

POWERING PERFORMANCE THROUGH INTELLIGENT COLLABORATION

Want to fuel a culture of innovation? Encourage employees to collaborate, take risks, and accept failure as part of the process.

OVER THE PAST YEAR, THREE COVID-19 VACCINE MAKERS USED ATLISSIAN'S PRODUCTS TO MANAGE THEIR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES.

AS GLOBAL PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANIES teamed up last year to share knowledge and resources that were vital in developing, testing, and delivering COVID-19 vaccines in a matter of months, rather than years, the transformative power of collaborative innovation was on full display.

So how can business leaders empower a culture of innovation and collaboration in their own companies? Certain elements are foundational, says Molly Hellerman, global head of innovation programs at enterprise software firm Atlassian. These include transparency about both successes and failures, operational principles that encourage collaboration across teams and business functions, the tools to support cross-functional teamwork, and an environment that protects those willing to challenge the status quo.

"Leadership needs to believe that innovation and collaboration are critical," Hellerman says. "They need to espouse it, model it, and show that failures are okay. They need to

highlight when we fail, highlight when we succeed, and make all of that okay."

Atlassian's products, used by 83% of the *Fortune* 500, include agile project management system Jira and team workspace platform Confluence. Over the past year, three COVID-19 vaccine makers used Atlassian's products to manage their research and development activities, says Hellerman. And one major U.S.-based airline used them to rethink and reorganize its aerodynamics, finances, and logistics when it transitioned from transporting passengers to transporting vaccines within a week.

For Atlassian, innovation is second nature, says Hellerman. The firm hires people who possess a spirit of exploration and encourages managers to carve out time for generating new ideas. The company wrote an entire playbook of approaches to collaboration that include blueprints for a quarterly 24-hour hackathon, sessions for candid feedback among teams, and brainstorming sessions.

Recent collaborations resulted in Point A, Atlassian's program for developing homegrown products. Ideas successfully pitched to the selection panel (which includes the company's cofounders) receive financial support for development, executed in collaboration with select Atlassian customers, and periodic checkpoints along the way. The program considered nearly three dozen projects over the past year—four of which will launch as new products in 2021.

For all Atlassian employees, both successes and failures are measured, celebrated, and shared with the hope of sparking more new ideas. If employees are thinking big and bold enough, the company believes half of the Point A projects will fail—and that's okay.

"Not only should you measure success, but you need to understand what your KPI is for failure, because even though you might not have hit the success metric, you may not have failed," says Hellerman. "It's just a matter of letting the next person have a stab at it." ■



83%

of Fortune 500 companies rely on **Atlassian** to keep their teams agile, innovative, and aligned

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