COMPETE OUTSIDE THE BOX™

Bureaucracy is the Enemy of Creativity
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Bureaucracy is based on the assumption that control, predictability and certainty can be created by management. This is mostly nonsense, particularly in today's hyper-change global environment where flexibility is essential. Bureaucracy is the opposite of flexibility because it dictates what workers should do. This is accomplished by rules, polices, procedures, etc.

Bureaucracy places unnecessary limits on thinking and actions of individuals confronting problems that require a new solution. It prevents new ideas from emerging or even being considered. Why think about the many tasks that the policy book says you cannot do? Over time, the result is apathy and poor performance. Just look at government, the ultimate bureaucracy, for evidence of how ineffective and inefficient bureaucracies can get.

Many people work for companies where if one makes critical statements about leadership, policies, etc., one gets ostracized or fired. In such oppressive places, there is an endemic lack of initiative, passion and sharing of ideas. The result is a lack of creativity and flexibility, which are essential to compete and survive in a rapidly changing environment. Bureaucracy is much like communism!

Become Creativity's Ally
A major step in building a creative culture is to eliminate bureaucracy, or even better, never create it in the first place. Note that some policies and rules are needed for repetitive tasks, or when there is one best way to do a task and the situation surrounding it is unlikely to change (e.g., surgery, handling cash, processing nuclear-fuel, etc.). However, when it comes to making decisions in a dynamic competitive environment where creativity, flexibility and risk-taking are needed for innovation, bureaucracy must be eliminated. Doing so gives personnel the freedom to experiment and try new ideas that will best fit new situations.

When Gordon Bethune (former CEO of Continental Airlines) was hired, one of his initial acts was to burn the company's policy manuals as part of his successful turnaround strategy. He removed policies and rules preventing staff from providing great customer service, and replaced them with general guidelines and principles. This contributed to quickly going from the worst in customer service to first.

Giving your followers freedom leads to creative solutions and ideas. Over time, creativity spurs on more creativity. Large-scale creativity can be built on lower-level ideas. Technology in electronics and computers works this way. The latest smart phone

has new technology that is built on or with older ones (e.g., plastics) or a smaller scale technology (e.g., transistors, software). In a similar way, innovations in employee selection can serve as the foundation for innovative training and unique capabilities that underlie innovation.

How to Destroy Bureaucracy
- Trust skilled, motivated and committed staff to make decisions related to their jobs.
- Replace rules, policies, and procedures with general guidelines or principles that help employees make decisions that are best suited to their situation, but are also consistent with the organization's strategy.
- Don't punish mistakes or decisions that don't not work, rather use these as learning opportunities.
- Accept that you operate in an uncertain global environment that requires flexibility and innovative solutions. There is no best way to do **new** things.
- Order and predictability are abnormal.
- Ask staff to tell you what prevents them from doing their jobs better; many rules and policies will likely be identified for elimination.

Removing bureaucracy requires leadership and helps organizations respond to change with flexibility, creativity and take reasonable risks needed to beat their competitors. The result is improved innovation, competitiveness and happier customers.

Follow me on Twitter and check out my book to get tons of great ideas on how to become an unconventional leader and create an innovative organization.

Eric J. Romero, PhD is an Unconventional Leadership Badass. For over 15 years, Eric has helped managers become **unconventional leaders**. Eric partners with leaders to help them create competitive advantage based on **creativity, flexibility and risk-taking** so they can innovate and win. Eric has written over 35 articles and presented his ideas around the world. He is the author of *Compete Outside the Box: The Unconventional Way to Beat the Competition*. Originally from New York City, his presentations are delivered with a sense of humor, 100% unedited honesty and street smarts. For more information go to www.CompeteOutsideTheBox.com.

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