

IE 101 | Innovation and Entrepreneurship 101

Author: Ikhtlaq Sidhu

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CHAPTER 07 | CULTURE Culture, Mindset, and Behavior

CHAPTER PURPOSE: This chapter explains how individual mindsets become team behaviors, and how repeated behaviors become innovation culture.

Figure 18. Culture is mindset made visible through behavior.

Culture Is Not a Slogan

Many organizations talk about innovation culture as if it were a list of values on a wall. That is a misconception. Culture is what people repeatedly do when there is uncertainty, pressure, disagreement, and incomplete evidence. In a course project, culture is visible in how the team handles feedback, conflict, deadlines, and disappointment.

CONTRAST: A team does not have an innovation culture because it says it is creative. It has an innovation culture when it repeatedly learns, adapts, and helps each other execute.

Behaviors That Support Innovation

Storytelling: turn scattered facts into a narrative people can understand and improve.

Trust: make it possible to say hard things early.

Comfort-zone expansion: practice doing useful things that initially feel unfamiliar.

Accretive negotiation: look for ways to make the total outcome better instead of simply dividing value.

Connectors: bring people, knowledge, customers, and resources into the project.

Diversity: increase the team's ability to see different problems, users, and solutions.

Inductive learning: learn from real cases, behavior, experiments, and examples.

Grit and emotional intelligence: keep moving without losing the ability to listen.

Example: The Connector Behavior

A team working on climate analytics needs access to building managers. One student does not know the technical model, but does know an alumnus in commercial real estate. That introduction produces three interviews and a pilot site. The connector behavior changes the project more than another hour of internal debate.

Mindset Differences Across Project Stages

Early-stage entrepreneurial teams need breadth, speed, and comfort with ambiguity. Later-stage technical teams need depth, discipline, architecture, and reliability. In contrast to the common belief that one innovation personality fits all situations, the better view is situational: the team must develop the behaviors required by the stage of the project.

Example: During discovery, a team may need broad curiosity. During the final demo, the same team needs focus, reliability, and disciplined tradeoffs.

Project stage

Useful mindset

Risk if overused

Early exploration

Broad, curious, connector-oriented, fast-learning.

Too many ideas and not enough proof.

Technical build

Focused, disciplined, architecture-aware, measurable.

A technically strong system that loses contact with users.

Scaling or handoff

Operational, reliable, stakeholder-aware.

Process overwhelms learning before the model is proven.

Practice Exercises and Questions

Which team behavior most helps the project right now?

Which team behavior is missing or underdeveloped?

Who served as a connector this week?

Where does the team need more breadth, and where does it need more depth?

Project Guide

1. Choose one innovation behavior to practice deliberately this week.
2. Ask each team member to identify one comfort-zone expansion.
3. Add at least one connector action to the project plan.
4. Revise the team rhythm so feedback, evidence, and decisions are visible.