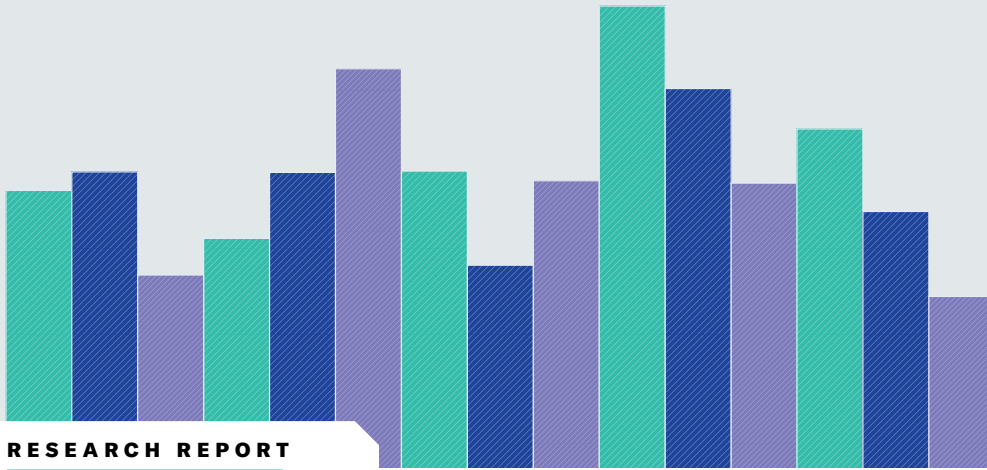


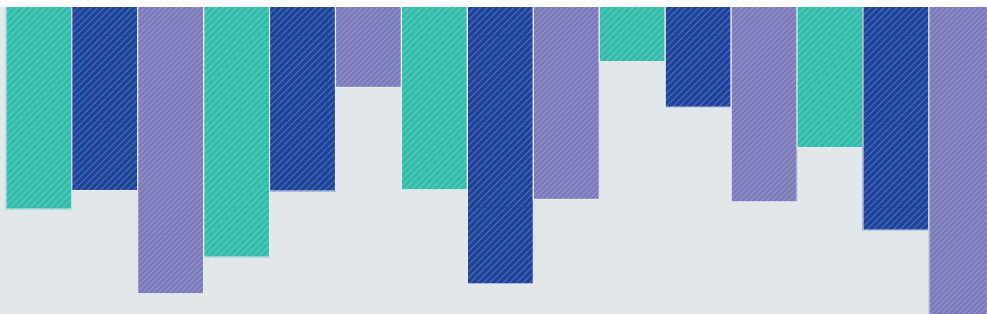


**Harvard
Business
Review**

ANALYTIC SERVICES



Creativity as a Catalyst for Business Growth



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Complex problems require creative solutions.

And in today's increasingly competitive business landscape, complexity is not in short supply. But how can an organization harness such creativity to address its biggest challenges?

Indeed, creativity isn't exclusive to typically "creative" professions. There's a creative well to tap in every organization's workforce, from the C-suite to the ground floor, and everywhere in between.

This research by Harvard Business Review Analytic Services, in association with Canva, shows that creativity is important to an organization's future success, and that a creative culture is a key contributor to strategic growth.

The proof is in the pudding. Creative practices are woven into the fabric of the world's most successful organizations and fastest-growing industries.

In today's visual economy, emerging technologies are enabling creative business practice in ever more new and unexpected ways. From the growth of visual communication platforms to the latest wave of generative AI solutions, creative tools are universally accessible. The convergence of artificial intelligence and visual communication is reimagining the creative process, opening up infinite possibilities for what's to come.

These are the tools enabling organizations to draw on their teams' innate human creativity and tackle their greatest, most complex challenges.

As well as innovation, creativity fostered in a workplace contributes to greater talent retention and satisfaction. Is there a clearer win-win?

Game-changing technological advancements also make space for a crucial creative facilitator: downtime. The time saved by such technology allows for teams to enjoy creative downtime, from which the most inventive ideas are frequently born. If time is money, then such downtime is money well spent from a creative point of view.

Yet these views may be counterintuitive, or even controversial. Downtime leading to greater productivity? Surely not.

Well, the results speak for themselves.

Canva understands these benefits and strives to provide the tools organizations need to unlock their workforce's creativity and accelerate business growth. It's no coincidence 95% of Fortune 500 companies are embracing our visual communication platform to achieve their goals.

It's an exciting time to contribute to an organization's future. Now is the time to recognize the role creativity plays in not only dazzling customers but driving strategic growth, fostering innovation, and empowering talent.

Creativity as a Catalyst for Business Growth

Organizations today are operating against a complex backdrop of political turmoil, skills gaps, economic volatility, and supply chain disruptions. To navigate this challenging landscape, many businesses are doubling down on time-tested survival strategies, from improving customer service to cutting operational costs. But while these tactics can bring about incremental improvements, they overlook a powerful catalyst to business growth: creativity.

“Creativity is the process of generating new ideas, which are critical to business right now,” says Andy Sandoz, U.K. chief creative officer of Deloitte Digital, a creative digital consultancy in London. “To put it very simply, what got us here won’t take us much further.”

While investing in creativity may seem like a luxury, organizations are discovering the benefits of doing so by prompting employees to look at obstacles from diverse perspectives. Creative collaboration is crucial to developing new and imaginative ideas. And an organizational focus on creativity can help inspire innovation and drive growth.

In fact, according to a November 2023 survey by Harvard Business Review Analytic Services of 542 members of the *Harvard Business Review* audience who are familiar with their organization’s approach to creativity in business strategy, problem-solving, and innovation, 96% agree creative ideas are essential to an organization’s long-term success and performance. Better yet, 94% agree creative companies achieve greater strategic growth.

However, linking creativity to business growth requires overcoming key challenges. Not all corporate environments are designed to recognize and

HIGHLIGHTS



96% of survey respondents agree **creative ideas are essential to an organization's long-term success** and performance.



94% agree that **organizations that invest** in creative tools and technology **will be more successful** in the future.



22% say their organization is **very successful** at **identifying creative solutions to business problems** regardless of whether the idea was implemented.

Due to rounding, some figures in this report may not add up to 100%.



The obstacles facing organizations today are among the same factors driving the need for greater creativity. Case in point: 69% of respondents say difficulty attracting and retaining talent is a key challenge. At the same time, 53% cite attracting and retaining talent as a driver of greater creativity.

reward creative exploits, and employee fears around job loss can delay experimentation with and adoption of creativity-inducing technologies, such as generative AI (gen AI). Standards for measuring the amorphous concept of creativity are also up for debate. And in a world in which time is money, encouraging employees to “play” in the workplace can seem counterintuitive to growth.

This paper examines creativity’s connection to success and explores the cultural, organizational, and technological challenges of supporting creativity. It also explores steps organizations must take to establish the leadership, talent, and culture required for creativity to serve as the heart of business innovation.

Converting Creativity into Value

Brainstorming sessions and collaborative ideation may not seem like ideal strategies for driving growth in an era marked by speed, precision, and the brute force of increased competition. But the reality is that the obstacles facing organizations today are among the same factors driving the need for greater creativity. Case in point: 69% of respondents say difficulty attracting and retaining talent is a key challenge. At the same time, 53% cite attracting and retaining talent as a driver of greater creativity, among those who agree that their organization needs to become more creative to support business growth. **FIGURE 1**

But while 93% of respondents cite creativity as “very” or “somewhat” important to business growth, many are struggling to generate new and innovative ideas and convert them into concrete solutions. In fact, only 22% say their organization is “very successful” at identifying creative solutions to business problems regardless of whether the idea was implemented. For the purposes of this paper, we

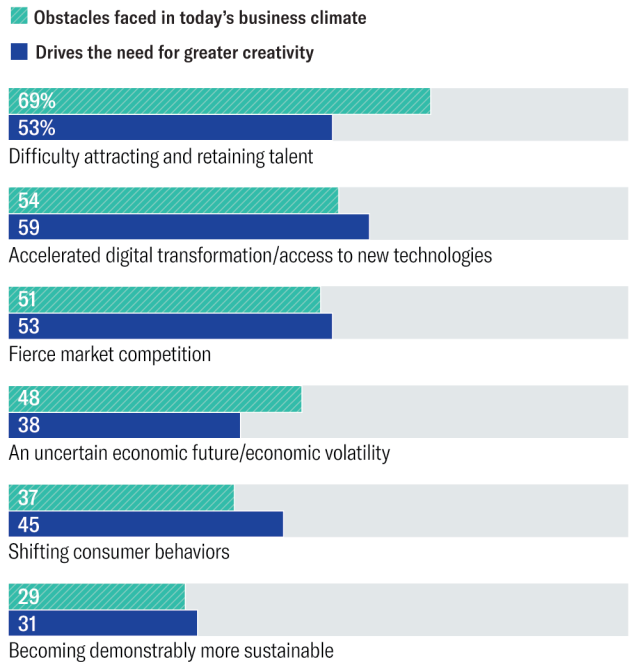
FIGURE 1

Top Business Challenges = Drivers of Creativity

Today’s most common business obstacles are also the key drivers of creativity

In today’s business climate, which of the following **obstacles** is your organization facing? *Select all that apply.*

Which of the following **drives the need** for greater creativity in your organization? *Select all that apply. (Among those who agree that their organization needs to become more creative to support business growth)*



Base: 478-542 respondents, varies by segment.
Not shown: 7% other obstacles; 3% other drivers for creativity.

Source: Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey, November 2023

define these organizations as leaders. Comparatively, 56% of respondents say their organization is “somewhat successful,” defined here as followers, and 22% say their organization is “not very successful,” defined here as laggards. **FIGURE 2**

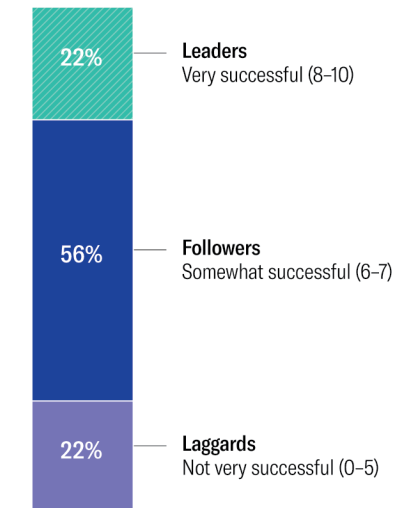
As it is, constant change, demand for greater speed, and fierce competition are driving workers to near-exhaustion. Nearly half (49%) of respondents cite mental and/or physical burnout as a challenge their organization is currently experiencing.

Compounding the challenges of scarce time and energy is a workplace that often fails to nurture the creativity of its employees. Fifty-eight percent of laggards and 43% of followers say their organization has a corporate culture that does not reward creative thinking, yet only 19% of leaders say the same.

FIGURE 2

Is Your Organization a Creative Leader, Follower, or Laggard?

How successful is your organization at identifying creative solutions to business problems, regardless of whether the idea was implemented?
[0-10 SCALE, WHERE 0 IS "NOT AT ALL SUCCESSFUL"
AND 10 IS "EXTREMELY SUCCESSFUL"]



Base: 542 respondents

Source: Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey, November 2023

Beyond failures to incentivize creativity, many employees fear being punished for experimenting with new ideas that break from convention. As John Cleese, English actor and co-founder of the boundary-pushing British comedy troupe Monty Python, said, “Nothing will stop you being creative more effectively as the fear of making a mistake.”

Yet, in today’s business climate, “there’s a real fear of failure,” says Chloe Preece, an associate professor of marketing at the ESCP Business School in London. “In order to have creativity, there needs to be an environment that is not completely risk averse so that failure is possible. Yet what we’re seeing increasingly with the economy is the lack of a safety net, which can hinder creativity.”

Executives are also acting as barriers to creativity by underestimating its ability to combat stagnation, dismantle outdated structures, and shake up routines—prerequisites for fueling innovation. Seventy-two percent of laggards say the leaders at their organization are not engaged enough in creative thinking to support creativity among employees. Comparatively, 44% of followers and 23% of leaders cite lack of leader engagement with creative thinking as a challenge for their organization.



Beyond failures to incentivize creativity, many employees fear being punished for experimenting with new ideas that break from convention. As John Cleese, English actor and co-founder of the boundary-pushing British comedy troupe Monty Python, said, “Nothing will stop you being creative more effectively as the fear of making a mistake.”

Part of the problem, says Scott Berkun, author of books on creativity and leadership, including *How Design Makes the World*, is leadership’s “shallow idea of what the word ‘creativity’ means.” Because they are content to view growth through the myopic lens of quarterly profit and loss, Berkun says most business leaders “are biased toward assuming that being creative means you get great business outcomes, but it’s just not that simple.”

Nor are metrics for measuring creativity as cut and dried as financial yardsticks like gross margin and cash flow. “Measuring the benefits or the impact of creativity is better now, but it’s not always a perfect science,” says Lee Rolston, chief growth officer at Jones Knowles Ritchie (JKR), a global branding agency based in London, New York, and Shanghai.

Given these fears and limitations, it’s no surprise that many organizations are falling short of realizing the benefits they had hoped to achieve from working creatively. Despite 67% of respondents seeking increased revenue growth/profitability from greater creativity, only 34% say they have successfully done so to date. **FIGURE 3** Similar gaps exist between aspiration and accomplishment. Sixty-four percent say they are seeking an increased competitive advantage in the marketplace from greater creativity, yet only 33% have achieved it. Similarly, 63% say they are seeking improved enhanced customer experience from greater creativity, yet 45% say they’ve achieved it.

Bridging this divide demands a more innovative approach to creativity itself. Organizations must welcome diverse perspectives from individuals with different backgrounds and experiences. Encouraging collaboration can ensure invisible ideas rise to the surface and get the attention they



“Creativity is about coming up with new ideas, but in order to come up with new ideas, you need to look at things from different perspectives,” says Chloe Preece, an associate professor of marketing at the ESCP Business School.

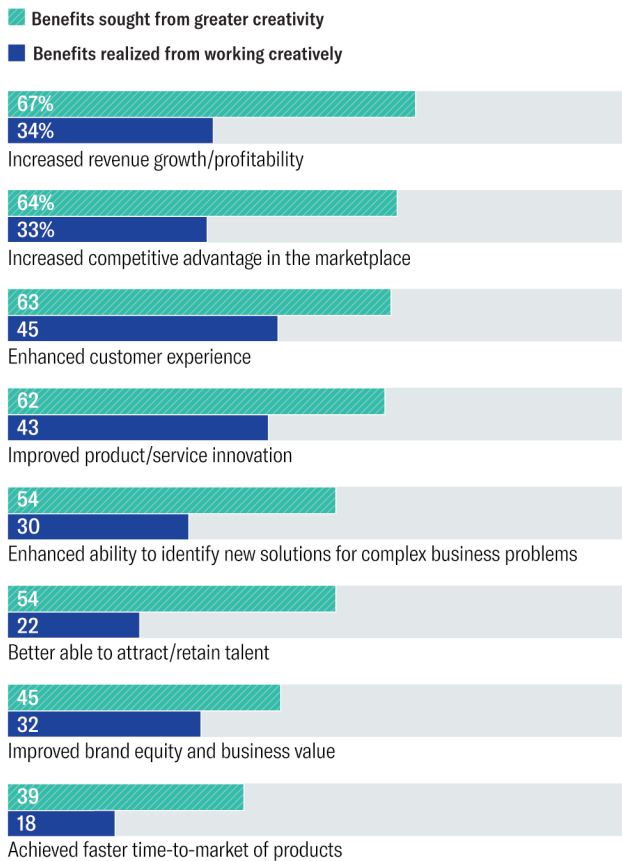
FIGURE 3

The Achievement Gap

Organizations have yet to fully realize the benefits they had hoped to reap from greater creativity

What are the business benefits your organization is seeking from greater creativity, if any? *Select all that apply.*

What are the benefits your organization has realized to date from working creatively, if any? *Select all that apply.*



Base: 542 respondents. Not shown: for benefits sought from greater creativity, 2% other, 2% none, 1% don't know; for benefits realized from working creatively, 1% other, 11% none, 4% don't know.

Source: Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey, November 2023

deserve. And embracing emerging technologies like gen AI promises to improve product innovation while at the same time attracting fresh talent.

Capitalizing on Diverse Perspectives, Culture, and Technology

Buoying any creative endeavor is a culture that encourages curiosity, celebrates open-mindedness, and inspires employees to question conventional wisdom. In fact, when it comes to fostering a workplace culture that inspires greater creativity, leaders are significantly more likely than laggards to facilitate cross-functional collaboration (53% vs. 14%) and encourage different ways of thinking (52% vs. 15%). **FIGURE 4**

But the freedom to collaborate and defy convention is counterproductive if it only serves to promote homogeneous thinking. Rather, 93% of respondents agree that diversity fosters creativity as each individual brings a unique outlook to the table.

“Creativity is about coming up with new ideas,” says Preece of ESCP Business School. “But in order to come up with new ideas, you need to look at things from different perspectives.”

Certainly, hiring people of varying backgrounds, geographies, and areas of expertise can reward an organization with a plethora of ideas informed by a broad spectrum of experiences. But while professional creatives, such as marketers, have long been recognized for their creative contributions, organizations must also encourage a wider array of business functions, from human resources to finance, to bring more creativity to their ways of working.

After all, says JKR’s Rolston, “People who creatively think about financial challenges are as creative as the people who get paid with the word ‘creative’ in their job title.”

Indeed, 91% of respondents agree that creative thinking is a key attribute for employees to possess.

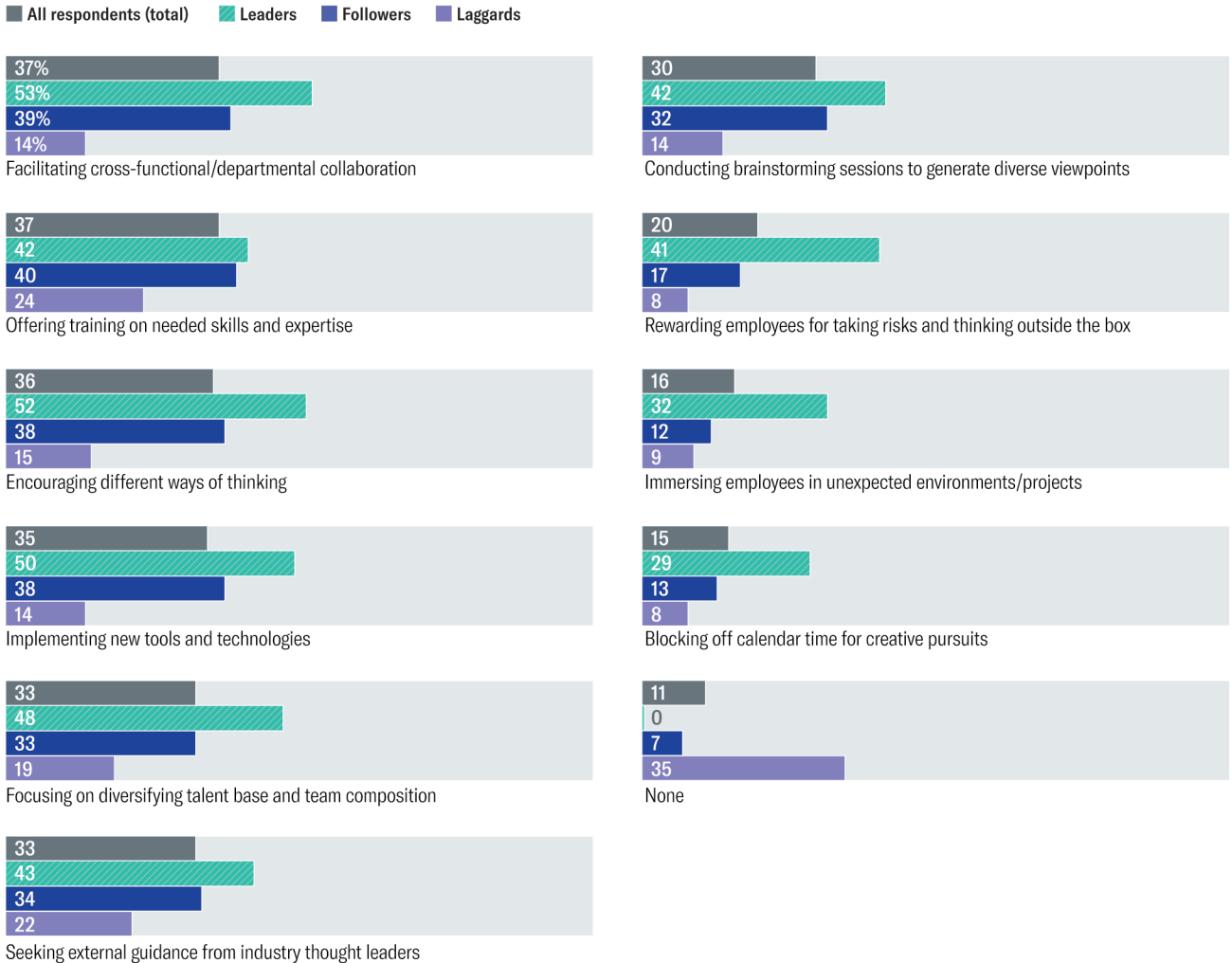
That’s not to suggest, however, that creativity comes naturally to all employees. Rather, many of today’s most successful organizations are investing more in training workers on how to think creatively. Just ask Natalie Piucco. Based in Sydney, Australia, Piucco is a chief technologist at technology giant Google Cloud. According to Piucco, Google’s onboarding process requires all new employees to learn about Double Diamond, a popular framework for innovation and design

FIGURE 4

A Collaborative Culture

Encouraging cross-functional collaboration is key to boosting creativity

How is your organization fostering a workplace culture that encourages greater creativity? *Select all that apply.*




Base: 542 respondents; 118 leaders, 306 followers, 118 laggards. Not shown: 2%–4% don't know. 1%–3% other, varies by segment.

Source: Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey, November 2023

developed by the British Design Council. “That onboarding moment sends a very clear message and permission that thinking creatively is encouraged here from day one,” she says.

Similarly, at branding agency JKR, Rolston says, employees from all departments are encouraged to explore their creativity, with the opportunity to participate in everything from on-site life drawing courses and photography classes to lessons on typeface creation.

Creativity also needs the right tools to flourish: 94% of respondents agree that organizations that invest in creative tools and technology will be more successful in the future; 96% agree that a creative company is open to experimenting with new technology as it develops; and 87% expect their organization’s overall financial investment in creativity-building tools/technologies to increase or stay the same in the next year.



“People who creatively think about financial challenges are as creative as the people who get paid with the word ‘creative’ in their job title.”

**Lee Rolston, chief growth officer,
Jones Knowles Ritchie**

Among respondents, the most-used tools/technologies to foster creativity for the purposes of strategic growth are visual communication tools (53%) and collaboration platforms (52%). **FIGURE 5** Visual communication tools are particularly effective at unlocking creativity by allowing users to expand their thinking and present their ideas using maps and storyboards. Creativity is also a social process, as collaboration platforms allow employees to share ideas,

brainstorm, and provide feedback. For leaders, collaboration platforms (65%) and visual communication tools (64%) are also the most used technologies.

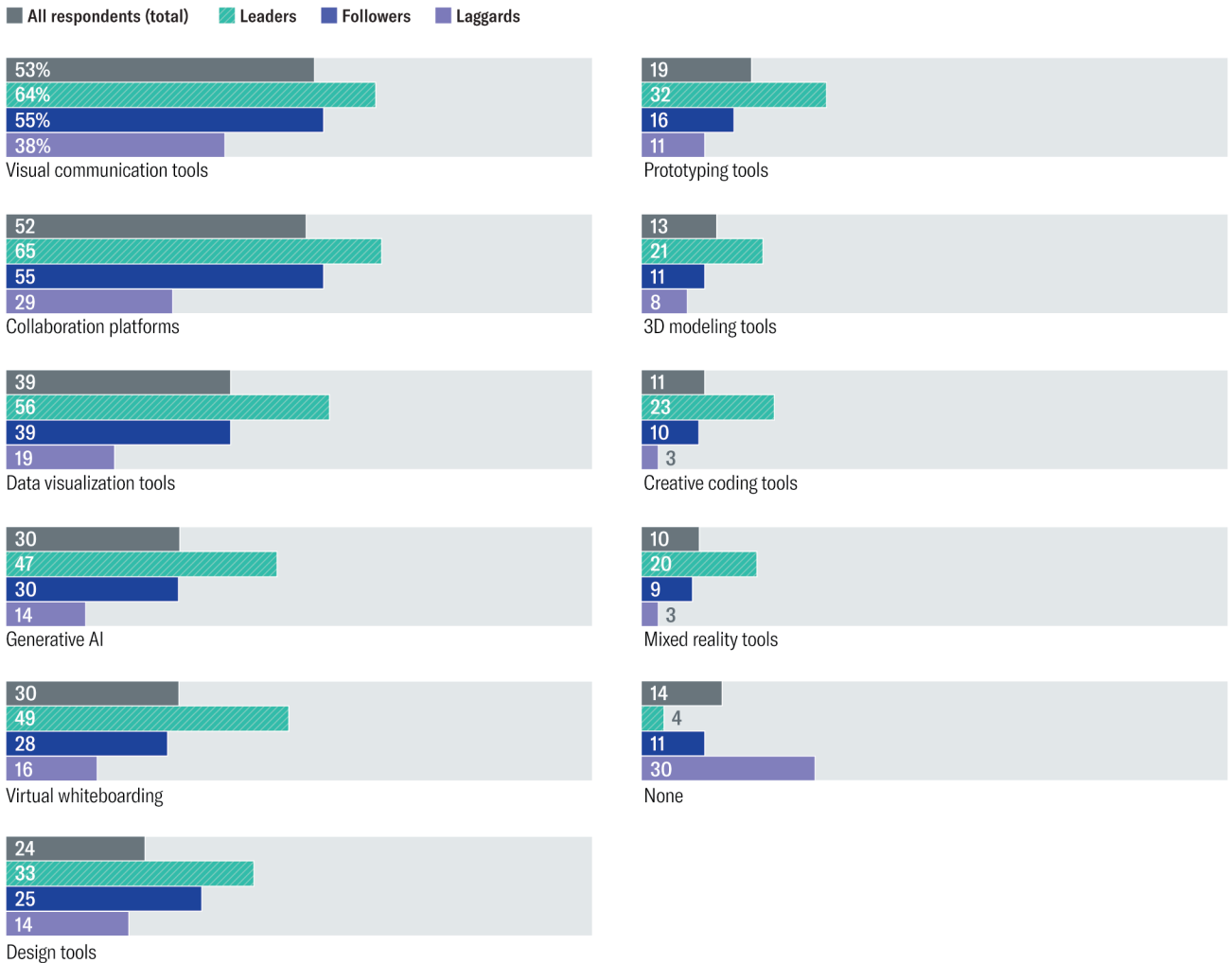
“The collaboration software employees use every single day at Google is a key part of how they connect with others and how quickly we can get our jobs done,” says Piucco. For example, she says, central to Google’s approach to collaboration is providing employees with initiative AI-driven

FIGURE 5

Creativity Tools

Visual communication tools and collaboration platforms encourage creativity

Which of the following tools/technologies is your organization using to foster creativity for the purposes of strategic growth? *Select all that apply.*



Base: 542 respondents; 118 leaders, 306 followers, 118 laggards. Not shown: 3%–6% don't know. 0%–3% other, varies by segment.

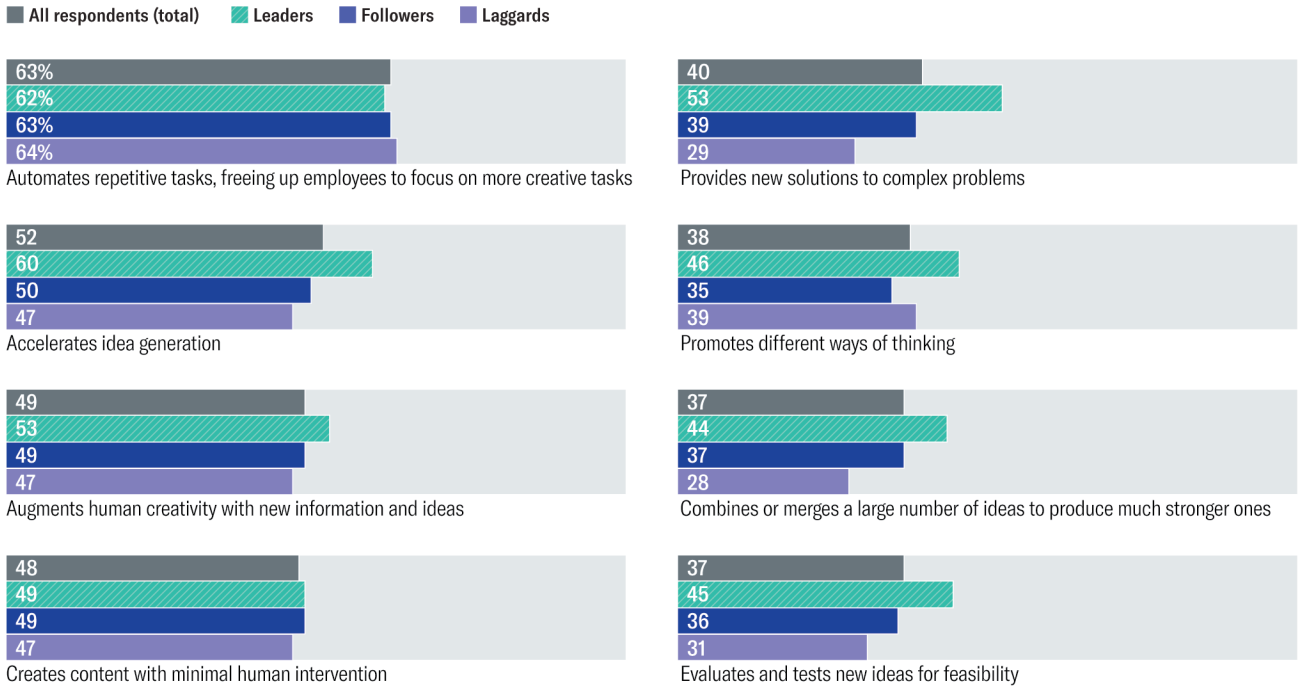
Source: Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey, November 2023

FIGURE 6

How Generative AI Fuels Creativity

Automating tasks and accelerating idea generation top the list of ways in which respondents think gen AI can promote creativity

In what ways do you think gen AI is most likely to help fuel creativity at your organization? *Select all that apply.*



Base: 542 respondents; 118 leaders, 306 followers, 118 laggards. Not shown: 2%–7% don't know, 1–3% other, 3–9% not likely to help fuel creativity, varies by segment.

Source: Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey, November 2023

search capabilities to uncover ideas fueling other projects across the company.

“Information isn’t locked in silos,” says Piucco. “I can piggyback off the ideas that other people are working on—the default is open before closed” in an open and collaborative manner.

Piucco offers the hypothetical use case of a Google engineer who solves an issue with a GPS location feature within Google Maps, and how another employee might “borrow a piece of expertise” from that project to come up with new ideas on how to use satellite imagery to determine which houses in a region could benefit most from solar energy.

In addition to collaboration software, gen AI is emerging as a defining tool for success. Forty-seven percent of leaders say their organization is using gen AI (e.g., writing assistants like ChatGPT, visual/image generators) to foster creativity for the purposes of strategic growth compared to just 30% of

followers and 14% of laggards. In fact, 42% of leaders think gen AI can enhance creativity at their organization to a great extent. Other ways in which leaders think gen AI will most likely help fuel creativity is by automating repetitive tasks, freeing employees to focus on more creative tasks (62%); accelerating idea generation (60%); and augmenting human creativity with new information and ideas (53%). **FIGURE 6**

While some organizations will need to allay fears around job loss to drive the adoption of gen AI, Lynne Parker, associate vice chancellor at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, says the technology “is just another tool in the toolkit that can be super helpful. Employers will be looking for people who can use these kinds of tools to help them be more productive.”

For instance, Rolston says JKR is currently using gen AI as a creative aid by entering the key principles of a brand into a gen AI system, describing the brand’s audience, and



“Culture is set by leadership, so you need leaders who buy into the power of ideas and who understand creativity,” says Andy Sandoz, U.K. chief creative officer of Deloitte Digital.

then asking the tool to generate messaging that aligns with a brand’s unique voice and tone. By testing the technology to see how it might “short-circuit the creative thinking and writing process,” Rolston says the agency is developing “an organized and methodical way to discover how a brand thinks—it’s quite exciting.”

Kevin Bender is another expert in creativity who has found a role for gen AI in his organization. Director of digital and design, global corporate communications, for consumer products company Colgate-Palmolive Co. in New York City, Bender says he and his team are experimenting with gen AI through the company’s proprietary hub and approved external tools to find new inspiration for drafting copy and ideating visuals for upcoming social media and employee communications campaigns.

“With ethical and responsible use, generative AI can be a creative copilot, supporting a designer or communicator, empowering our teams to be more efficient and productive,” he says. “That’s a huge win for our organization.”

The Value of Downtime, Safety, and Failure

Despite the competitive advantages of gen AI, sometimes the greatest creative achievements grow from moments of silence. “Creativity happens in the gaps and spaces when you’re not expecting it,” says Deloitte Digital’s Sandoz. “You can’t always sit down from nine to five and make it happen.”

Downtime is a commodity highly valued by the creative powers at Google. The tech giant allows employees to dedicate 20% of their week to focus on any idea that excites them, says Google Cloud’s Piucco, noting that Gmail, the world’s largest email service, is a byproduct of the company’s 20% initiative.

Yet not having enough time in the day is cited by 45% of respondents as one of the top challenges their organization is currently facing.

“Creativity is not predictable, linear, or programmable,” says Rolston. “You have to allow creativity to flow. But that time and space is not always afforded to creative businesses anymore. You have to get creative about being creative quicker and more efficiently.”

Driving this need for a new approach to creativity is the fact that yesterday’s rules for strategic growth may no longer apply to today’s businesses. The pandemic, digital disruption,

and economic uncertainty have fundamentally changed the global landscape, requiring business leaders to think creatively themselves when it comes to inspiring new ideas. In fact, 94% of survey respondents agree that a creative leader increases the creativity of their team.

“Culture is set by leadership, so you need leaders who buy into the power of ideas and who understand creativity,” says Sandoz.

In addition to fully appreciating the value of creativity, leadership must acknowledge the need for psychological safety—a term coined by Amy Edmondson, a Harvard Business School professor and author of *The Fearless Organization*. Psychological safety entails creating an environment in which employees feel comfortable expressing their ideas, speaking with candor, and admitting mistakes without fear of repercussions.

“Do I feel safe raising my ideas and sharing my diverse opinions? If I make a mistake, will it be held against me? Can I raise tough issues? Psychological safety is the essence of that playfulness, which ultimately gives us permission to be creative,” says Piucco.

But one employee’s safe space is easily another’s cubicle of discomfort. For this reason, David Burkus, teamwork expert and author of *Best Team Ever: The Surprising Science of High-Performing Teams*, says senior executives must take steps to gauge an organization’s levels of psychological safety. They can do so by asking, “When was the last time someone on your team disagreed with you in front of everyone else?” If you can think of an example, we’ll talk about how you handled it. But a lot of leaders can’t think of one, and that’s a huge problem.”

Nor should leaders confuse psychological safety with a complete absence of critical feedback, especially when creative thinking is at play. “When someone proposes an idea, it may be interesting at first, but for it to be refined and cultivated, someone has to push back on it,” says author Berkun. “It’s challenging to create a culture where there’s just the right amount of creative friction.”

In addition to striking a balance between psychological safety and creative friction, executives must help employees develop the necessary skills and expertise to contribute creatively. In fact, 78% of respondents cite a willingness to experiment as one of the most important skills leaders should develop in employees to help them become more creative.



“Cultivating trust in the team by listening with empathy and encouraging speaking openly is critical to driving innovation and making the greatest impact.”

Kevin Bender, director of digital and design, global corporate communications, Colgate-Palmolive Co.

“The enemy of creativity is perfection,” says Colgate-Palmolive’s Bender. “We have to learn from our failures and move forward.” In fact, he says his team meets every two weeks to examine why some social media creative initiatives performed better than others—information that’s integrated into the company’s “learning agenda” for future reference.

Another way executives can elevate creativity in employees is by building an environment where curiosity is encouraged—a strategy cited by 77% of respondents. “Creativity is the magic that happens when individuals and teams are empowered to tackle business opportunities in new ways and when teams are inspired to pursue their curiosity in an inclusive environment and ask ‘what if,’” says Bender. “Cultivating trust in the team by listening with empathy and encouraging speaking openly is critical to driving innovation and making the greatest impact.”

In a more literal sense of space, organizations can boost employees’ sense of safety by designing areas for collaboration, especially as many workers return to the office. For instance, Bender says Colgate-Palmolive recently redesigned “a communal collaborative space” within its New York City global headquarters that includes a common-living area, barista counter, and interactive digital screens for employees to share creative content.

“Intentional, accessible design is really critical for fostering collaboration,” says Bender.

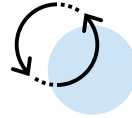
Rewarding creativity can significantly fuel greater creativity in employees. While one in five respondents say their organization is encouraging greater creativity by rewarding employees for taking risks and thinking outside the box, leaders (41%) are more likely to reward such behavior than are followers (17%) or laggards (8%).

“Creativity is about rewarding the behavior that you want to see,” says Piucco. For instance, at Google, employees rely on an internal tool, named gThanks, to post public kudos about co-workers’ most recent accomplishments. “As humans, when we see people with permission to be creative, and that it’s being recognized by the business, we’re more likely to see creativity as part of our everyday role,” says Piucco.

Accounting for Creativity

For all of creativity’s benefits, it can be difficult to ascribe a monetary value to generating new ideas and challenging the status quo. As it is, respondents are relying on a wide range of KPIs to measure the impact of creativity, including financial metrics (43%), customer satisfaction (43%), employee satisfaction (32%), cost/benefit analysis (28%), and brand recognition (21%).

In some cases, there can be a more precise payoff for creative endeavors. For instance, Bender points to a recent Colgate-Palmolive initiative, dubbed Intern Week Takeover, in which summer interns were permitted to freely “play” with the



“As humans, when we see people with permission to be creative, and that it’s being recognized by the business, we’re more likely to see creativity as part of our everyday role,” says Natalie Piucco, chief technologist at Google Cloud.

visual style of the company’s corporate social media accounts, resulting in “an uptick in engagement—a great example of a successful creative execution.”

Nevertheless, he adds, “Does creativity always equal successful performance? I’m not sure that’s true. Business objectives and audience need always come first, and then the creative execution follows.”

In fact, tackling the amorphous nature of creativity means discovering new ways to measure its value. This quest includes looking beyond creativity’s impact on customer experience to the ways in which it eases everyday tasks for employees. “If you’re using creativity to solve small, annoying problems faster, your reward really isn’t monetary,” says author Burkus. “It’s the fact that you get to do more of the work you like.”

Berkun, on the other hand, offers a more mathematical formula for measuring creativity. “The more ideas that are suggested indicates a more vibrant culture where people feel comfortable and don’t feel judged for their ideas,” he says. From there, companies can measure the number of ideas that are put into practice, and “of those new ideas that received investments, determine the outcomes and what was learned.”

For others, gauging creativity entails not only counting the hits but tabulating the misses, as well. “Creativity is about failure,” says Piucco. “Many people think that creativity is only measured by how many ideas made it into production, but actually it’s asking your team, how many projects did you kill? It’s counterintuitive but a very important way to think about measuring creativity. Experimentation is key to creativity. It’s like cooking pancakes; the first one is rarely the best.”

There’s also the ripple effect of creativity to consider. For instance, the brainstorming sessions that led to the creation of the modern-day electric car not only produced a brand-new product category but also continue to have worldwide implications in terms of climate change, energy usage, and even political ideology.



“Ultimately, creativity is about solving problems, in particular, those that you haven’t faced before,” says David Burkus, teamwork expert and author.

“Understanding how an idea impacts society; drives change against a key initiative; [and] impacts efficiency, well-being at work, and talent acquisition—they’re all variables that you can start to put into a creative metric around creative business transformation,” says Sandoz, emphasizing the need for organizations to “widen their metrics of success.”

Together, these varying KPIs can make it difficult for organizations to determine how best to invest financially in creativity. “You can’t make a normal ROI case the way you could say, ‘Hey, if we buy \$100,000 in online ads, we’ll get this many impressions,’” says Burkus. “You have to almost start with ‘How much do we want to spend on this?’ to the point where, if our initiatives don’t produce a return, we would still be fiscally solvent.”

Piucco recommends another strategy for determining investment in creativity. “I often encourage leaders to look across their business and conduct an audit of their tech investment,” she says. “Where are they versioning, visioning, and venturing?”

A concept developed by Kevin Dame, head of product at YouTube, versioning, visioning, and venturing describes the many phases of innovation in which product teams use incremental product improvements to enhance user experience over time (versioning), explore new terrain (visioning), or take big bold leaps that bring about monumental change (venturing).

According to Piucco, using a 70/20/10 rule is a good guide for thinking about time, technology, budget, and people investments across the three Vs. “Oftentimes we get stuck in versioning, and then we wonder why we’re not being creative,” she says. “Real creative ideas that stick are typically revolutionary, not evolutionary. They’re not small changes; they’re monumental leaps.”

A Commitment to Creativity

Indeed, there are signs that organizations are hoping creativity can help them find their way through unfamiliar territory. Half of all leaders are implementing new tools and technologies to foster a workplace culture that encourages greater creativity compared to just 38% of followers and 14% of laggards. Spending behavior patterns also indicate a continued commitment to creativity. Among respondents who say their organization is currently making significant financial investment in creativity-building tools/technologies, 43% expect their overall investment to significantly increase in the next year, whereas 35% expect to moderately increase their spend in the next 12 months.

Such lofty goals and shows of financial support for more creative solutions are encouraging. In today’s business climate, there’s a growing need to find new ways of thinking when it comes to designing products, satisfying customers, and weathering issues from supply chain shortages to elevated interest rates.

“Ultimately, creativity is about solving problems, in particular, those that you haven’t faced before,” says Burkus.

At the same time, business leaders are increasingly recognizing the impact of creativity on strategic growth, signaling a healthy departure from the past. “Even 10 years ago, we had to use the word ‘innovation’ instead of ‘creativity’ to get executives to take it seriously, which is ridiculous,” says Burkus.

Today, creativity is playing a pivotal role in business strategy, decision making, and innovation. Organizations are learning how to create the necessary spaces for experimentation, embracing diverse perspectives, testing the boundaries of gen AI, and multiplying the metrics used to gauge creativity’s power to transform.

METHODOLOGY AND PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Harvard Business Review Analytic Services surveyed 542 members of the *Harvard Business Review* audience via an online survey fielded in November 2023. Respondents qualified to complete the survey if they were familiar with their organization's approach to business strategy, problem solving, and innovation, and were knowledgeable about their organization's approach to embracing creativity.

Size of Organization

37%
10,000 or more
employees

35%
1,000–9,999
employees

28%
100–999
employees

Seniority

29%
Executive
management/
board members

31%
Senior
management

23%
Middle
management

17%
Other grades

Industry Sectors

13%
Technology

11%
Education

10%
Health Care

9%
Manufacturing

8%
Financial services

All other sectors
less than 8% each.

Job Functions

11%
General
management

9%
HR/training

9%
Operations/
product
management

All other functions
less than 8% each.

Regions

41%
North America

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