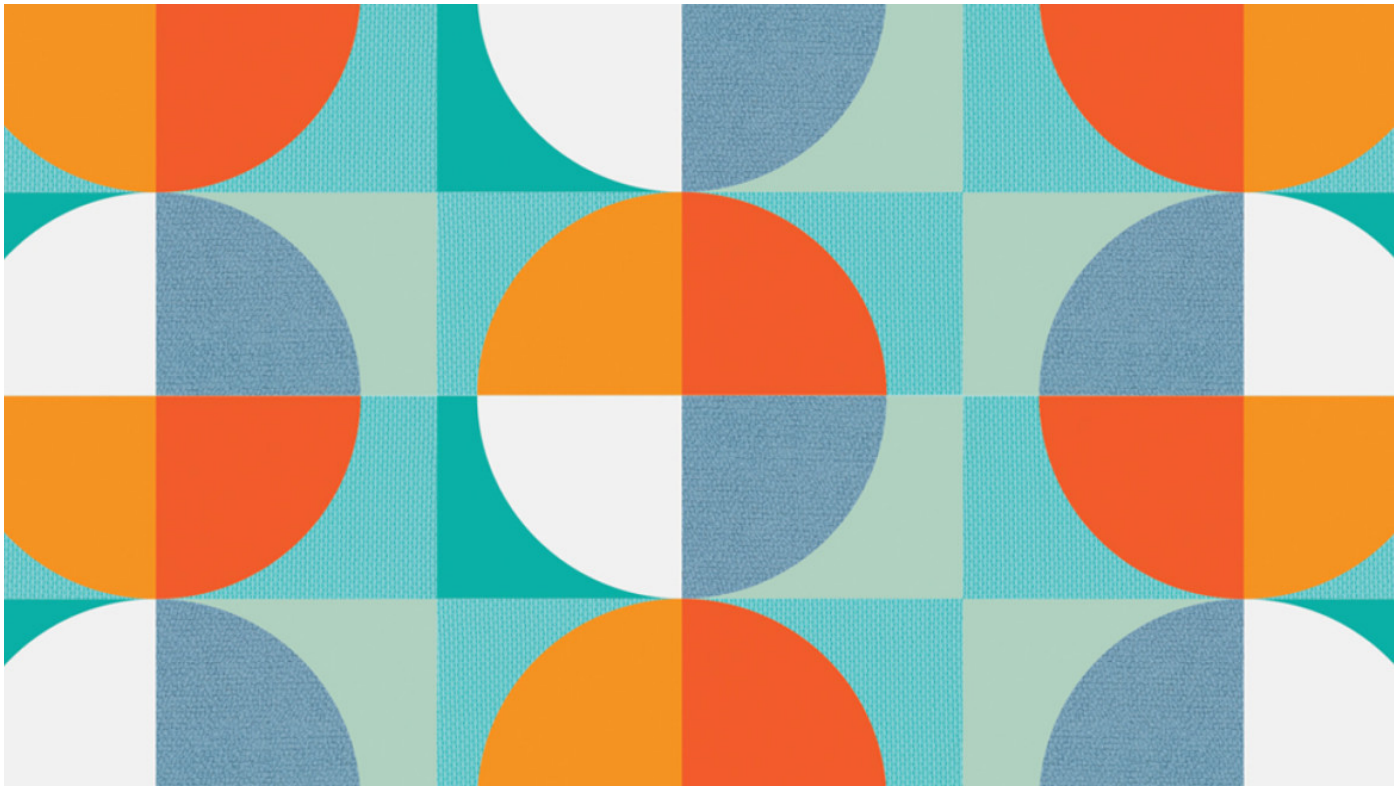
Culture + Talent

A Startup Mindset

Pushing Boundaries in Large Organizations

Read 3 minutes



Innovation. Ten letters packed with expectation and possibility. Ten letters sparking creativity, driving decisions globally and propelling startups into a world of burgeoning, billion-dollar valuations. The marketplace is captivated by innovation, leaning heavily on the promise of disruption to deliver new, inspiring products and services.

Sometimes called “entrepreneurs in residence,” intrapreneurs are the boundary-pushing, out-of-the-box innovators in large organizations. These big thinkers flourish and fully flex their creative muscles when specific conditions are met within their organizations. To fuel their work, they often lead their own teams, desire control when hiring, strive to set their own project parameters and actively work around traditional corporate hurdles to move the needle on innovative endeavors.

For several years, turnstone has been studying intrapreneurs and the conditions they need to thrive. Here’s what they’ve learned:

FIVE LESSONS FROM STARTUP CULTURES

1. POSSESS A TRANSFORMATIONAL MINDSET

Intrapreneurs have a healthy disregard for conventional ways of working and thinking. They work together to solve complex problems and positively transform the industry. This transformational mindset gives the intrapreneur a sense of purpose and optimism to take extraordinary risks, fostering a “make” culture bent on delivering game-changing results

2. ACCOUNTABILITY FUELS INNOVATION

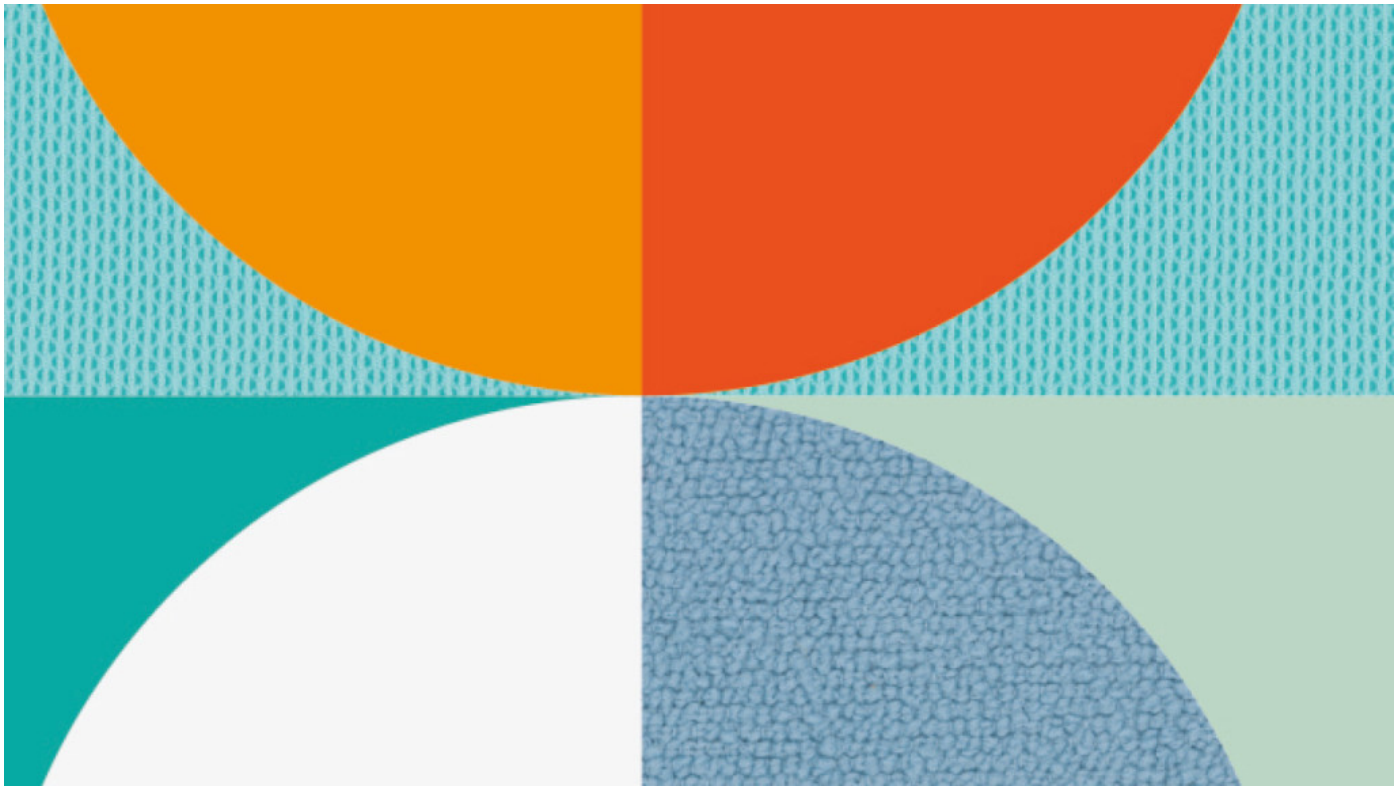
Like kindling in a fire, innovators depend on accountability to further their work. With clear goals and metrics in place, prototypes are presented for additional funding, timelines are adjusted and ideas are refined, each of which is critical to maintain the speed to innovate. During this process, intrapreneurs use storytelling to encourage broad buy-in and maintain forward movement.

3. INNOVATION REQUIRES LEADERSHIP

Change starts with the leader. Leaders not only shape the culture of innovation, they drive the culture based on their own views about failure, risk and disruption. The level to which the innovation-driven team feels empowered comes directly from the top and eventually trickles down to the rest of the organization, creating a domino effect built on trust and the freedom to create new solutions.

4. NAVIGATE AN ENVIRONMENT OF CONSTRAINED AGILITY

Innovation-driven teams are highly collaborative and agile, depending heavily on design thinking and divergent viewpoints to grow ideas. Ironically, the team's agility is hemmed in by the corporate policies and hierarchy governing their organization. Progress achieved quickly by innovation teams must eventually wait for buy-in, approval and funding from executives, creating "constrained agility." Intrapreneurs balance these shifting dynamics with an empathetic, customer-centered approach that gives meaning to their work.



5. THRIVE IN A CULTURE OF EMPOWERMENT

Intrapreneurs thrive in a culture of trust and empowerment. Fueled by an intrinsic motivation to solve sticky problems, they often seek an independent charter that would allow them to experience freedom in hiring and the exploration of new frontiers. Leaders at all levels, both within the innovative group and in the greater organization, have the power to push boundaries when their work begins with trust.

Research conducted by turnstone from 2015 – 2017 included interviews from dozens of participants in the United States and Canada, as well as a survey conducted in partnership with Steelcase, Inc. and Qualtrics.