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Leading JPS Africa's Transformation:

Curiosity, Capability, Performance and Sustainable Growth

Introduction

In today's volatile and highly competitive business environment, sustained growth depends less on operational efficiency alone and more on an organisation's ability to continuously learn, adapt and innovate. Effective leaders create conditions where curiosity is encouraged, experimentation is accepted and diverse perspectives are valued. These behaviours help organisations develop innovative teams capable of generating breakthrough ideas and delivering exponential growth.

Curiosity as the Foundation of Innovation

Curiosity is the desire to explore new ideas, challenge assumptions and seek deeper understanding. Research suggests that organisations that encourage exploration and learning are better positioned to discover new opportunities and adapt to changing markets. March (1991), cited that successful organisations balance the exploitation of existing capabilities with the exploration of new possibilities through experimentation, discovery and risk-taking.[1]

Leaders foster curiosity by:

- Asking insightful questions rather than providing immediate answers.
- Encouraging employees to challenge established practices.
- Promoting continuous learning and knowledge sharing.
- Rewarding experimentation and intelligent risk-taking.

When JPS Africa's leaders demonstrate curiosity themselves, they create a culture where learning becomes a collective responsibility rather than an individual initiative.

Creating Psychological Safety for Innovation

Curiosity alone is insufficient if employees fear criticism or failure. Teams innovate most effectively when members feel safe to express ideas ask questions and admit mistakes.

Clarity, effective communication and supportive supervision are pre-requisites. According to Edmondson & Lei (2014), psychological safety is a critical factor influencing team learning, collaboration and innovation. Employees are more likely to contribute novel ideas when they believe they can take interpersonal risks without fear of embarrassment or punishment.[2]

Leaders build psychological safety by:

- Valuing diverse viewpoints.
- Listening actively and respectfully.
- Treating mistakes as learning opportunities.
- Encouraging constructive debate.

Research further shows that psychological safety promotes information sharing, collaboration and team effectiveness, all of which contribute to stronger organisational performance.[3]

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[1] March, J. G. (1991). *Exploration and Exploitation in Organizational Learning*. Organization Science, 2(1), 71-87.

[2] Edmondson, A. C., & Lei, Z. (2014). *Psychological Safety: The History, Renaissance, and Future of an Interpersonal Construct*. Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior, 1, 23-43.

[3] Mogård, E. V., Rørstad, O. B., & Bang, H. (2023). *The relationship between psychological safety and management team effectiveness: The mediating role of behavioral integration*. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 20*(1), 406. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20010406

Developing Innovative Teams

Innovation is rarely the result of isolated genius. Instead, it emerges from collaborative teams with diverse expertise and perspectives. Research by Amabile (1997), showed that creativity flourishes when employees possess relevant expertise, creative-thinking skills and strong intrinsic motivation. People tend to produce their most creative work when they are motivated by interest, challenge and purpose rather than solely by external rewards.[4]

JPS Africa is a learning organisation and promotes cross functionality.
Leaders can develop innovative teams by:

1. Building diversity of thought through varied backgrounds, experiences and skills.
2. Providing autonomy that allows employees to experiment and solve problems creatively.
3. Aligning work with purpose to strengthen intrinsic motivation.
4. Encouraging cross-functional collaboration to generate novel solutions.
5. Recognising learning and innovation efforts, not only successful outcomes.

The above practices strengthen creative capacity and enhance the quality and quantity of innovative ideas generated across the organisation.[5]

From Innovation to Exponential Growth

Exponential growth occurs when organisations consistently convert new knowledge into innovative products, services, processes and business models. Curious leaders create learning organisations that continuously identify emerging opportunities and respond faster than competitors. By fostering psychological safety and enabling innovation, leaders establish a cycle of continuous improvement and value creation.

This cycle can be summarised as follows:
Curiosity → Learning → Innovation → Competitive Advantage → Growth

As employees explore new possibilities, applying various institutionalised business models and interventions like management and leadership mentoring and coaching, JPS Africa accumulates knowledge, develop innovative capabilities of managers and direct reports to strengthen adaptability. Over time, such capabilities generate sustainable competitive advantages that support long-term growth and resilience.[6]

Conclusion

Leadership plays a decisive role in shaping an organisation's capacity for innovation and growth. Leaders who cultivate curiosity, create psychological safety and promote intrinsically motivated teamwork build environments where innovation flourishes. Such organisations are better equipped to adapt to disruption, seize emerging opportunities and achieve exponential growth. In an economy increasingly driven by knowledge and innovation, fostering curiosity is no longer optional; it is a strategic leadership imperative.

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[4] Amabile, T. M. (1997). *Motivating Creativity in Organizations: On Doing What You Love and Loving What You Do*. California Management Review, 40(1), 39-58.

[5] Amabile, T. M. (1988). *A Model of Creativity and Innovation in Organizations*. Research in Organizational Behavior, 10, 123-167.

[6] March, J. G. (1991). *Exploration and Exploitation in Organizational Learning*. Organization Science, 2(1), 71-87.

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1. Amabile, T. M. (2012). Componential Theory of Creativity. Harvard Business School Working Paper.
2. Amabile, T. M. (1988). A Model of Creativity and Innovation in Organizations. Research in Organizational Behavior, 10, 123-167.
3. Amabile, T. M. (1997). Motivating Creativity in Organizations: On Doing What You Love and Loving What You Do. California Management Review, 40(1), 39-58.
4. Edmondson, A. C., & Lei, Z. (2014). Psychological Safety: The History, Renaissance, and Future of an Interpersonal Construct. Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior, 1, 23-43.
5. Edmondson, A. C. (1999). Psychological Safety and Learning Behavior in Work Teams. Administrative Science Quarterly, 44(2), 350-383.
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