



Leading Innovation in a Covid-19 World



GARY COVERT
CONSULTING

THREE NEW TRUTHS

1 Conditions have changed drastically even if organizations' over-all objectives of future growth and profitability remain the same. Supply chains, client needs, customer behaviors, and government policies have all changed. Leaders need a comprehensive way to integrate and address the new realities and in very short order.

2 Organizations need the wisdom of their teams as never before. Unfortunately, these teams are laboring under the realities of social distancing and fear for their health and economic well-being.

3 The effects of the pandemic may be drawn out and may reoccur. New thinking will be critical in order to adapt if the coronavirus situation lasts longer or if we are living in an age of periodic and unpredictable disruptions from future outbreaks.

Many organizations are facing immediate threat. Other organizations are simply facing uncertainty. Either case requires a strong, effective response that involves proactively raising the bar.

The fallout from COVID-19 creates serious challenges, but within all these challenges exist some great opportunities IF leaders have the ability to surface great ideas and get them developed to improve the position of their organizations.

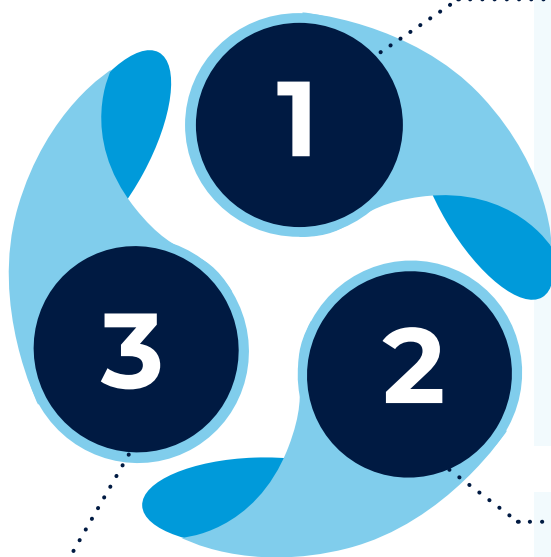
BEYOND SURVIVAL, 3 BENEFITS OF INNOVATING NOW

- ▶ **Maintain Momentum.** *Those that get organized now will have a tremendous advantage over those that try to move from a standing start.*
- ▶ **Keep Teams Fresh and Dynamic.** *Leaders who focus their teams on making improvements now will keep those teams from getting stale and prevent valuable networks from deteriorating.*
- ▶ **Boost Morale.** *Uncertainty can lead to lost productivity, fear, and disengagement. Thinking and acting to create a positive future together is a tremendously powerful antidote.*

MERE OPTIMIZATION IS RISKIER THAN TRULY INNOVATING. - PETER DRUCKER

Leading Innovation Fundamentals...the what, who, and how in “normal” times

While there are special considerations to innovating in a COVID-19 world, the fundamentals remain the same.



BE CLEAR ON WHAT INNOVATION IS.

Make sure you and your team are focusing on raising the bar in terms of doing things better or creating new products or services. Of course, we need to solve problems, but make sure solutions are focused on elevated performance, not just getting back to a baseline.

INNOVATE INCLUSIVELY.

The best innovation efforts include people from across wide parts of the organization and deep within the organization. Don't limit innovation expectations to the senior leadership team or R&D groups.

USE A PROCESS.

All leaders should be educated in and follow some sort of process. The steps do not need to be complex. In his books and workshops on innovation, Dr. Alan Weiss outlines the following steps: ideation, screening, development, selection, planning and execution.

9 Special Considerations to Innovation in the New Reality

ONE

Assure your people that they are not innovating themselves out of a job, rather they are innovating to keep the organization well-positioned and thriving, which creates new opportunities for everyone.

TWO

Express your empathy for the present situation. People are concerned (some are flat-out scared) about their health, the health of their families, and their fundamental economic well-being. While talking about preparing for the future, leaders also need to show that they are sensitive to the strains of today.

THREE

Capture and use up-to-date information about any changes that have occurred and have good communication mechanisms for that information. People need to share information about trends, changes, and unintended consequences in order to take appropriate action.

FOUR

Concentrate on short- to medium-term improvements (base hits and scoring runs). While the organization needs long-term thinking, many organizations will benefit from concrete steps that produce results soon that people can get excited about today.

FIVE

Consider your organization's tolerance for change when evaluating ideas to pursue. A healthcare-related company may be under big strain so base hits with little disruption may be a prudent course. Manufacturers of products that saw a dip in orders, but huge shifts in the supply chain may have a bigger tolerance (and imperative) to change.

SIX

Communicate with confidence that many of the answers (and thereby control of an organization's future) reside internally.

SEVEN

Set up robust mechanisms that allow initiatives to be visible, collaboration to occur at a distance, and follow a clear innovation process.

EIGHT

Include key clients, suppliers, and stakeholders in your innovation efforts. Let them know "we are in this together" and need their input on areas of potential collaboration.

NINE

Reinforce the mindset that innovation is not just another thing to do, it is a discipline that will help the organization to bring together all its key activities and to execute more effectively.



How leaders should get started:



Communicate clearly that you are in the market for new ideas to get the organization best prepared for the future and make adjustments for today.

Issue clear “what if” or “how come” challenges that relate to high priority areas to be addressed.

Encourage people to organize and become part of teams of interested and capable parties to get new ideas generated, developed and presented.

Make sure people are following a process, not just coming up with ideas and then jumping to implementation.

Get senior leadership involved in these innovation teams early on as a sponsor and participant.

Create a timeline for some short-term and medium-term ideas to be surfaced and approved...be conservative but encourage your organization to stretch.

Set up systems to capture and communicate progress on initiatives and areas that people need help.

Put innovation on your regular meeting agendas in terms of what steps are we taking to make necessary improvements.



Conclusion

These are times of unprecedented challenge. Leaders need to take the lead and build the innovation capacity of their organizations. It can be done and it is possible that organizations can come out stronger and better for it, but the time is now.

The issue of how to raise the bar in a COVID-19 world is not just important, it is urgent. Without effective and rigorous processes in place and effective actions taken, leaders will lose the opportunity to address problems before they worsen and they may lose their position in the marketplace to those that DID innovate during this time.

Curious about how to dramatically accelerate innovation in your organization or team? Contact me for access to a complimentary online self-assessment of your organization's innovation processes. The self-assessment will produce a detailed report of potential bright spots and lowlights, as well as comparison to benchmarks.

ABOUT GARY COVERT

Gary Covert empowers leaders with the tools to develop exceptional talent, keep strategic focus, and innovate continuously without burning out. He advises and coaches senior leaders from a diverse range of industries, including logistics, technology, global hospitality, eye health, restaurants, healthcare, financial services, construction, mining, and energy.

Contact: Gary Covert
Founder, Gary Covert Consulting
gary@garycovertconsulting.com | ph 480 720 9551
PO Box 51732
Phoenix, Arizona 85076
USA

