



Workplace innovation: Learning from innovative companies in today's modern era

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Abstract: *What can we learn from innovative companies today? Workplace innovation is a crucial issue in today's highly dynamic, global marketplace. This article depicts lessons that can be extracted from three innovative companies— Alphabet, IBM and Amazon. These companies have been recognized in Fortune's "America's Most Innovative Companies" listing and are consistently valued highly by stakeholders worldwide.*

Keywords: *Workplace Innovation, Alphabet, IBM and Amazon*

1. INTRODUCTION

Modernization. Invention. Change. Creativity. These words are often associated with workplace innovation and have become a strategic objective for many organizations today. Business leaders are always looking for ways to innovate because it can help solve problems and gain a competitive edge in business today. Ye et al. (2022) noted that a growing concern among practitioners is how to stimulate employee's innovative behavior. Innovative behavior refers to the behavior of individuals to consciously take, promote, and realize new ideas for the enterprise.

What can we learn from innovative companies today? Workplace innovation is a crucial issue in today's highly dynamic, global marketplace. This article depicts lessons that can be extracted from three innovative companies— Alphabet, IBM and Amazon. These companies have been recognized in Fortune's "America's Most Innovative Companies" listing and are consistently regarded highly by stakeholders worldwide (Fortune, 2024).

The purpose of this article is to accomplish the following: 1) briefly define workplace innovation, 2) describe Alphabet, IBM and Amazon innovation program or strategy, and 3) provide practical application of effective workplace innovation program. Understanding workplace innovation can help business leaders gain a competitive edge in business today.

2. WORKPLACE INNOVATION DEFINED

Innovation is noted as a crucial source of sustainable competitive advantage that companies use to bolster rapidly changing business environment. Scholars and practitioners have been attracted to the concept of innovation as studies have consistently suggested that "creativity and innovation in products, work processes and services are key contributors to long-term organizational survival and success" (Ghosh, 2015, p. 1126). Thus, creativity is both the starting point and root of innovation.

Pot (2011) defined workplace innovation as the implementation of new and combined interventions in the fields of work organization, human resource management and supportive technologies. Moreover, Scott & Bruce (1994) viewed innovation behavior as the outcome of four interacting systems— individual, leader, work group, and climate for innovation. Thus, innovation is a multistage process which begins with problem recognition and the generation of ideas or solutions, either novel or adopted (Scott & Bruce, 1994).

El Moudden & Balhadj (2024) indicated that there are several types of innovation, but the best known are those which distinguish product innovation from process innovation, and in contrast, which distinguish technological innovation from administrative innovation. Product innovation includes new products/services introduced throughout the organization while process innovation is new element introduced into production operations. Finally, technological innovations occur in the technical or

technological systems of the organization while administrative innovation occurs in the social system of the organization.

3. CORPORATION BACKGROUND

Three companies are examined in this section for their outstanding innovative programs-- Alphabet, IBM and Amazon.

Alphabet:

Alphabet Inc, the holding company of Google, is a global technology company offering products and platforms including Google Search, Google Maps, calendars, ads, Gmail, Google Play, Android, Google Cloud, Google Display & Video 360, Google Marketing Platform, and YouTube. Headquartered in Mountain View, California, Google was founded by Larry Page and Sergey Brin in 1998, and later announced they are creating a new holding company, Alphabet Inc. in 2015. With over \$307 billion in revenue and employing over 179,582 workers, Alphabet is one of the largest technology companies in the world (GlobalData, 2024). The company consistently received top accolades such as Forbes' list of the World's Most Valuable Brands, Ethisphere's World's Most Ethical Companies and Fortune's America's Most Innovative Companies (Alphabet Investor Relations, 2024).

Thompson (2023) noted that Google (Alphabet) follows its mission and vision statements for its leadership position in multiple industries globally. Google's mission statement is as follows: "Our mission is to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful" (para. 3). By embracing groundbreaking technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI), big data analytics, and cloud computing, Alphabet's path to digital supremacy is paved with strategic investments and partnerships such as alliances with the University of Tokyo and the University of Chicago pointing towards an accelerated journey towards achieving a quantum computing future. This commitment is evident by Alphabet's infusion up to \$2 billion in AI research company Anthropic nurturing an ecosystem where AI is not only advanced but also interpretable and steerable. Alphabet's digital strategies: A symbiosis of innovation and security include the following: 1) Operational efficiencies and market expansion through disruptive technologies, 2) Key thematic focus on cybersecurity and e-commerce technologies, and 3) Cutting-edge product launches, strategic partnerships, and tactical investments (PR Newswire, 2024).

IBM:

International Business Machines Corporation (IBM), one of the world's largest IT companies, is a provider of global hybrid cloud and IT, and consulting solutions and services. IBM's key areas include analytics, artificial intelligence, automation, blockchain, cloud computing, IT infrastructure and management, cybersecurity, and software development. Headquartered in Armonk, New York in 1911 as the Computing-Tabulating-Recording Company, it was later renamed to IBM in 1924 (Patrizio & Moore, n.d.). With over 282,000 employees worldwide, IBM has over \$61 billion in revenue (Britannica Money, 2024). IBM consistently amassed great accolades such as Time's 100 Most Influential Companies, The Wall Street Journal's The 250-Best Managed Companies, Ethisphere's World's Most Ethical Companies, and Fortune's America's Most Innovative Companies (IBM, 2024).

According to Lombardo (2023), IBM's mission statement is "to lead in the creation, development and manufacture of the industry's most advanced information technologies, including computer systems, software, networking systems, storage devices and microelectronics. And our worldwide network of IBM solutions and services professionals translates these advanced technologies into business value for our customers. We translate these advanced technologies into the value for our customers through our professional solutions, services and consulting business worldwide" (para. 3). IBM's strategy has been consistently aligned with the twin pillars of hybrid cloud and AI while aiming to leverage the strengths of their Power systems to facilitate digital transformation for its clients. As IBM looks ahead, the focus remains on client-centric innovation, expanding as-a-service options, hybrid cloud, AI, quantum computing, systems and semiconductors, security and creating more pathways for workload mobility across hybrid environments (Dickens, 2023). Innovation is the heart and soul of IBM and collaboration with partners such as Cleveland Clinic, Germany's Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft, UK's Hartree Centre, and Japan's University of Tokyo and Keio University (IBM, 2024).

Amazon:

Amazon.com Inc (Amazon) is a massive online retailer in the world having a global presence to over a dozen countries. Founded by Jeff Bezos in 1994, Amazon is headquartered in Seattle, Washington

an annual revenue of over \$514 billion and employing over 1,525,000 workers worldwide. Amazon has become the largest online ecommerce retailer, and one of the most powerful brands in the world offering support related services, subscription, home delivery/shipping, and cloud web hosting (Ecommerce Platforms, 2020). With amazing customer-focused philosophy, Amazon consistently garnered top awards such as American Customer Satisfaction Index 2020, Forbes’ World Best Employers and Global Company, BrandZ Most Valuable Brand, and Fortune’s America’s Most Innovative Companies (Amazon, 2024).

Amazon’s mission statement is “to be Earth’s most customer-centric company” and guided by four principles—customer obsession rather than competitor focus, passion for invention, commitment to operational excellence, and long-term thinking (Work@tech, n.d., para. 3). Moreover, Pereira (2024) noted how Amazon has taken several measures to ensure its competitiveness in global markets by investing heavily in research and development (R&D) focusing on developing cutting-edge solutions and products, continually striving for innovation through acquisitions and partnership with other leading companies such as Whole Foods Market or Twitch Interactives, and placing special emphasis on customer service by designing delivery options such as Prime Air drone or expanding logistics infrastructure globally. Additionally, Amazon is committed to integrating AI through programs such as Amazon Bedrock, Amazon SageMaker, and Amazon Elastic Compute Cloud (EC2) Trn1 (Amazon, 2024). Finally, Bieler (2022) stated keeping innovation sustainable by hiring creative builders via the “bar raiser solution” and keeping “day one thinking” will prove pivotal Amazon’s organizational success.

4. ANALYSIS OF ALPHABET, IBM AND AMAZON

Workplace innovation can foster growth and long-term viability of an organization. While Alphabet, IBM, and Amazon are unique companies, it is interesting to note their similarities:

- Commitment to innovation
- Customer/client focused
- Collaboration with partners

This author observed all three companies are committed to innovation, customer/client focused, and partnership/collaboration. Firstly, commitment to innovation is evident by investing in AI and emerging technologies. Alphabet has embraced groundbreaking technologies like AI, big data analytics, and cloud computing ensuring digital superiority. Moreover, IBM innovative commitment is clearly manifested by consistent alignment to its twin pillars of hybrid cloud and AI quantum computing, semiconductors, and more. Finally, Amazon has pioneered innovation through R&D and I program such as Amazon Bedrock, SageMaker, and Elastic Compute Cloud (EC2) Trn1. Secondly, being customer/client focused is an important similarity of abovementioned organizations as evident in their respective mission statements. Alphabet’s mission statement is to organize the world’s information and make it universally accessible and useful. A part of IBM’s mission statement is to translate advanced technologies into the value for customers while Amazon’s mission statement is to be Earth’s most customer-centric company. Thirdly, collaboration with partners is another commonality of Amazon, IBM and Alphabet. These alliances/collaborations include Alphabet’s partnership with University of Tokyo and University of Chicago, IBM’s partnership with as Cleveland Clinic, Germany’s Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft, UK’s Hartree Centre, and Japan’s University of Tokyo and Keio University, and Amazon’s partnership with Whole Foods Market or Twitch Interactives.

Below are highlights of the abovementioned innovation strategy:

Alphabet	IBM	Amazon
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AI, big data analytics, and cloud computing • Partnerships/alliances such as with University of Tokyo and the University of Chicago • Mission statement: “Our mission is to organize the world’s information and make it universally accessible and useful” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Twin pillars of hybrid cloud and AI • Partnership such as with Cleveland Clinic, Germany’s Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft, UK’s Hartree Centre, and Japan’s University of Tokyo and Keio University 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AI commitment through programs such as Amazon Bedrock, Amazon SageMaker, and Amazon Elastic Compute Cloud (EC2) Trn1 • Partnership/acquisition with other leading companies such as Whole Foods Market or Twitch Interactives

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mission statement is “.... And our worldwide network of IBM solutions and services professionals translates these advanced technologies into business value for our customers” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mission statement is “to be Earth’s most customer-centric company”
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5. PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Innovative ideas, technologies, and solutions have shaped the world we live in. Indeed, every new idea come from a creative individual or team of innovators. Thus, fostering workplace innovation is a must in today’s highly competitive global marketplace because innovation improves motivation, contributes to one’s personal brand, encourages collaboration, and increases professional recognition (Indeed Editorial Team, 2022). Moreover, Allen (2018) provided strategies on how to turn ideas into innovation—be persistent, show leadership, find time to think or join like minded colleagues in huddles/forums, know your subject and have passion for it, find allies/champions and collaborate, and learn from others; avoid reinventing the wheel.

Trajanov (n.d.) stated that a culture of innovation provides numerous benefits for companies such as competitive advantage, improved customer experience, increased efficiency, enhanced employee engagement, attraction and retention of top talent and increased revenue and profitability. Below are eight steps to creating a culture of innovation (Trajanov, n.d.):

- Define and communicate a clear innovation strategy
- Empower employees to generate and pursue new ideas
- Create psychological safety
- Remove unnecessary bureaucracy
- Let information flow freely
- Encourage cross-functional collaboration
- Celebrate innovation successes
- Hire with diversity in mind

Finally, Spitzer (2013) noted that no single strategy for fostering creativity and innovation that works all the time, but leaders should stay focused on three things—adopting and encouraging a creative mindset, building and sustaining a vibrant and healthy work environment, and providing a disciplined process for making creativity and innovation and everyday part of the culture.

6. CONCLUSION

This article defined workplace innovation and extracted lessons from three innovative companies—Alphabet, IBM and Amazon. Workplace innovation is pivotal to a company’s competitive advantage as innovation brings new ideas, technologies, and solution while increasing efficiencies and profitability. Innovation is here to stay, and companies must leverage it to their advantage and future success.

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Dr. Baldonado is a faculty member at Columbia Southern University and a military veteran. His areas of expertise include human resources, work motivation and diversity, business administration, and management. Dr. Baldonado has over 20 years of human resources, military, and teaching experience and has published in his field.

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