all of these trends have had much to do with the creation of an environment where increased and ever-changing knowledge is required in far more jobs and ideas and innovation are becoming more critical to success. So, why is that?

Because in a world where products, services, methods, tools, knowledge, skill sets, personnel, supply chains, work processes, customers, suppliers, and any other aspect of business one can think of is shifting, changing, turning over quickly, and getting more complex; everything is becoming momentary. So whoever can best a) stabilize their work processes in the midst of all that and do the "current or regular work" effectively and b) accompany that with the greatest amount of good ideas and innovations that define the next moment, is going to win. We'll see below that standardization / stability of work and creativity go hand in hand. And that lack of standardization / instability and increased chaos and lack of creativity are also partners.

So though they go hand-in-hand, for our discussion here we'll speak separately about knowledge management and creativity & innovation and our primary focus will be on creativity and innovation. But per an effective knowledge management system, what it does is provides employees with the tools, resources, information, expertise (mostly knowledge) to do their jobs effectively despite the constant change and increasing complexity bombarding them. Without such a system, chaos, waste, inefficiency, and employee frustration expand continually as is happening with many businesses. Coming off of that, what an effective idea generation and innovation system does is positions employees to respond to changes around them in an organized systematic way and to put their creative talents to work to continually create new methods, products, services, etc. that lead the next generation of change. And these generations continue to shorten.

So knowledge management systems ensure that the "regular / day-to-day work" is done effectively and efficiently. And idea generation and innovation systems ensure that the enterprise can both respond (not react) to change systematically and can lead change in their industry through superior innovation. Ideally the systems are completely integrated.

And to be sure we're clear on a very important aspect of today's ever-changing, more complex, and competitive environment, let's mention that success requires that there now be two kinds of work going on all



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of the time. One we've called the "regular work". For example, if we're painting a fence or doing a business analysis, the fence painting or the analysis is the regular work. And sure, we want to do that well. But that's not enough. Parallel to that we must continually be working on improving the way we paint the fence or do the analysis. And this is a quite different type of work that requires different approaches and performance attributes. In effect we need to have two organizations and two strategies going all the time. And though we want them to be integrated there are distinct differences in these systems and strategies. As we'll see in the implementation section, to be successful and to drive things like creativity and innovation, the "work improvement system" must engage employees from all levels of the organization. It's critical that business leaders realize that they can't have just a handful of management personnel working on the business while the great majority work in the business. Today's Three C environment is demanding more. Companies that have all levels of employees working on the business or better said, working on how they do the work, will easily outperform a similarly situated enterprise that has only a few doing that. Much proof is available.

The question then is what does a company look and act like that has all employees both doing work and working on the work? As we'll see, the answer to that question leads us to the formation of the creative and innovative enterprise. Conceptually we'll see that in a fast-changing and more complex environment the old "man as a machine" thinking that efficiency comes in having an employee doing the regular work 100% of the time is just plain wrong. In this environment employees working, say 90% or even 80% of the time on their "regular work" and then positioned to work effectively on how they do the work 10 - 20% of the time will lead to vastly more productivity than the 100% - 0% work model that was arguably more effective in yesterday's less complex and slower changing business environment.

And one final perspective we want to offer to position the business leader for understanding the current environment and to further justify the need for the creation of effective knowledge management and idea generation and innovation systems.

Today's knowledge and idea economy is forcing changes in all jobs and one is in the role of those in business leadership positions (see NLW Tenet # 6 on Investment-first Leadership). Sure there's always a need to be a doer / task accomplisher even at the highest levels. And working on business problems, strategies, and developing people will always be important components of executive positions. How these things should best be done in today's environment is changing but the role itself relative to these things hasn't. But what is changing universally and significantly as a result of the Three C knowledge and idea economy is that leadership in today's organization is about working with employees to create the system that positions people at all levels to work on improving all aspects of the work. And when we say improvements we mean everything from the tiniest upward tweaks to the most high-impact breakthroughs and in any and every area from operations to policy to marketing, R&D, and strategy. Companies that are doing even pieces of that are winning big. The question shouldn't be... Is this the thing to do? It should only be... How do we do it? The creation of that system is all about leveraging. Or stated another way it's about large scale potential maximization which is leveraging. There's not much precedent to what that strategy and it's accompanying structures, practices, processes, etc. look like or how to move from current state to ideal state. The closest thing being the very best continuous improvement systems. And all but a very few of these fall well short of the ideal state. But it certainly can be done and the No Limits Workplace has much to do with achieving that.

In summary, we hope the above explanation makes it clear that because of the Three C's and the resulting knowledge and idea economy, knowledge management and idea generation and innovation are more necessary for success than ever. As mentioned, in this article we'll particularly address the creativity and innovation aspect and not so much the knowledge management side (see NLW Standard Work article for that). We at the NLW are certain that business executives that "get" this and respond to it effectively, per the information below, will propel their organizations past their competitors and in doing so will do all people a great service by a) defining what the next generation business model looks and acts like and b) expanding wealth creation and prosperity for all and making the workplace experience more meaningful.



## SECTION 2 - Defining creativity and innovation

A book could be written on this. But this is business and the art of business is in turning ideas into results with the least expenditure of resources. At the NLW we pride ourselves on our ability to explain new ideas and approaches in ways that supply the most necessary insights and information in the most actionable way and in as compact a space as possible.

### Part A - A definition of creativity and innovation

Innovation is simply applied creativity. Or we might say it's creativity channeled towards business objectives. That understanding has multiple implications.

An employee can be creative about many things but creativity is only of value to the enterprise if it can be connected to wealth generation. If it yields a successful new product or service, obviously that can have a great impact on sales and profits. A better method of performing work, a new tool or way to use current tools, equipment, materials, or other resources, an improved business process, a new piece of information or new knowledge that allows for improved decision making, etc. are all innovations. If it adds value in the form of increased customer satisfaction, reduced resource requirements (time, people, materials, supplies, etc.) to produce similar or better results, that improves quality, safety, employee proficiency, etc. then it's an innovation. So while it's creativity we want to promote and foster, we must keep in mind that it's innovation that we ultimately seek. That link between creativity and results will continue to be important throughout our discussion. Innovation assumes properly channeled creativity.

### Part B - The elements of the creativity - innovation sequence

The second part of our definition of creativity and innovation is to take a look at the sequence of events that has to occur for an idea to become reality. This is important because without it we don't know what it is we're trying to promote and foster. Sure every business leader wants innovations. Managers everywhere are exhorting people to "think out of the box", realizing that they need creative thinking to move beyond historic limitations. But even with traditional motivators from money, promotions, and recognition to speeches and threats of dire results, people and therefore organizations fail to become more creative and innovative. Clearly we need a more comprehensive and detailed understanding of the "sequential pieces" of the innovation equation if we are to figure out how to promote and foster innovation. Each element must be considered for support. The following provides that more elemental breakdown.

#### Step 1 - Thought (idea or germ of an idea)

That breakdown begins with the realization that every innovation begins as a thought in someone's mind. Every action and every physical result from a building or a bridge to a computer, a song, painting, policy, or new way to do anything begins as a thought. So step one of the innovation sequence is a creative thought. We'll discuss how to promote more of those thoughts.

#### Step 2 - Sharing the idea

Ideas, especially those that if implemented go outside the scope of one person's control, often need to be shared in order to "pull the thread" and develop the idea. And also to test informally for validity. This step isn't always necessary but is common enough that we don't want it to go unmentioned.

#### Step 3 - Intake and consideration

Here we move into the more formal area. Businesses by necessity are structures. So a system must exist to move an idea from step 2 onto a pre-defined path or process that ensures that it gets understood, considered, and prioritized against other ideas that may be competing for limited resources.



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### Step 4 - Implementation

There's much to this but briefly there has to be a pre-defined system for identifying the right resources (people, time, tools, information, etc.) to move an idea towards implementation. Much of this aligns with continuous improvement (CI) systems and processes done right, which they often aren't.

### Step 5 - Evaluation

There has to be some way to evaluate the impact of the idea and if necessary to make adjustments to ensure success after initial implementation. Again CI methodologies align.

Summary - Now that we know the start to finish elements of innovation, we're getting closer to being able to define structures practices, etc. to both generate ideas and to move them from people's minds to realization and results. But let's first gain a bit more understanding about the critical and historically elusive step 1, the generation of ideas.

### SECTION 3 - What promotes idea creation and what defeats it

Let's begin by tackling the following age old questions about creativity.

Is creativity primarily a talent that some people have and some don't? Or is it something that everyone has?

Like most either-or questions, the right answer isn't an either-or answer. But it's key to have a solid understanding of this question and it's answers as they have much to do with the actions we need to take to promote creativity and innovation.

The answer to both questions is, a partial yes. But the tilt is towards everybody having it. Yes, some people are more creative than others and we want to attract creativity and design our selection processes to select for that. And we may want to look for multiple ways to import creativity into our organizations such as targeted temporary hires, etc. But what we often find with what we call "creative people", especially in business settings, is that they don't necessarily have more creative capacity than others but they do manage to generate more creative output than others. So it looks like they're more creative. Most of the time, and again in business organizations in particular, creativity is more a matter of persistence, determination, and sometimes fearlessness than creative capacity. As we'll discuss in the next section our traditional business models do much to prevent creativity and therefore it isn't so much the creative types who are creative as it is the persistent, bold, and determined types. This in turn paints a picture that creativity is something of which only a few are capable. When in fact that isn't the case at all. It's just that only a few are willing to be creative in the face of organizational resistance. As discussed in other sections, it's in the removal of that "organizational resistance" that creativity and innovation multiplies endlessly.

So back to our important question and answer. We said that the tilt of our answer is towards everyone having much creative potential. That's a critical understanding. Development of a creative and innovative enterprise begins with the leader's ability to recognize the creative potential that exists in the hearts and minds of all employees. Potential doesn't get actualized if someone doesn't "see" the potential. From there we'll discuss how to draw it out and move it from potential to realization. That's a challenge because the nature of creativity, especially at the point of the emerging thought / idea, is such that for most people it's easily defeated. Think for instance how quickly an idea can be snuffed out when one person in a group is trying to express a partially formed new thought. Whereas it takes effort and energy and perhaps even risk to help someone formulate the idea. And once a person's efforts to offer ideas are rejected or disregarded, then for most the creative switch is turned indefinitely to the off position. On the other hand if ideas are sought and surrounded by a supportive system they'll multiply. Our experience at the NLW is that even those who may at first appear less creative and those who appear unwilling to be creative will jump on board once



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they see the positive intentions and outcomes for the enterprise and the people in it. It's just human nature to want to be part of something worthwhile.

As an analogy, we might picture ideas as oak trees. When first germinating they are small and fragile and can be destroyed by the slightest even most unintentional incident. But when nurtured can grow and become great and influential. As we'll see in our final section nurturing is much about providing an environment with the right balance of support and independence (roots and wings) that translates to a good balance of spontaneity and structure. On one hand too much autonomy is chaotic which drowns creativity. On the other hand rigidity and control throttle it. This is as true in the arts as it is in business.

Finally per our question and answer, one other important implication. We said we want to both promote creativity and attract creative people. The best way to attract creative people is to be an organization that values and promotes creativity and can demonstrate that. Not only will this lead to success as we've discussed but when candidates see that we have robust systems in place to generate ideas and effectively move them to implementation, we'll become the employer of choice for innovators. So by pursuing this one thing we get better results, happier employees, and attract the best. That's synergy.

So now that we know that everybody has much creativity within them, the next question is what makes it come to the surface and how do we ensure that those ideas align with organizational objectives?

There are two parts to that answer. One part ensures creative thoughts the other part ensures that they relate to organizational objectives.

### Generating Creativity

As far as generating creative thoughts, we find that creativity is a "higher nature" activity. Like all higher nature behaviors, it has to come willingly. One can't be forced to be creative any more than one can be forced to care about someone, be enthusiastic, thoughtful, or appreciative. This realization is hugely important as we find that along with creativity, the performance characteristics most critical to success in today's Three C environment are of the higher nature variety. Yet we also find that many things about the traditional business environment, especially it's top-down nature, work against these higher nature responses. So how do we generate behaviors that only come willingly when our environment doesn't seem to support that and traditional motivational tools don't work?

As described in more detail in the NLW Tenet # 2 there is one sure way to get people to operate consistently from their higher nature including be creative. That is to make work MEANINGFUL. People will pour their blood, sweat, and creativity into something if they perceive it to be meaningful. Very briefly, meaning attaches to two types of things. One has to do with making the most of one's self (personal growth, learning, skill development, etc.) and the other has to do with using that best self to connect with others and contribute to something worthwhile. Either one by itself is incomplete. So the short answer is that if we want creativity, we have to provide a workplace that people see as meaningful. And as we'll see in our last section, the structures and practices we recommend have much to do with the organization's ability to invest in people and position them to work together and contribute in ways that are meaningful.

So we're saying that people want to be creative. Just because they're not, that doesn't mean they don't want to be. Again we have to see the potential, not the current state. Everybody loves a new invention, a better idea, an improved way to do something, especially if they've had a part in conceiving it. It's normal and natural to want to do things more efficiently and effectively. People only want the opposite of these things when they're in a "lower nature mode" (selfishness - what's easiest / what's in it for me?) or (fear - I'm afraid of change, I'm going to lose something in the process). Our higher nature aligns with functional perfection just as nature continually seeks the same. Whereas lack of creativity isn't normal. It's the defeat of what's best in us. That's important to keep in mind as we move to solutions because they start with the realization

that there are barriers in place that cause these selfish and fearful responses or we would already have much more creative and innovative enterprises.



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### Ensuring Creativity Aligns with Objectives

This is easy. Our experience shows that when the environment promotes creativity as discussed above, and people are provided with and able to access information relative to their own jobs, the work around them, and the organization's challenges and objectives, they will almost always channel their ideas sensibly. On the other hand when they don't have this information, employees usually don't offer ideas. But when they do they are often misguided and unrealistic. This happens all the time and then managers conclude that employees with these off-target ideas are out of touch (which they are, but whose fault is that?), not too smart (not true), and not too creative (not true). The fact is that it doesn't take a lot of effort to provide people with what they need to know to ensure that their ideas align with organizational needs. And per our next section, once this spigot gets turned on and people see results from their ideas it will only spiral upwards.

### Summary

This section focused on the critical step one in the innovation process, the generation of good ideas. We mentioned that everybody has significant creative capacity. We said that people want to be creative but for most, the conditions around them will significantly dictate their willingness to be creative or not. We've also made it clear that creativity and other higher nature performance attributes only come from people willingly. And we said that willingness comes when people see work as meaningful. And we very briefly defined what makes work meaningful.

So we should be in agreement that people can be creative and innovative, they want to be creative and innovative, managers want them to be creative and innovative, and our organizations need for people to be creative and innovative. That's a lot of positive potential. Now we need to define some structures, practices, and processes (a system) that can move ideas from concept to reality.

### SECTION 4 - The structures, practices, etc. that define the innovative enterprise

So we've arrived at our final section. We have enough understanding of our subject matter to identify organizational structures, practices, expectations of people, and perceptions of how work should work that inhibit or defeat creativity and innovation. And also enough know-how to recognize those practices, etc. that are supportive. We can systematically take out the bad and bring in the good.

Per that, let's take a look at the table below. You'll note that one column lists brief descriptions of organizational structures, practices, etc. that support ideas and innovation and the other lists corresponding structures, practices, etc. that work against ideas and innovation. The third provides a short explanation as to why that is, though the information we've been discussing should allow the reader to have a good feel for that.

This table isn't meant to suggest that all 15 of these conditions need to be met for an enterprise to be innovative. That would be far too high a bar to set. The table is a reference for self-diagnosis and a guide towards the kinds of structures and practices that bring out the best in people and that companies are finding to be most effective in today's fast-changing, increasingly complex and competitive knowledge and idea economy. They're the kinds of systematic structures, etc. that position regular folks to achieve great things. And the beautiful thing about what we're discussing here is that because movement towards these things aligns with what's best in people, any such movement will build momentum. And momentum and direction can generate a lot of positive results even when most of the previous players and processes remain in place. These are the kinds of systematic upgrades that position regular folks to achieve

So we needn't get far on the continuum towards becoming a structurally more creative and innovative enterprise in order to gain more creative and innovative output. Though importantly, we do have to maintain the momentum with continued actions in the right direction.

| <b>Promotes Creativity &amp; Innovation</b>   | <b>Defeats Creativity &amp; Innovation</b>   | <b>Why</b>  |
|---|--|---|
| Knowledge and training on how to do the regular work effectively  | Lack of training and knowledge   | Good ideas are rarely generated by unknowledgeable and poorly trained people because they lack the perspective to know what a good idea is.   |
| Clear job requirements, preferably a system of standard work (see NLW std wrk article)                            | Allowing too much job task autonomy  | As above, when requirements are unclear it's difficult to know what a good idea is and isn't. When requirements are clear it becomes easy to recognize ways to make things better.          |
| Having a pre-defined system for making job task improvements  | A lack of a system for making job task improvements  | Having a role in small localized improvements is the precursor of continually higher impact ideas. This sets creativity in motion.  |
| Key indicators that define job success and roll up to larger downstream measures                                  | Lack of metrics. Or indicators that aren't helpful to job performance  | Metrics help define what works and doesn't and helps upstream workers to have ideas that have downstream impact   |
| Up and downstream knowledge of supply chains and work processes that one works within                             | Lack of up and downstream knowledge and information  | The more one knows about the work around them, the more they can envision improvements. Improvements outside of one's direct and complete control are impossible in isolation.              |
| Time and resource allocations to be able to work with various stakeholders to handle problems at the lowest level | Working in isolation and needing to go up the organization all the time with problems and turn them over to others | This is where the rubber hits the road. When stakeholders are positioned to handle problems among each other at low levels in the organization their ownership expands ideas get generated. |
| Basic training in continuous improvement tools and techniques and the opportunity to apply them                   | A lack of training and knowledge of CI tools and techniques  | Another rubber hits the road area. If we want people to offer ideas and make improvements they have to be equipped with the toolkit for doing that.   |

| <b>Promotes Creativity &amp; Innovation</b>   | <b>Defeats Creativity &amp; Innovation</b>  | <b>Why</b>   |
|---|---|--|
| Defined protocols for dealing with problems that are beyond one's capacity to manage  | Lack of consistency on how larger problems are reported and addressed                   | Nothing is more frustrating for employees than repeat problems that they can't address and don't know what to do about. Defined protocols ensure that this rarely happens.   |
| A reasonable amount of knowledge and information about the organization's challenges and objectives                                     | A lack of knowledge and information about the organization's challenges and objectives  | The more employees know about what's important to the organization the more they can help and will help significantly if positioned to do so.  |
| Engagement in multiple aspects of the workplace beyond one's job (policies, decision-making, problem solving, customer interface, etc.) | A lack of opportunities to contribute in ways outside one's day-to-day job              | To the degree that employees are engaged in all aspects of the enterprise they will take ownership, be more entrepreneurial, and more knowledgeable. Ideas flow naturally from that combination.   |
| Training and development opportunities that expand capability, a sense of being invested in   | Lack of training and development opportunities, a sense that one is a cost not an asset | To the degree people feel invested in they will make a greater return on that investment. This is especially true of "non-professional" employees.   |
| Proof that the organization seeks one's ideas and if valid, puts them to use  | Proof that the organization doesn't listen or have an interest in one's input           | When people see a positive response to their inputs, the spigot will just get opened wider   |
| A systematic approach when things go wrong  | A blame-oriented approach when things go wrong  | People will close up very quickly if blamed for something that they recognize as systematic in nature which almost all problems are. A systematic approach removes the fear.   |
| Reward and recognition processes for ideas  | A lack of reward and recognition processes for ideas                                    | This is overrated. Mostly the engagement and use of ideas is reward enough but it doesn't hurt to provide some amount of formal reward / recognition   |
| A defined system for idea intake - consideration - implementation and an accompanying well-communicated strategy                        | A lack of defined idea intake - consideration - implementation system                   | This is critical. Businesses being the structures that they are a defined end-to-end system for idea intake to implementation must exist (see implementation). This also turns of the go signal to employees about what the organization wants and needs |



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### Regarding Implementation

This is tough to generalize about because each situation is truly unique. Organizations are at all kinds of different current states as far as being creative and innovative, engaging employees, managing knowledge, having good or not so good training and development processes for different levels of employees, communications processes, continuous improvement infrastructure, supportive and non-supportive HR policies, values, and cultures, etc. All these things influence what we call the “selective emphasis” of what implementation steps to take and in what order.

The key is to “selectively emphasize” those things that will have the most impact the quickest. This isn’t hard to do but does require some diagnosis and clear thinking. And again per momentum, the right actions will be so positive and appealing to employees that they will be highly forgiving of missteps, especially when they have involvement in it. And we’ve seen that management missteps can be a plus when handled properly. People love to see management make a (not too big) mistake and then be forthright about it. That in itself can lead to quickly upgrading an organization’s culture.

### An Implementation Plan

With the above implementation variables in mind, the following provides a generalized implementation plan that contains elements that are probably universal to all organizations looking to become significantly more creative and innovative.

1. NLW Diagnosis - A diagnosis with key personnel to take the temperature of the enterprise around the NLW Scorecard items. This needn’t be more a lengthy process. At the NLW we believe that we have the diagnostic model and instincts to draw significant meaningful data from a single meeting or very few meetings if the right people are available and the discussion is frank. Surveys can be employed but are not our usual preference.
2. Initial Communications - Employee presentations by appropriate personnel (we can do whatever fits but prefer local leadership to do as much as possible). Presentations will for the most part follow the information in this article with a few additional important concepts about high performance, productivity, and wealth generation intertwined. Very importantly, we find that most employees already have a good feel for these things. So we’re often telling people something they already know or sense at some level. As a result these communications tend to be very favorable and create a lot of inertia if followed by actions consistent with the communications. To that point, we’ve used an approach where employees literally provide answers to questions as opposed to being informed by the speaker.
3. A WIS Facilitation Team and Idea Generation Process - We advise the creation of a Work Improvement System Facilitation Team (with a local name). There’s a good bit to this in the form of structures, tools, and processes but it’s not complicated and employees respond to it with much enthusiasm as they both sense the value and want to learn and participate. This team becomes the hub of the wheel that’s the system for making improvements and driving the organization towards increased creativity and innovation. A key part of the origination and development of the team and it’s roles and responsibilities includes the creation of a process for intaking - considering - prioritizing - launching improvement ideas and the communication of this process to other employees. Once this “idea to implementation path” is in place it will do much to generate input. The “messages” sent to the workforce by the creation of this team and the things it manages are game-changing. Teams like this quickly indicate the power of bottom-up structures.
4. Minimal Continuous Improvement Tool Training - Parallel to the WIS team development there’s some minimal training on a few basic continuous improvement tools. These are the tools that people use to turn

ideas into reality. It's key to understand that these tools are simple and can be learned and applied effectively by all employees though we needn't train all employees initially. Training sessions are short as the tools are primarily learned through application and with some facilitation during usage. Standard tools to get the workgroup moving towards some of the 15 items mentioned above are standard work, basic process mapping, meeting facilitation, basic problem solving, brainstorming and perhaps others



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depending on the situation. Keep in mind, the tools are not the thing. Too often tools are taught in much depth but only to a few and then opportunities not properly provided. It's the opportunities to put them to use by many employees to bring one's ideas into reality that is the explosive thing. The WIS team and process have much to do with that. Once people see how the tools help do that, their usage will become commonplace and employees will get increasingly effective at applying all kinds of continuous improvement methodologies. These tools are highly intuitive and when taught and used properly follow normal creative thought processes. So they greatly enhance group creativity.

5. Begin Formalized Idea Generation and Improvement Efforts - Part of the WIS team's role is to communicate it's activities including how the intake to realization process works and to generate ideas from the workgroup. Because of the previous steps and the fact that co-workers are involved in the WIS Facilitation Team, ideas generally pour in. This is a critical time. Many organizations find that there are so many opportunities for improvement from incremental to breakthrough that the challenge comes in paring down expectations and making suggestions scalable while gaining implementation expertise and maintaining momentum. There is much more to be said about this point in the evolution.

We'll stop at this point. Once an organization gets this far down the road (which can happen in as little as a month or two depending on resource availability, the size of the organization, and the previous knowledge and skill sets of participants) people are enthused, momentum is occurring, ownership is taking hold, and reversal is almost impossible. From this point it's just a matter of continuous improvement of all of the parts and pieces of the system. As ideas are generated and acted upon and people are engaged in that activity everything spirals upward. More ideas, better ideas, more effective use of tools, more engagement of people, improved relationships, more cross knowledge, etc. As ideas are implemented the "regular work" stabilizes and improves and as that occurs the opportunity to generate and implement ideas and make improvements increases. The organization continues to drive higher capability and higher value work down the organization thus increasing productivity. All of this moves the organization towards the objective of becoming the creative and innovative self-evolving enterprise.

### SUMMARY

We've said that people can be creative and innovative, that they want to be creative and innovative, that leaders want their people and their organizations to be more creative and innovative, and that the business environment is demanding it. And we said that that's a lot of potential just waiting to be actualized.

All of this very powerful potential realization is just a stone's throw away for any organization. We need to keep reminding ourselves, this stuff may be different but it's not difficult, it's simple. What isn't simple and is growing increasingly difficult, is trying to succeed with our traditional approaches in an environment that is proving them to be weak and ineffective no matter how hard we try. Whereas this approach simply aligns us with the demands of the environment. The dinosaurs could be the best dinosaurs possible but no matter how hard they tried they couldn't align with an increasingly colder environment. So they're extinct. Much the same in our case. Change isn't the tough road, it's the easy road. You just have to be sure you're changes match the external reality. Alignment with what's best in people is the easy road. Engaging people in this effort as opposed to having management do everything is the easy road. We're not inventing anything. We're simply leveraging capacity we already have to do what works. What could be a more perfect scenario for success, differentiating ourselves from others, and providing our employees with exactly what they want?

So as our NLW marketing materials say, we're aligning work with the human spirit and in doing so yielding the incredible enterprise - employee win-win of enduring business success and a more satisfying and rewarding work experience for all participants.

Please contact us regarding how to implement the ideas in this article. You'll be amazed at how simple and inexpensive this undertaking is and how significant the rewards will be for your business, yourself, and your people.