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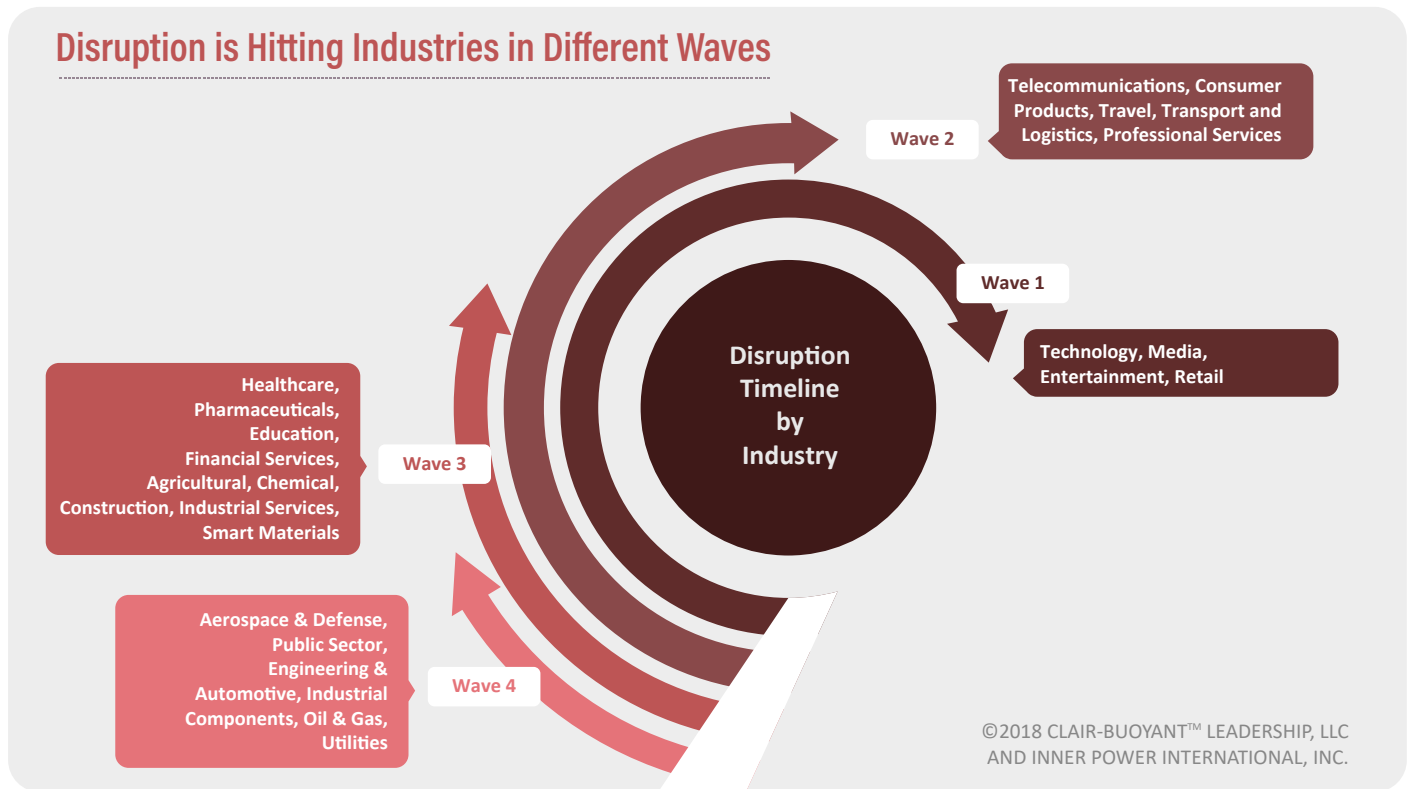
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# A Disruptor Innovator Profile: Spotting the “Disruptors” in Your Midst

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One key issue that has arisen as we work with leaders of legacy organizations attempting to embrace a new strategy and mindset for the digital/disruptive age is how to identify the potential “disruptors” within their own workforce. As these leaders grasp the breadth and depth of the shift their companies will have to undertake to leverage the disruptive era for growth, they also sense that there may be latent “disruptor” talent among their colleagues that can be harnessed to accelerate the process. Hence, they’re asking, “what are the mindsets and behaviors of a disruptor?” “If we tried to identify potential disruptors within our organization, what would we look for?”



In addressing these questions, our point of departure is the very formula for success in the 20th Century Industrial Age business model and mindset that is under attack from disruptors. This formula includes set-points like the extreme focus on operational efficiencies and the processes, risk averseness, and optimization that accompany it; longstanding presumptions of stability and predictability in the market; the perceptions of employees as “human capital assets;” and the primacy of a highly firm-centric perspective.

Our experience with legacy organizations is that the “disruptors in their midst” are, in effect, fundamentally challenging many of these set-points even if they are not actively pursuing “disruptive” initiatives.

Thus, a good place to look is for employees who are:

- predisposed to challenge the core assumptions behind longstanding Industrial Age thinking. They ask why we have to do it this way, or why we do this at all—not out of obstinance, but out of genuine exploration and interest in dialoguing about new solutions.
- predisposed, in the face of these formulas, or to rules or perceived limitations to experimentation, innovation and growth, to want to be resourceful and to break, end-run, evade, or avoid such rules and processes. Importantly, however, they do so in pursuit of progress and impact rather than making things “easier for themselves.”

- curious about how the world is evolving and interested in ongoing learning and exploration of new technology, new opportunities, and new initiatives. They also demonstrate a measure of self-awareness.
- predisposed to take greater than average risks to learn as fast as the world is changing; to try things and be ok with failing; and to keep trying—especially in pursuit of bold achievements like 10X leaps forward, not just 10% improvements. They have, if you like, a certain resilience to cuts and bruises.
- more emotionally intelligent than average, and especially empathetic with those whom the organization serves and toward customer’s needs, often elevating them over those of the firm.
- naturally inclined to set bold “reach” goals that cause the release of old ways of thinking to achieve them.
- able to demonstrate deep belief, patience, and trust in the process that it takes to achieve bold “reach” goals.
- naturally interested in things “outside the firm’s four walls,” as opposed to just the internal functioning of the business, and are usually also more attuned to the needs of others.

naturally inclined, highly motivated, and clearly empowered. Second, and perhaps more importantly, at the core of a disruptor mindset is a radically more robust definition of, and commitment to, innovation than is the case in nearly all legacy companies. Harnessing the behaviors listed in the table below, in our experience, has the capacity to forge this more robust level of innovation, which, in turn, will be one of the most important keys to success in the era of disruption.

Finally, we do not believe that the “disruptor innovators in your midst” need to demonstrate all the qualities we list below. To the contrary, in our experience, few will have them all. Some will be good at one or two and have no capacity for others.

So, for leaders in legacy organizations looking to harness “disruptor innovator” behaviors innate in current employees, the goal should be to identify which behaviors certain employees demonstrate and align them to the various disruptive activities the company is undertaking. For example, employees good at asking questions that challenge the fundamentals of the company’s business model should be part of any assessment of how vulnerable the firm could be to disruption.

## “Disruptors” or “Disruptor Innovators”?

In addressing these characteristics and behaviors, we also concluded that thinking of such employees as “disruptors” is not enough. Unharnessed, these employees may demonstrate positive enthusiasm for disruptive change, and might even develop, or come to lead, a disruptive business initiative in a legacy firm. But, they might also become so frustrated with the pace of things or so alienated from the organization that they will leave.

That’s why we believe such employees should be thought of as “Disruptor Innovators” instead. First, when harnessed to help the organization leverage disruption for growth, such employees have the real potential to serve like first responder resources:



# A Disruptor Innovator Profile: What to look for in spotting “Disruptor Innovators” in your midst

Disruptor Innovator Behaviors	Underlying Beliefs Driving Behaviors	How They May Have Been Seen in the Past
<p><b>Interested in trends, events, and issues outside the range of focus of the company and industry</b></p> <p><i>Talks about key issues outside the company/industry purview; relates to how they have impact on organizational success. Seeks to share such insight with colleagues and to get them similarly interested.</i></p> <p><i>Investigates, explores, and engages a wide range of social and political connections and interests in order to share risk.</i></p> <p><i>Develops, connects and collaborates with strong networks with diverse interest groups.</i></p>	<p><i>Believes that, try as they might, companies do not exist in a vacuum. To grow smartly in this day and age, companies must be aware of their connection to, and influence by and on, larger forces.</i></p> <p><i>Believes that situations, institutions, and people can change and can be directed in a positive way.</i></p>	<p><i>Someone who is not focused on the company’s business. Someone who is detached.; too cerebral.</i></p>
<p><b>Challenges core business assumptions</b></p> <p><i>Asks questions of others’ fundamental thinking, like, “Let’s step back and ask ourselves why we are still doing things this way?”; “What if we tried this in a completely different way?”</i></p> <p><i>When challenged, does not get defensive or overly anxious; remains curious, learning.</i></p>	<p><i>Curiosity, questioning to learn and explore; healthy skepticism of convention; questions authority.</i></p> <p><i>Exploration, and experimentation, and questioning are positive and enrich the learning of all.</i></p> <p><i>Belief that anxiety and vulnerability can be managed during setbacks or criticism.</i></p>	<p><i>Someone who is a nuisance. Someone who thinks they’re smarter than everyone else; someone who wants to stir things up.</i></p>
<p><b>Seeks to speed things up by breaking, bending, or eliminating rules or processes</b></p> <p><i>Looks for flexible ways to avoid, evade, change rules and processes in pursuit of impact/progress.</i></p> <p><i>Celebrates and rewards risk taking.</i></p>	<p><i>Belief that things are “over-ordered” and that controls are too constraining; that this undercuts potential for growth.</i></p> <p><i>Values improvisation; not highly sensitive to being wrong or making a mistake because this is part of learning.</i></p>	<p><i>Someone who’s mischievous; careless or lacks integrity.</i></p>

# A Disruptor Innovator Profile: What to look for in spotting “Disruptor Innovators” in your midst

## Disruptor Innovator Behaviors

### Drawn to experimenting

*Volunteers to try new things; a natural “beta” person.*

*Tolerates ambiguity and uncertainty.*

*Inclusive of diverse ideas and viewpoints.*

### Takes greater risks and is more willing to fail

*Stakes out the edge of the spectrum of potential initiatives, responses, or resource allocations, etc.; advocates for pushing the acceptable limits. Fails but learns.*

*Is willing to test their abilities with humor.*

*Enjoys dealing with unpredictable situations.*

### Fundamentally and consistently eager to push beyond the comfort zone to keep learning

*Looks for ways to increase knowledge/insight base.*

*Often practices and discloses self-awareness and self-development commitments; seeks to keep oneself outside the comfort zone.*

*Demonstrates, discloses, asks questions and listens with an interest in a broad set of topics.*

## Underlying Beliefs Driving Behaviors

*Belief that “new” equals “progress” and can unlock unlimited opportunities and potential.*

*Pushing boundaries and learning new ways are good for growth and are very productive.*

*Belief that failing is part of ultimately succeeding.*

*Belief that self-assurance and confidence can be learned and are not a given; that one is only limited by one’s own belief.*

*Knows “growth and comfort do not coexist.”*

*More insight leads to more possibilities.*

*Learning is critical to growth. Not learning and growing leads to stagnation.*

*Eager to learn how to boost one’s own performance and learning.*

*Personal qualities can be learned, developed, or cultivated.*

## How They May Have Been Seen in the Past

*Someone who’s undisciplined; lacks focus; eccentric; just wants to try new things.*

*Someone who’s crazy; who can’t be trusted.*

*Someone who lacks focus; who is “showing off” about their knowledge.*

# A Disruptor Innovator Profile: What to look for in spotting “Disruptor Innovators” in your midst

## Disruptor Innovator Behaviors

**Be more emotionally intelligent than average, with deep empathy toward customers and their needs (whether external or internal)**

*Asks questions, listens, and discloses interest in customers’ journeys and their experiences with company offerings.*

*Explores customers’ needs, interests, problems and the role the company plays in helping them deliver on their promises.*

**Sets bold “stretch” goals that require release of old ways of thinking to achieve them.**

*Aims for radical improvement that seems just out of reach vs. safer, predictable targets for improvement.*

**Demonstrates patience and trust in the process of achieving something radical.**

*After setting a bold goal, when things don’t immediately change, does not reduce the target or settle for less.*

## Underlying Beliefs Driving Behaviors

*Has a service or purpose orientation... “We are in business for our customers;” Sees leadership as a role that serves others, turning the traditional hierarchy upside down.*

*Identify with the relationship with the customer, rather than sole focus on protecting the firm’s value or one’s personal stakes.*

*Believes you cannot get to the next phase of an initiative without boldness and greater speed.*

*Knows that personal agency is paramount to achieving what initially seems impossible: “What you believe is what you can achieve.”*

*Knows with any exponential change, the first part is the hardest, messiest, and may look like no progress is being achieved, so holds steady.*

*Knows that when you start re-thinking your targets, making up excuses, or talking yourself out of bold “reach” goals, you are giving up on the vision.*

## How They May Have Been Seen in the Past

*Someone who does not seem loyal to the company. Someone who’s angling for a job with a customer.*

*Someone who is unrealistic, unreasonable, or simply a bit crazy.*

*Someone who is unrealistic, unreasonable, and taking on too much.*

# Overview

This white paper is part of a new series focused on navigating through the Era of Disruption and the Dawn of Exponential Times. The aim is to illuminate the opportunities available in this extraordinary era and to clarify the unprecedented transformations needed at the organizational, leadership and individual level in order to meet the challenges at hand and thrive. Other papers in this series include:

## 1. What Got You Here Will Leave You Here

Explore how this Era of Disruption is dramatically different than living in a “VUCA” world – where volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity reign. The dawn of exponential times promises to deliver 10x and higher benefit only if we can reinvent our organizations and ourselves for new ways of leading, thinking, and relating. (June, 2016)

## 2. Strategies for the Disruptive Era and for Exponential Times

It’s already been established that the core strategies and strategic thinking pathways of the last half-century will no longer suffice in the era of disruption and exponential times. It’s also clear that digital native companies leading the disruptive charge operate within radically different strategic guiderails. Digital 2.0 incumbents across nearly all industries will require a mix of the two approaches to navigate the transition from the linear to the exponential era. (Coming soon)

## 3. The Case for the Humble Incumbent

Many incumbent companies in industries that predate the digital era will fail to make the transition through disruption and into the exponential era, and many factors will contribute to determining that. Our experience is that those that we call “Humble Incumbents”—organizations fundamentally infused with, and built around, humility—will have the strongest base to work from. This paper shares the results of our research with senior leaders of global organizations across several legacy industries that are being confronted with the challenges and opportunities posed by disruption, and reveals key insights and winning practices of those who are mastering the journey. (July, 2017)

For more information on the other articles in this series, please visit us online:

<http://innerpowerintl.com/our-latest-ideas/> or <http://www.CB-leadership.com/>

Or, join us for further dialogue on LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/paul-kinsinger-2211a812/>

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/karenswalch/> <https://www.linkedin.com/in/leanndelcarpio>



## 4. What is Exponential Leadership?

While many organizations have been focusing on developing greater adaptability and agility in leaders in the face of increasing turbulence, our experience is that this approach does not go far enough. Disruption and exponential times are already demanding a more extreme expansion of the way we think and lead, so as companies disrupt and reinvent their business models, so too must leaders reinvent themselves. (Coming soon)

## 5. How Can We Develop Leaders for Exponential Times?

The ways we have developed leaders in the past will no longer be enough to face the unprecedented challenges inherent in this era of disruption. Not only must the leadership skills for this era be reimagined—we must also reinvent how we develop leaders for exponential times.

(September, 2016)

## 6. The Key to Conscious Reinvention for Exponential Times

We are at a stage of human evolution that demands elevated levels of thinking and collective reinvention to thrive in the face of constant disruption. As individual leaders, we must slow down to unearth personal beliefs that hinder rapid transformation and then accelerate new practices to move exponentially forward. This will require identifying key accelerator beliefs and practices that each of us can utilize to advance our thinking and development.

(December, 2016)



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