Every society has its protectors of status quo and its fraternities of the indifferent who are notorious for sleeping through revolutions. Today, our very survival depends on our ability to stay awake, to adjust to new ideas, to remain vigilant and to face the challenge of change.

—Martin Luther King Jr.

Figure 10. The last stage on the path to inclusion and innovation
The Neuroplasticity of Teams

Brain researchers used to think that the circuitry of the brain was fixed. They have since learned that the hundred billion neurons and hundred trillion connections among those neurons operate in an incredibly flexible way. The brain has plasticity and can rewire itself. A team is nothing less than a great brain, but the synapses take place between people rather than between neurons. Similarly, there is nothing fixed or hardwired about the speed or patterns of these connections. Teams are astonishingly plastic, so we really don’t know the natural capacity of any team to perform. We simply know they can surprise us because the human ingenuity of a given group of people is unknown and unknowable. More than anything else, team plasticity reflects the leader’s modeling behavior. If the leader suppresses dissent, people recoil as predictably as deer react to sudden movements. If the leader accommodates dissent, it builds the team’s innovation-surge capacity. Collectively, the team has sensory organs that react to the environment, adapting based on social, emotional, and intellectual processing of the conditions that surround it.

Key question: What patterns has your team adopted from the leader?

I once worked with a CEO whose team was struggling to adapt in a rapidly changing industry. He said his team was not smart enough, curious enough, or entrepreneurial enough. When his amygdala overpowered his prefrontal cortex, he acted out of frustration. The tenor of the team changed. His efforts to “drive” innovation would always result in a blowback of crippling silence. As fear extinguished curiosity, the team became sluggish, stubborn, and slow.

Key concept: Challenger safety democratizes innovation.

After posting lackluster results for a couple of years, this feudal lord was fired. Fortunately, I had the pleasure of working with his successor. The anatomy of the executive team didn’t change, but the environment did. The new leader introduced a new social technology—none other than
challenger safety (figure 10). He nurtured respect and permission to astonishing levels. He brought down the cultural barriers to entry. The team was a little skittish at first, but then came a wave of unprecedented productivity. You see, humans are designed to respond to kindness and empathy. They responded with improvement after improvement, innovation after innovation. The new CEO regenerated the neurological system of the team. The velocity of information increased. The cocreative process came alive. The adaptive capacity emerged. He took the team to intellectual heights they had never known. As a unit, they became more artistic and more athletic, more disciplined and more demanding, and ultimately, much more confident and aware of themselves.

**Key concept:** When it comes to innovation, connectivity increases productivity.

The changes in inputs brought changes in outputs. Here came the flow of insights, connections, associations, ideations, unexpected leaps, and aha moments. This is the promise of challenger safety. You can do the same thing this leader did if you encourage dialogue and emotionally tolerate dissent along the way. Because people are creative within a cultural context, it’s the leader’s job to liberate the creative impulse in that context.

Now here’s the other side of it: Although the brain is plastic, it defaults to rigidity. Teams do too, which means that the past lingers in the present. The early socialization patterns and original norms tend to be incredibly stubborn and hard to replace.

**Key concept:** To socialize a team with challenger safety from the beginning is always easier than to re-socialize a team later.

Organizational change is a process that moves through three separate layers—technical, behavioral, and cultural. We often start by changing all three layers at the same time, but each one changes at a different pace. First is the structural or nonhuman layer, or what we call artifacts. They include systems, processes, structures, roles, responsibilities, policies, procedures, and tools.
and technology. These things represent configurable parts and can be changed relatively quickly with money and authority. In the behavioral layer, we change the way people behave as they interact with the technical layer and each other in new ways. But simply because people are behaving differently doesn’t mean that they want to or that they would continue in the new patterns if given the choice. When artifacts hold up behavior, they act as scaffolding, and once the scaffolding is removed, behavior reverts to past patterns—unless there are changes in the cultural layer. That tendency to snap back is what we call a regression to the mean. The third layer of change is the invisible layer, consisting of values, beliefs, and assumptions.

**Key question:** Can you think of a change you started but didn’t finish, where you snapped back to your original behavior?

In all social units, the cultural layer is the single most difficult thing to change and the layer that changes last. It’s your lag indicator. You can impose change and get people to comply. If the chief medical officer at a hospital is watching, the doctors and nurses will wash their hands to decrease the risk of nosocomial infection. But if the chief steps away, their level of compliance immediately falls. Why? Because they lack intrinsic motivation. They go back to their calcified patterns.

Team behavior is much the same. What compounds the problem in challenger safety is that you are asking people not only to change their behavior but to do it in an environment of greater personal risk.

**The Stage of Brave**

The culminating stage of psychological safety is the place where respect and permission intersect at the highest level—a super-enriched zone dedicated to exploration and experimentation.
To advance from contributor safety to challenger safety requires crossing the “innovation threshold”—a place where the highest possible level of psychological safety replaces what would normally be a place inhabited with the greatest fear.

Challenger safety is a level of psychological safety so high that people feel empowered to challenge the status quo, leaving their comfort zones to put a creative or disruptive idea on the table, which by definition, is a threat to the way things are done and therefore a risk to themselves personally. To invite people to challenge the status quo is both natural and unnatural. It’s natural in the sense that human beings are innately creative. The biologist Edward O. Wilson said creativity is “the unique and defining trait of our species.” The creative instinct propels us to challenge the status quo out of a desire to create and improve things, but doing so is unnatural in an environment that we perceive to be unsafe. If the environment is a pocket of thick trust, we will go forward with our challenge. If it’s a pocket of thin trust, our self-censoring instinct is triggered, and we will remove ourselves from participation. The atmosphere either draws out or shuts down the creative impulse to challenge. It’s scary enough to speak truth to power. It's even more scary to speak opinion to power because there’s a bigger personal risk of rejection and embarrassment.

I recently interviewed a vice president at a large health care system. He said the organization was more militaristic than the military. He challenged the status quo on a staffing issue early on and barely lived to tell about it. “I thought I had a brain, but I guess I don’t,” he said. “In this organization, you do exactly what you’re told, with no commentary.” I interviewed another woman who worked at a large media company in South America. “We are not allowed to be creative,” she said. “If you’re not in senior leadership, you don’t challenge anything. If you do, you’re out.”

Clearly, not all leaders are convinced that psychological safety is necessary for innovation.
As a result, some leaders believe that psychological safety is nothing more than asking people to be nice, under the assumption that they need to be coddled before they can be expected to engage. Two Australian scholars, Ben Farr-Wharton and Ace Simpson, make this point masterfully. “Through a systems management perspective, the very human concept of compassion seems wasteful. This is because noticing, empathizing with, making sense of and responding to a colleague’s suffering (how we define the process of organizational compassion) may be considered an indulgent and time-consuming process that detracts from immediate work duties.”

Those who say that psychological safety is nothing more than sympathetic and sentimental slush offered by leaders who are unwilling to hold others accountable are in denial themselves. They refuse to acknowledge that you can’t coerce or manipulate innovation. The process is surrounded by political and interpersonal risk. Unless you lower or remove those barriers to entry and those violations in human interaction, people simply will not engage at full capacity.

This final stage of psychological safety governs what are clearly the most sensitive, charged, pressurized, politicized, stressful, and high-stakes situations of all. Because the fear and potential risk to the individual are highest, the level of psychological safety must be deepest. With inclusion safety, you’re asking to be included; with learner safety, you’re asking to be encouraged; with contributor safety, you’re asking for autonomy; but with challenger safety, the social exchange has now gone to another level: The team is asking you to challenge the status quo. That’s a mighty ask! Thus, the only reasonable condition is that the organization protect you in the process. If the organization wants candor, you need cover—you need real and sustained air cover to be brave enough to take what is almost always a substantial personal risk.

In case it still hasn’t sunk in, let me sketch the emotional landscape of innovation in an organization. It’s one thing to use your talents in creative pursuits or be curious about something
on your own. It’s quite another to take aim at the status quo in an organization when the entire system and culture preserve it. If challenger safety doesn’t exist in the organization, there’s a high cost to that curiosity and creativity. It tends to be an arena of shame, pain, and embarrassment in addition to the normal uncertainty, ambiguity, and chaos. Innovation is hard enough because there’s no safety from failure. No one can give you that. But what the leader can do is take the social sting and emotional bite out of the process. At a minimum, the absence of challenger safety blocks the flow of information that allows collaboration to happen.

For organizations trying to create a thriving environment for neurodivergent talent, including employees who demonstrate variations in learning, attention, mood, and sociability—including the autism spectrum, dyslexia, attention deficit, hyperactivity, depression, and other atypical neurological conditions—challenger safety becomes a precondition for basic productivity. It’s my personal experience that neurodivergent employees are more acutely sensitive to indicators of fear, react faster to them, and require more time to reemerge out of defensive routines. And yet we all need challenger safety to help us be brave enough to challenge the status quo.

**Key question:** When was the last time you were brave and challenged the status quo?

When I teach leaders the concept of challenger safety and the social exchange of candor for cover, they often nod and say, “I got it.” That’s when I stare back at them and say, “No, you don’t got that. You don’t even begin to get the magnitude of what you are asking people to do.” May I suggest at this point that you put this book down and go find a mirror. Now take a hard look. If you want your people to innovate, you need to do some soul-searching and deep introspection about what you’re asking. Innovation is not some kind of frictionless, comfortable process. No, innovation is doing violence to the current regime. It’s willfully knocking yourself out of orbit.
It’s trading certainty for ambiguity. Most of the time, it’s asking for failure. That’s just the organizational side of it. Now think about the personal side.

What are you asking of your people when you ask them to challenge the status quo and innovate? Yes, there’s a sense of adventure that comes with exploration, but the reality is that you’re asking your people to expose themselves to criticism, risk failure, take chances, be vulnerable, not fit in, and feel pain. And you’re asking them to do all of this without any real control of the outcome.

Now do you see what you’re asking? Well, if you’re going to ask that, your employees are going to make a reasonable request of you. They know you can’t promise zero loss. They know you can’t remove all risk, and they know you can’t eliminate the pain. Everybody gets that, so at a minimum, they’re asking you to protect them socially and emotionally as they engage in this free-ranging process. “At least protect me from embarrassment and rejection” comes the petition. Now that’s a reasonable request. And don’t forget that not everyone craves creative contribution over comfort.

Which brings us to the question of who goes first. I was training a group of employees at a university once and sat down at one of the tables to join a discussion. One of the participants said, “I get the candor-for-cover concept. Would you please tell the executives that the cover must come first? Do they really expect me to give the candor when I haven’t seen evidence of the cover? I may be dumb, but I’m not stupid.” There you have it.

Candor for cover means that you as the leader protect each person’s right to speak candidly about any topic, provided they don’t make personal attacks or have malicious intent. When people feel protected in that right, they tend to exercise that right (see table 7).

**Key concept:** The social exchange for challenger safety is cover for candor.
The definition of *尊重* in the fourth stage of psychological safety is “respect for the individual’s ability to innovate.” Like the definitions of respect for learner safety and contributor safety, respect at this level is an earned right rather than an innate right. Thus, you earn the right to innovate based on a track record of performance. Am I saying you shouldn’t have a voice until you become an expert? No, everyone should have a voice, but you will naturally find that people will take you seriously if that voice has credibility behind it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Definition of Respect</th>
<th>Definition of Permission</th>
<th>Social Exchange</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Inclusion safety</td>
<td>Respect for the individual’s humanity</td>
<td>Permission for the individual to interact with you as a human being</td>
<td>Inclusion in exchange for human status and the absence of harm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Learner safety</td>
<td>Respect for the individual’s innate need to learn and grow</td>
<td>Permission for the individual to engage in all aspects of the learning process</td>
<td>Encouragement in exchange for engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Contributor safety</td>
<td>Respect for the individual’s ability to create value</td>
<td>Permission for the individual to work with independence and their own judgment</td>
<td>Autonomy with guidance in exchange for results</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 7 Stage 4 Challenger Safety**
In addition to respect, the nature of permission changes as well as we transition to challenger safety. In the fourth stage, implicitly or explicitly, we are giving the individual permission to challenge the status quo in good faith. That means we assume the individual is acting with a pure motive to help improve things. There are no other qualifications or restrictions. Sometimes people challenge the status quo with ideas for incremental improvement. Sometimes they take moon shots and propose a wholesale transformation to the way we do things. Sometimes they come with fully baked ideas and plans, and sometimes they come with nothing but an unsupported hunch or gut instinct. In an atmosphere of challenger safety, we take all comers and all contributions. We may take some challenges more seriously than others as we consider the source, but we honor each person’s offering regardless of hierarchy. We make it safe to criticize. Everyone is expected to engage in disruptive thinking.

**Key question:** Do you feel that you have a license to innovate in your organization?

If you have challenged the status quo without challenger safety, you no doubt remember that painful experience, and you’re very careful not to repeat it. Your brave attempt was met with retribution. You thought you had the air cover, but you were wrong, which left you naked to rejection. Those experiences are neurobiological encounters that create stress, scars, and vivid memories that cause us to err on the side of caution the next time.

On one occasion, I was training a large law enforcement agency. I sensed right away that the culture was toxic and vindictive. Sure enough, as soon as we moved into the first discussion, you could plainly see that the members of this organization were not healthy enough to hold even a basic dialogue. By imposing the constant fear of criticism, the leaders had successfully created an atmosphere of jaded cynicism. The group dynamic was silence interspersed with sarcasm, an
occasional wisecrack, and cutting humor. No one would dare challenge the status quo in good faith. That would be tantamount to a request for verbal and emotional abuse, which would come swiftly.

If you’re encouraging your people to challenge the status quo but haven’t prepared the climate by cultivating the necessary challenger safety, what can you reasonably expect? Are your people going to be brave and wander into enemy territory when they know their bravery will be met with punishment? Do people volunteer opinions when opinions are suppressed? Only fools rush in when it’s not safe. If there’s no air cover to back them up, it’s unwise of them to try and disingenuous of you to ask. Even if you frame challenging the status quo as expressing healthy dissatisfaction, it’s still subversive and always a personal risk. No cover, no candor. People will come up with defensive routines to save themselves from the risk of embarrassment. And if they make mistakes, they will be sorely tempted to cover them up.

**Key questions:** When was the last time you tried to cover up a mistake? What motivated you to do that?

Let me illustrate from my own professional experience. For three years I had a Japanese boss based in Tokyo, Mr. Tadao Otsuki. When I was given the assignment to report to Tad, as we called him, I braced myself because of what I had read about the rigid hierarchical nature of Japanese business culture. I read a book about Japanese society that issued this warning: “An expression of a contradictory opinion to that of the head was considered a sign of misbehavior.” “I’m in trouble,” I thought, because I don’t know how to do my job without giving my opinions, and sometimes they are bound to be contrary. But then came the pleasant surprise: Tad turned out to be a collaborative, trustworthy man who allowed me to be brave. He cultivated an idea meritocracy and was utterly agnostic about title, position, and authority, leveling the power
dynamics and draining the anxiety out of the process of seeking help or feedback, and feeling vulnerable when you did. In the twilight of his career, this man had worked for several multinational corporations and had learned that diverse, multidisciplinary teams don’t innovate unless they are lubricated with the oil of challenger safety. He understood that innovation requires exploring the unknown and always involves tension and stress. He asked me to be brave, but first created the organization's accommodation for that bravery, which of course would mean that I would often offer up bad ideas, go down dead-end roads. But then there were times when the team would come up with a breakthrough innovation.

**Key question:** Do you strive to be agnostic about title, position, or authority when someone challenges the status quo?

As a last step to set the table for challenger safety, he demonstrated transparency. He shared all the information he could, and he did it consistently.

**Key concept:** The more unknowns the leader eliminates through transparency, the fewer sources of stress the employee worries about.

I accepted the invitation. I ventured out slowly, observing my boss carefully for any signs of emotional defensiveness. Eventually, I quit fearing failure or judgment because it was, as Abraham Maslow put it, “safe enough to dare.” It was never a career ender to challenge something because I knew the culture tolerated and even expected it. It’s the leader that creates that organizational laboratory of experimentation, and that lab requires conditions that are different from a pure execution mode of operations. Think about the inherent constraints under which we must innovate. Typically, we have less data, more ambiguity, more unknowns, and more failures, so we need more exploratory inquiry, more tolerance for unreasonable ideas, and more capacity to absorb failure.
Clearly, innovation most often happens under conditions of stress, when you’re feeling the pressure of competition, when you’re trying to figure out a solution surrounded by constraints and limitations. There’s nothing relaxed or carefree about it.

**Key concept:** In the process of innovation, there is no necessary relationship between stress and fear.

The stress and pressure we feel doesn’t automatically create fear. I remember many times working for Tad when I felt enormous pressure and exhilaration. The pressure was imposed by our competitive circumstances, but he didn’t add a layer of fear to the mix as a perverse incentive to get us motivated. By creating challenger safety, he helped convert stress into positive energy. I had been put in charge of an organization that was hemorrhaging cash. The market tanked and we were in a free fall. Instead of escalating interpersonal tension to accompany the crisis, my boss increased the frequency of his touch points with me, but they were always calm and focused encounters. Even when others showed up with spiked emotion, Tad was a de-escalating influence. Eventually, we came through the crisis with a stronger, faster, and more engaged organization.

**Key concept:** It’s possible to unlock creativity in a crisis if the leader welcomes dissent and doesn’t add a layer of manufactured fear to the existing level of natural stress.

**The Social Origins of Innovation**

Innovation means looking into the foggy future and trying to make something better by connecting things that are not normally connected using divergent, lateral, associative, or nonlinear thinking. You basically have three options. You can connect

- Existing knowledge with existing knowledge
• Existing knowledge with new knowledge
• New knowledge with new knowledge

Remember a few years ago when Netflix knocked Blockbuster out of the market? How did they do it? They connected snail mail with compact discs! Those two ordinary things became the source of an unlikely, disruptive innovation. That’s the pattern most of the time. We build on what we know, using the tools, technology, and ideas we already have.\textsuperscript{11} How do you think chocolate and peanut butter came together? But here’s the irony of innovation: even though it’s built on knowledge assets, it’s the learning process that brings them together to create value in new ways.

\textbf{Key concept:} In the process of innovation, learning is more important than knowing.

Learning is the process of combining knowledge assets, but those assets are constantly becoming obsolete. In the long run, an enduring and adaptable learning process is more valuable than the perishable knowledge assets themselves.

If we look at innovation further, we can see that there are two basic types. Type 1 is incremental and derivative, while type 2 is radical and disruptive (\textbf{table 8}).

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\caption{The Two Types of Innovation}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{TYPE 1:} & \textbf{TYPE 2:} \\
\hline
• Incremental & • Radical \\
• Derivative & • Disruptive \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

\textbf{Key question:} Can you think of a recent example of type 1 innovation (incremental and derivative) in your organization?

As you might expect, type 1 is much more common because it’s natural to start with what we know and connect it with something else that we know. If that doesn’t work, we try new
combinations of things (figure 8). We combine and recombine. That recombination is the essence of innovation. That’s why Steve Jobs said, “Creativity is just connecting things.” I’d like to add to that statement:

**Key concept:** Innovation is the process of connected people connecting things.

We all know that simply putting a bunch of virtuosos together doesn’t automatically create beautiful music. They must learn to play together. They must connect first, and out of that connection comes the magic.

![The Process of Innovation](image)

**Figure 11.** How breakthroughs are generated

People can of course experience a light bulb moment of lone genius, a burst of inspiration, a eureka moment, but those are the exception. The more common pattern is for innovation to spring out of social interaction. In a Q&A session at Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg said, “Ideas typically do not just come to you. They happen because you’ve been talking about something and talking to a lot of people about it for a long period of time.”¹² Brian Wilson, the musical genius behind the Beach Boys, confessed the same truth: “The key to our success was respecting one another’s ideas
and opinions.” Yes, you need talented people to innovate, but the magic is in the way they blend and merge ideas as they work together in what often seems a chaotic and spontaneous process. It doesn’t matter if you are writing software or writing music, innovation usually has a social origin.

**Are Questions Welcome?**

I invite you to be a cultural anthropologist for a day and watch the way innovation happens on your team. If you look carefully, you’ll notice that innovation ultimately emerges from the process of inquiry. That process comprises five steps, as shown in figure 12.

![Figure 12. The process of inquiry](image)

As you can see, the first step is to ask questions. Questions act as the catalyst. They activate the process. Without questions, nothing happens. And yet we must acknowledge the risk.

**Key concept:** Asking questions introduces personal risk.
And if we’re talking about questions that point to innovation, they almost always introduce more personal risk because they challenge the status quo. They attack the way things are done. From a career standpoint, this is the high-risk, high-reward zone. Ask yourself: Are questions really welcome on my team—not soft, easy, nonthreatening questions, but courageous and disruptive questions?

**Key question:** Are questions welcome on your team?

Have you cultivated a culture of inquiry that is hospitable to tough, uncomfortable questions, and do people really feel that? If you want a surge of ideas, you first need a surge of questions. If you want a surge of questions, you need to nurture the highest level of psychological safety based on the respect and permission that you give people.

We see very quickly that the entire process of innovation depends on a willingness to activate the inquiry process with questions. All organizations traffic in information and ideas, but not all organizations innovate. What makes the difference? If you haven’t noticed, the natural consequence of analysis is friction. People see things differently and draw different conclusions. Now comes the hard part. How do you lubricate the gears of collaboration to reduce friction? If you can do it, you’ll create new value. But if the friction increases, sand becomes the lubricant and your gears will grind to a halt.

My Japanese boss was a master at nurturing a culture of inquiry. From the tone he set, I knew two things: First, there were no dumb questions. I think he had learned from experience, as many of us do, that the line between brilliance and ignorance can be very thin. Second, there were no questions that were off limits, no topics that we couldn’t talk about. Those were the ground rules he established, reinforced by his own modeling behavior and a talk-to-listen ratio that hovered at fifty-fifty. Without his example and the cover he provided, I would have been reluctant
to activate the inquiry process and engage in innovation. In the end, inviting questions is the spigot that turns innovation on. Discouraging questions, and punishing those who ask them, turns the spigot off.

**Key concept:** If you deprive your team of challenger safety, you unknowingly dedicate the team to the status quo.

Rather than protecting your team against groupthink, you’re reinforcing it. You’re conditioning your people not to think and not to challenge, and teams learn very quickly not to think and not to challenge. They learn very quickly how to “lock themselves inside an echo chamber of like-minded friends.”

Whether your team innovates and how fast your team innovates is up to you. You regulate the speed of discovery and the velocity of information. You accelerate problem-solving. You create a climate of discipline and agility. You engender the patterns and prevailing norms that allow the team to manage itself.

I worked with another CEO who needed a lot of oxygen in any room and would always commandeer meetings. He couldn’t get off the stage. At the request of a distraught vice president of human resources, I attended an executive meeting with this CEO and his team to observe the dynamic. In this case, the CEO wasn’t outwardly insulting, just subtly demeaning. He began the meeting and drove the agenda. He would ask yes/no questions and would become visibly agitated if his direct reports gave more than a few words of explanation beyond a simple yes or no. At one point, and I’ll never forget this, the group started discussing a topic and getting into some productive dialogue. About two or three minutes in, the CEO literally opened his laptop and began doing email—in the middle of the meeting! I looked at the vice president of human resources in disbelief and she gave me a knowing look of resignation. This is the way he would censure and
censor. Eventually, the CEO lost his job, dying of self-inflicted wounds: He failed because his team functioned as vertical and independent blocks of knowledge that never came together.

It’s important to remember that innovation is interdisciplinary. Your success will depend, not on independent action, but on your dependent interaction. If the team can’t gel and productively work through the five steps of inquiry, you’ll never get there—regardless of the talent you have. You can only win as a team. It may seem unspectacular, but when you’re watching innovation happen, you’re watching people talk, interact, discuss, and debate. Only through that interplay and synthesis of ideas does constructive dissent, creative abrasion, and the process of combination and recombination happen.

When I was the plant manager at Geneva Steel, I learned the lifelong lesson that every system has a constraint. The constraint not only limits but also dictates the output of the entire system. The constraint is the bottleneck and other parts of the system can’t compensate for it. Consider the 4-x-400-meter relay event. Each of the four members of the team runs one lap around the track. If you’re the slowest member, your slowness will dictate the overall performance of the team. Everyone depends on each other. If the three other members of the team run their stages in forty-eight seconds and it takes you seventy-five, the team must still include your time in the total. Regardless of how fast they run, you’re the drag.

Innovation works the same way. Your job as a leader is to reduce social friction while increasing intellectual friction. This is the primary way to de-bottleneck the innovation constraint. If you can do this, people will invest deeply in the process because they become attached to what they create through the fusion of the rational and the emotional. I see team after team exquisitely blessed with every resource it needs to innovate, except one—psychological safety, which is the constraint in the system.
Key question: What can you do to reduce the social friction on your team while increasing the intellectual friction?

It’s one thing to collaborate for execution, which normally preserves the status quo. It’s quite another to collaborate for innovation. Whereas execution is about creating value today, innovation is about creating value for tomorrow. It’s an insurgent mission, a Skunk Works within the mothership. You’re acting as disrupters in residence. That’s what the great brain project is all about. The process is not tidy, clean, or linear. It’s messy and iterative. Innovation is the marriage of gnarly problems and creative chaos with only a possibility that you’ll produce something better.

Key concept: The pattern of innovation is to try a lot and triumph a little.