The following document is supplemental to *ACRP WebResource 16: Playbook for Developing a Culture of Innovation at Airports* (ACRP Project 01-47, "A Guide to Developing a Culture of Innovation at Airports"). The full WebResource can be found at https://crp.trb.org/acrpwebresource16/.

Developing a Culture of Innovation at Airports
FAQ Sheet

Just what *is* a culture of innovation?

According to Merriam-Webster, culture is "the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterize an institution or organization."[1] If an organization had a *personality*, this is what it would be. Culture affects how people **feel** about working in an organization, how they **treat** one another, how they **view** where the organization is headed, and what they **do** to help it get there. When people feel good about an organization and its purpose, they tend to give more of themselves in their jobs. This can translate into improved **productivity** and a **motivation** to think up **better ways** of doing things.

Innovation as noted by Merriam-Webster is "1: a new idea, method or device: novelty. 2: the introduction of something new."[2] It is the process of developing and applying ideas to the improvement of the way things are accomplished or achieved. *The Invisible Advantage* further defines **types of innovation** as:[3]

- **Incremental Innovation** - focused on improving core business functions every day;
- **Sustaining Innovation** - major advancements in core business functions for the benefit of existing customers and markets; and
- **Disruptive Innovation** - new business models reinvent the organization for the longer term.

Marrying these two powerful forces results in a culture of innovation. This is a holistic workplace culture that encourages **free thinking**, an **experimental** approach to creating solutions, and **a willingness to learn** to generate new or improved products, services, or processes. It brings **diverse perspectives** to the table and promotes a sense of **belonging** for all staff members where everyone feels their **voice** is welcomed and **heard**. It promotes and fosters a work environment in which everyone knows that their individual roles are **changing** the organization for the better, no matter their job function. Achieving this requires understanding the things that shape the norms, values, and behaviors carried out by individuals in an organization. It also entails developing characteristics such as: leadership **behavior**, organizational **structure**, business **processes**, **metrics**, **incentives**, **rewards**, **recognition**, and symbols that all reinforce innovation.

What if I'm *Already* "Doing Innovation?"

Many organizations have started to formalize their innovation efforts; but this research project uncovered that it is important to categorize the conversation surrounding innovation. Ed Essey of the Microsoft Garage organization summarized this using three major ways that organizations view innovation: as **fruit**, a **tree**, or **soil**.[4] This led to the research team's creation of Figure 1, which further differentiates "doing innovation" from a "culture of innovation."

In the **fruit** viewpoint, innovation is seen as doing *projects,* which can demonstrate *why* innovation is needed and can be *what sparks the need* for innovation. In the **tree** viewpoint, innovation is seen as having an innovation *program*, which usually gets a start when airports create new innovation-related executive positions. Programs typically focus on teams carrying out transformative innovations. In the **soil** viewpoint, innovation is seen as being in the culture itself. It becomes a continuous cycle where soil is nourished, and the organization can plant more "*trees*" and bear more *"fruit"* as part of its cultural norm. This is not in opposition to the fruit and tree viewpoints; visible fruit is needed to demonstrate the value of a shift to a culture of innovation.
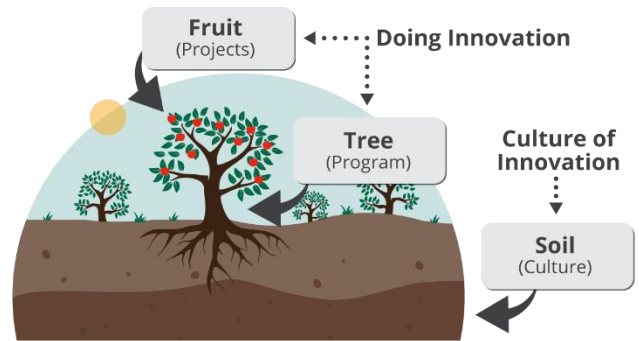

Figure 1 Viewpoints of Innovation

How should my organization move forward?

There are several things you can do *right now* to start cultivating your organization to transition to a culture of innovation as highlighted in Figure 2. But at some point, it is recommended to build a program responsible for driving the culture change and tracking this process.

Figure 2: Formalizing Your Culture of Innovation Team

If you already have an innovation program, you still need to consider culture change. Remember the difference between a culture of innovation and doing innovation; does your program focus mostly or entirely on bearing "fruit?" If so, it may not yet be equipped to manage your efforts to improve the "soil" or the culture of your organization. But it is, of course, up to you whether this culture improvement element needs its own program or becomes part of your existing program. Read Part 2 and Part 3 for more on specific next steps you can take.
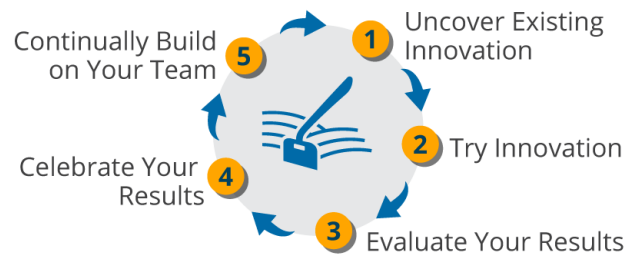

Figure 3: Building Your Culture of Innovation Program

For more detail on all of these concepts, [visit the website](#) and look for the Deep Dive, which provides the full set of content, rich with examples and analysis of key concepts.

Endnotes

[1] "Culture," Merriam-Webster, Inc., Accessed April 1, 2022, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture.

[2] "Innovation," Merriam-Webster, Inc., Accessed April 1, 2022, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mindset.

[3] Soren Kaplan, *The Invisible Advantage: How to Create a Culture of Innovation*, (Austin, TX, 2017), https://www.sorenkaplan.com/innovation-book-culture-toolkit/.

[4] Ed Essey, "How to Unlock Your Innovation Growth with Fruits, Trees, and Soil," Edessey.com, July 31, 2018, https://edessey.com/fruits-trees-and-soil/.