

Part 3- 'What Does Innovation Really Look Like' with Rich Kenny

Thu, 7/21 12:01PM • 37:04

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

business, innovation, people, challenge, organisation, idea, approach, crucial, suppose, culture, important, piece, programme, foster, support, buyer, leadership, outcome, good, trust

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My name is Scott Challinor, and you are listening to the Leaders Council podcast, for the people who run the country and the people who keep the country running. As regular listeners of this programme will know, part of our mission here at the Leaders Council is to bring you a variety of distinct perspectives on leadership. And to this end, we're joined on today's programme by Rich Kenny, the managing director at Interact and Research and Sustainability Director at Techbuyer where he leads the research sustainability and compliance teams. He's the third senior leader, of course, to join us from Techbuyer in recent weeks. Rich, a very warm welcome to you, and by all means, thanks for taking the time to join us on the show today.

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That's a pleasure. Thanks for having me, Scott.

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It's a real pleasure. And today, of course, we're going to be addressing the key theme of what innovation really looks like and how people form a very, very key part of that. Now, first and foremost, talking about innovation, I suppose different businesses, they have different definitions innovation, don't they? So, within Techbuyer what does innovation mean to you?

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I think for us, we look to innovate all the time. We have to be very clear on what the difference is between innovation and improvement, because I think those two terms get used interchangeably. So, we look at it in two different ways, where innovation is, where we're doing it in a new direction, or making something better by a new mechanism, as opposed to just making something slightly better. So, I guess the key things for us are the themes around incremental innovation, where we're making small directional changes versus transformation-

based innovation where we're completely either overhauling or implementing or creating something brand new. We do both here at Techbuyer and everyone is empowered to do both aspects of innovation, whether it's large-scale projects, or small-scale improvements that are then leading to micro innovations as well. So, I think for us, it's about getting better. But also, not just by improving a process by 1% but by also completely changing the way we do things sometimes as and when we need to. It's about a flexible approach to innovation.

02:08

Yeah, so it's like the little changes, but also changes that are going to spiral into something that's really going to transform progress within the businesses and really drive the company forward.

02:18

100%. Yeah, we're talking about small changes. It's that we're always trying to be 1% better every day and everyone's trying to improve their function. But nobody knows why classes improvement than the micro innovation we're talking about is, you know. If we're dealing say, with packaging, we're not looking at brand new ways of doing circular packaging to reduce the sustainability impact by using cardboard or foam. We're talking about micro changes, like adjusting our packaging mix to include more recyclability, changing the way we do shipping, for example, to consolidate shipments to reduce carbon footprint, and no, those aren't transformational changes. They're completely new approaches to a small path within the business. And those are those little micro innovations that are not truly transformative. But they all very much add up.

03:02

Yeah, absolutely right and they allow innovation to really take hold within an organisation. I guess, you've got to embed it into the culture of the business, haven't you? So how do you go about doing that based on your own experiences at Techbuyer of doing it?

03:20

I think a lot of it's about empowering people. So, I break sort of innovation into four sections: attitudes, people aspiration and outcome. What I think is crucial for innovation functions is to have all of those in our mind when we're when looking at these functions. So, you know, attitude is about taking a conscious approach to everything. It's the pursuit of innovation through our core values about wanting to be either 1%, better, or transformationally better at everything we do, and everything we touch. It's about how would you encourage that attitude in the business and that's by celebrating independence or providing facilities to allow innovation throughout the

business in every department. It's looking at what differences need to be made, not just at a strategic level, but at an operational level. So that's the boots on the ground approach, it's saying what needs to change? And that's encompassed within the attitude of the organisation. How can you make things better? How do you take accountability of improving your area? That leads to that empowered contribution from the business that we have loads of people saying, I want to be better, here's where I think we can do it, and being comfortable and competent within our people to do that.

So that's about basically putting everyone in the business in charge of innovation, rather than saying there's a department that looks after this; we say everyone's in charge of innovation, you've got an idea, you bring it forward. And the view is very much that each unique individual contributes to that collective approach. So, if we get a diverse selection of talent, then we have a diverse selection of thought, which means there's a good chance that we'll have that incremental sidestep of innovation that then leads us in a direction which I think is crucial.

It's also about, I hate using the term but entrepreneurial self-styling; it is about making sure that people feel that they have control within the business to do their own thing with a sense of we are a collective and we are working together. But it's very much about thinking of the business as an organism, as opposed to thinking "I just come to work I just do my hours". That's okay, but also, if you want more, there is more; if you want to take charge, if you want to lead that direction, that's really important. This develops into the aspiration piece, if you aspire for more, you want more control, you want more input, that's the aspirational outcome of it. And that's where we're looking at, you know, believing we can change the world in what we do.

We're fortunate in our industry, that it's a circular based business. It's very, very focused around reducing carbon, but also providing significant business benefits. So, if we can innovate, we can be a front runner in this field. And that's really important to our operations. If you've got an idea, having a company that allows you to develop them, take that further and support that rather than just saying, no, we tried that, and it doesn't work. Could we try it differently? Is it still an idea that's worth pursuing? And that's a good way to have a culture develop around the people and the cross section of talent, as opposed to just this is how we are this is how we think. It's very much about thinking, well, everyone thinks differently, let's embrace that and that then takes you to the outcomes.

So not every idea is a good idea, but you still want to collect those ideas. So, things change, circumstances change, what was a good approach before might not be now, what wasn't before could now be. So, if you're driving a ship, you've got a direction, but that direction will need to change depending on the environmental conditions, and that understanding of the outcome, and where we want to go long term allows you to weather those bumps of understanding failure and improving. I think that what's crucial is that you've got these four things, attitudes, people, aspirations and outcome, in your mind and you realise that culture needs to be driven by an outcome that is initially driven by an aspiration, but it's fundamentally going to be your people and your attitudes that drive those changes.

Yeah, exactly. And how, of course, do you instill the right attitude in people in that sense? I suppose the business has to take some role in facilitating that, doesn't it?

07:05

Absolutely. It's about a safe environment in which people feel comfortable to express that diversity of thought and that diversity of talent. You know, I've never heard with intact bias. And one says, "we tried that" and then the conversation ends. I've never seen that as a shutdown. I've never seen someone go, "look, we had a go once it's not for us." There's always that challenging attitude asking, why didn't it work last time? What did we try? Because one person saying they had one approach doesn't mean that the idea is a bad idea. It's just the last approach didn't work at that time. So, it's about fostering trust, inspiring confidence and then supporting both financially and from a mentorship point of view. I bring quite a lot of transformational innovations into the business and I do that because I feel completely safe to do so. I've got the Managing Director, I've got a CEO within the business that listens to what I've got to say, and asks, what do you think we should change? What should we do? They are happy for me to come in there and provide 100 ideas and share their time and their experience and marry it with mine. And that's really important, like the mentorship piece in the business is crucial. Because you might have a great idea, but no idea how to go about it. We've got an abundance of talent that I feel very fortunate to have across a massive section of disciplines. There's always someone in the business you can go and talk to and say, look, I've had this idea, but I just don't know how to progress it. And there will be someone within Techbuyer who'll say, oh, you should speak to this person or this person, or you should try taking it to this committee. We are really good at signposting where to get support, and then providing that support properly. That's what I think makes us unique and strong.

08:47

Yeah, and I suppose that's where the collective approach is so important, and so beneficial, isn't it? Because obviously, you've got, obviously that mentorship, you've got people to turn to, and then when there are ideas, you've got the capability to be able to nurture that, develop that and with that you're also nurturing the talents of the individual that has come up with it as well, aren't you?

09:05

100%, and that's the word that is really crucial, nurture. Because not everyone is going to. We have this concept that everyone can create innovation, but they don't just wake up in the morning and have world changing ideas. This is where the incremental innovation tends to lead to transformational innovation, in that you get quite good at doing a little bit, then you gain your confidence and you earn your stripes, and then you start looking at bigger pieces and bigger pieces and you apply that experience gained from being nurtured and supported and looked

after. This helps you take those bigger risks, those bigger changes with a much more likely outcome of success. I would say when I when I started the business I was looking at some fairly big changes and digital transformation-based projects and I was really well supported and able to understand the business and where my role fit in. I was also given tonnes of opportunities to move laterally within the business and understand other functions and where there could be a value. So, I very quickly, in what would usually take decades in another organisation, built tonnes of support in a real innovation fostering culture. I know that sounds a bit like a cop out saying, Okay, it's a culture that fosters it. But that's what we have it set by, that's what I love and that's what gets me out of bed in the morning. If I have an idea, and someone has said, we'll do what we can do with it. When I say, this is what I'm stuck on, they will find someone to help you, whether it's a government or through a partnership or through taking it into the industry, or whether it's someone within the business, all the gloves are off. You can kind of do whatever you want, so long as its outcome driven towards improving the business and I think that's really refreshing and it's rare from in my experience, and I've been doing this for 20 years. It's rare for someone to always support your decisions; so long as they're well thought out, and they're out there and they're working towards a positive outcome.

10:54

yeah, it's backing your people, isn't it. And to create that culture you've got to obviously invest in aspiration, as you've already talked about. And I think a key part of that is also investing in people and their development, isn't it. And that's something that I think every business has to look at, don't they?

11:11

Absolutely, investment is crucial. A lot of businesses have one or two really, really talented individuals that tend to get the lion's share of what I would call the fun projects. You tend to find that there is one guy or girl we go to solve problems and to change the business. What's refreshing here is that you could go to any department in this business across any area of operation, whether it's packaging, whether it's goods out, whether it's goods in whether it's technical, whether it's IT, whether it's sales, and there'll be someone in there that is driving a brand-new way of doing things. For another business one team would be leading that and we're talking about a guy or a girl in packaging, or dispatch, etc. that's looking at completely changing the way we run an operational procedure in the business to make it more efficient, more effective, more beneficial to our customers; these people are in every single team in our business.

The investment that we tend to give is not just financial in regard to training courses, which you see a lot, but an investment in terms of senior management time. The people who've been there and done this or stuff are very happy to get back to sorting out those basic propositions in the business such as shipping, selling and buying, and work with people who may have been in the business six months, and then come in and say, "What's your current procedure? Okay, let's try this. Let's work together."

And getting that time is really hard; in most organisations you tend to find that you know, where the biggest test, I guess, is the term you use. But we make sure that we're kind of frying all the fish I suppose. And that, you know, the people who've maybe been there and done that can help structure someone else's development and nurture their ideas without just coming in saying that's a good idea. I'll take that, don't worry, instead we say, let's help you get there yourself, let's help you be better, let's help you develop, and that's that investment in time. Once again, quite rare. It's primarily seen in other businesses that maybe the HR team will throw some money at you to go on a training course, but it's rare to get the CEO come and sit with you and ask "what's your idea and what you think you're not telling me about it? Let's work through the hurdles, let's work through the challenges and let me apply my experience to your idea as well." That's unusual.

13:21

Yeah, and it's important to mention that you talked about that example of sitting down with the CEO and sharing an idea with them for this culture to really work. You've got to have that almost Open-Door leadership policy, having new leadership has got to be accessible to everyone.

13:38

I've always hated the term because I tend to find companies that have an open-door policy have a lot of doors in the way; they have an open-door policy when it's convenient. And I think that that really is, one of the things that pains me quite a lot, is that workers will expect that my doors always open except I can never book a meeting with you. You know, and that's, that's great that you're available, except I've been waiting six months, I've not been able to speak to you and I wanted to speak to you for the entirety of that time. I've never had that issue. I've always been able to just drop an email to them and say, "Look, I know you'd like that this is going well. But can you find 10 minutes for me to talk through an idea?" No, I've never had someone say that's just not possible this month or whatever. They will say, "Okay, well, can you come in at seven o'clock in the morning? We can talk about it then?" Yeah, of course. "Could you stay at nine o'clock at night? And can we talk? Right?" Yes, we can. There's always a level of flexibility and it's a sign of good leadership and healthy leadership that people will, you know, impact their own day to help other people in the business.

14:40

Yeah, because I suppose when you've got a collective you've got to make the leadership element accessible to the entire collective, haven't you and showing that flexibility and showing that willingness to engage pays dividends in the long run, doesn't it? Because I mean, it brings the best out of people because they believe in the leadership they believe in the project.

14:59

Yeah, absolutely. And that also ties into the whole cultural pieces that there's two ways to look at culture isn't there. Culture theoretically is like an idea of shared experience and values that make communication with a business easier because we all kind of all think the same, or we all act the same way. But that's quite a dangerous way to look at culture, because that's the, let's hire people like me approach because there's people that understand what I'm like. The other option is you go with a more challenging culture, and you go, well, let's, let's hire people that are good for the business; I might not get on with them personally, but professionally, I'm pretty sure I will do. As long as we're driving towards the same outcome, we can definitely work as a team and we can work well together. It's why it's essential, but it's why I hate seeing hobbies on the CV; when it comes to hiring and things like that, you look at the CV and you ask does he play football, I play football, we could be friends. But actually, I don't really care what you do in spare time, because that's not really relevant for what I want you to do here. It's great if I want a friend, but if I want a colleague, I don't want someone to play the same sports with me and like the same music and, you know, think the same way, I want somebody that's got a completely divergent approach to me but has the same values. So, for me, culture is all about values rather than experience and commonalities. That's why I think we're successful as an organisation because that culture isn't about things we do, it's more about how we feel about things. So long as you feel the same sort of way we do about putting hard work in, embracing and encouraging teamwork and about understanding your role within the business and what, what we can do for you, as well as what you can do for us, those are the elements of culture that I think are crucial for building an innovation focused business. Because you're saying, I don't care what your experience is, I care what your values are and that's what we talked about, you know, attitude, aspiration, outcome and stuff.

16:48

Yeah, and there's a couple of important things to take from that. I think what you said there is about the business reaching out and basically saying what we can do for you, as well as what you can do for us. And I think in the sort of challenging recruitment environment we're seeing right now, certainly, post pandemic in a lot of sectors, there are a lot of candidates out there who are concerned about what the employer can do for them, and their demands are changing on that side of things for certain. So, leadership does, first and foremost have to be very, very aware of that doesn't it?

17:16

100%. It's a two-way street; an employee and an employer isn't just a contract, it's a relationship and we have to give and take in relationships. The job market at the moment is fairly buoyant in a lot of areas so there's an urge to almost push back and go, it's all about me, I'm unique, I'm here, and I therefore I get to get my demands across. But that only takes you so far. We can talk about the higher pay, and we can talk about benefits, and we can talk about all this sort of stuff. But at the end of the day, there's a function to fulfil and if you're exceptional you can fulfil that function in multiple places. And you can kind of, you know, take your town on the street, as it

were. I think the key is, if you understand the two-way relationship, it builds both ways, you'll get opportunities to do things that you wouldn't get to do somewhere else. If you're hamstrung by being right; you're a high performer, you're the highest paid person, therefore, you must only do your role, because that's what you're paid for. We cannot afford you to do something else. There's an element there of going like, well, what decisions are you making? How does this become a relationship and not a contract? And that's really important in the job market right now, because I think a lot of a lot of the younger workforce are interested in not building a career in one place but building their experience and building their knowledge.

You shouldn't be looking down on people who only want to work in a particular sector for a couple of years, and get really, really good. That's okay. Because I mean, I don't feel like there's that many jobs that are like that anymore. We can't afford to be like, you know, we're hiring you and we're investing in you and I expect you to stay here for 10 years. I think that's fairly unrealistic. Now, we're lucky because we've got loads of people hitting 10-15 years in the business. But I'm aware that that's unusual in a fast-moving tech business. So, what we have to do is say, well, how do we get the most out of this relationship? So, everyone is always fulfilled in this role. And that's, you know, I think that's primarily through, like you said, opportunities through trading through development through access to leadership, and through, you know, leaving our business after two and a half years saying, I did a really good shift there and I really enjoyed it but now I've got all the skills and the opportunities, and I want to explore somewhere else. That's what I think is interesting about the job market right now, we've got these people who maybe fight over COVID and gone wrong, which need to stay here for now. The job market spans and we're seeing a lot of people move in quite big, droves, and I'm not entirely sure it's the best decisions. A lot of people think they're moving for fringe benefits, and they're not moving for their long-term development. I think they're going to end up getting stimulant pigeonholed by making those demands too explicit. And that's a shame because I think we're going to have a lot of talent feeling very unfulfilled in 18 months' time.

19:46

Exactly right. It's going to need continuous development, isn't it because the nature of work is changing for certain. So that is very important when you're looking at opportunities that are out there, look at what it can do for your development. And just going back to another point, Rich, you touched on as well, just a little bit earlier on, you talked about diverging ideas and this is where diversity is being championed at the moment in so many businesses, and that's not just diversity of background, but also diversity of experience, diversity of skills, and also diversity of ideas most importantly, isn't it? It is those diverse teams where there is a multitude of ideas and a multitude of skills coming together that tend to thrive more than others, isn't it?

20:32

Yeah, that's exactly right. It's that diversity that is crucial. As I said, it's about diversity of experience, from their personal experience, and also their work experience, also, that variation

of thought is crucial. Because if we all think the same, then we all approach problems in the same way. And the only way we can really make transformational changes is if we all think a bit differently. And then we apply those different start points, different endpoints, different thoughts, different cultures, if we apply them to a problem, we end up with a much better net result.

21:03

Exactly right. And obviously, I suppose that's why the incremental innovation can tie into the transformative, isn't it, they are two fundamentally different things, but the little steps, the little changes, they can all snowball into those major changes. It's getting an idea developing it, getting access to the right people and really taking that forward to make the change.

21:24

Yeah. Financially, when we talk about innovation, it's so often thought about as this big piece of work that completely changes the direction, whereas, you know, I do think the incremental pieces is vital as well, because that's generally where a lot of your really talented people put their piece. It's about taking a new idea that isn't going to be completely high risk for the business that isn't a massive digital transformation projects or it's not a huge operational change. We're talking about small new ways of doing things that have a really good net benefit. And they might not make you millions of pounds, but they might make things a little bit better. But you can build on those, you know, you build on that experience, you build on that knowledge, you build on that first success. And then that gives you the confidence to try bigger, harder and potentially more risky things with a much higher chance of success. It all starts with incremental ones; you've got to cut your teeth somewhere. It's hard sometimes to get that allowance. It's hard for someone to sit down and go, Okay, you want to try something completely new, you know, there's a high chance of failure here. It's like, Yeah, but what we also learn in failure; what the benefit of getting it wrong as well? And that's something you've got to have a look at sometimes it's okay to fail as long as you gain the experience.

22:41

Exactly right. And I think that that, again, comes back to leadership. I mean, it's like where there are failures and setbacks, if we call it failures, it's about not abandoning the whole idea entirely. It's about learning from that experience, because the L word is so important in developments in the world of work today, isn't it? I mean, it's that win or mental learning that you've got to take on rather than thinking of it as a failing or a setback that's terminal, that is going to end the entire cycle.

23:08

Yeah, yeah. And I think sometimes I get smarter if I fail and if you always think about how smart you're going to get, you know, sometimes you've got to win. And sometimes those incremental ones, it's important that you win, because success tends to breed success. Those little wins add up over time, as a business that grows, a lot of it comes down to good decision making and good repeated decision making. I do think, generally you're not failing, you're learning. But unfortunately, if you're not applying those learnings to the next one, and you're repeating mistakes, then you are failing. You've got to be very honest about innovation. And so, whenever you apply the same techniques, or same methodology, the same approach to a failed project, if you've approached it the same way, five times and it's failed five times, there is a piece where you've got to consider, are you learning or are you just trying to use the same thing and hoping it finds the right tool? I mean, my favourite sort of phrase, businesses are like a toolbox when all you've got a hammer, everything's like a nail. If you've only got one tool in your toolbox, you're just going to approach stuff in the same way, which is smack it as hard as you can. But maybe it's a screw, maybe it's attack, maybe, you know, you can push it with yourself. Maybe it's about precision, in this case, not about power. And I think that's what those little micro innovations lead to is a larger toolbox, so long as you're willing to accept the fact that your way of doing it isn't always the best way.

24:34

Yeah, exactly right. I think that's where that multitude of ideas can feed into things because if something isn't working you have the people beside you, whether you're a leader or whether you're in any role within the organisation to basically say, let's go and approach this in a different way.

24:49

Yeah, it's hard because you have to be brave. Because as the Research Director at Techbuyer, people say, well you do research a lot like, you've published papers all over, you know what you're doing. As you know what you're doing now means that I can be a hard person to challenge if I'm not careful. Because if I sit in the meeting and say, this is how I think we should do it, if I set that anchor point, this is how I think we should do it, chances are people who are maybe either not feeling supported or who aren't familiar with this sort of open approach will sit down and think well, surely that person knows best so let's just do that. Whereas I would much rather someone who says, I'm not sure on that, I'm really not comfortable with that approach, have we thought about this, that and the other? That's the crucial part of culture of feeling supported enough and safe enough to say, I'm not sure, mate, I know, you're good at this but have you thought about x, and then been able to communicate whether I have or haven't, and admit the fact that if I haven't, great, let's put that in the mix. And let's see if we can do that. And let's see if that might work as well. And not be too overconfident that just because it's always worked means it will always work. And that's the culture thing, in a nutshell, it is feeling safe enough, secure enough and empowered enough to say that you're not sure, even to the CEO, or to a senior director. That's a hard culture to get right, because you don't want to challenge

every decision, but you do need a culture that feels safe enough to challenge if they think there's a better way.

26:17

It is, isn't it? It's that delicate balance between not having everything challenged, because there is some authority that has to be asserted sometimes, but it's the comfort to challenge and be challenged, where it's appropriate to do so. That's sort of the fine line there, isn't it?

26:33

That's it and it's understanding at what point challenge is needed. If you're challenged all the time, have we got a culture then that actually has low trust? If you're challenging every decision that's been made? We encourage people to challenge but how often? Are you being challenged on things that really don't require much input? Like at the point where we're confirming, and we're communicating stuff, there's times we think this isn't really an open discussion, this is the path we've chosen, we've done our research, we've done the best we're going to do, this is what we are doing. Sometimes you don't want every single decision challenging, because otherwise all we end up with is a lot of people talking about things and not a lot of getting done. So, it's so tricky to find that balance with an innovation-based framework and with businesses like this, when you're moving so fast you have to foster trust, security and safety, but at the same time, you have to know when to just put your head down and give something a try. Yeah, that's really hard.

27:32

Yeah, it is, isn't it, judging the two situations? And obviously, you talked about the importance of trust, and I suppose that's absolutely imperative for making the collective work, as we've discussed already. So, when it comes to the trust framework at Techbuyer, how do you go about really embedding that in the cultural side of things as well?

27:53

Yeah, the trickiest thing is building trust, because you have to do it through honesty, and you have to do it through transparency. For me, I like to make everything about what we do transparent so that no one feels anything's been hidden or protected or covered up. But you have to have that transparency, and you have to have that visibility so that people feel that they are trusted to see what's going on under the hood. There are elements that have to be obscured and that could be elements around HR, it can be elements around, people's health and wellbeing. So, there's elements that need to be just personal. But there's other elements that just need to be out in the open and that needs to be clear, and that needs to be communicated.

It's a balance between communication and over-communication, between trust and challenge. And setting that tone is something that evolves constantly in the business, and it starts from the very top. So, for me, it starts with Kevin; I know, I can always have an honest conversation with Kevin Towers (CEO). I can ring him on a Saturday, if I really need to say, I'm really not happy about something that's going on in the business. This might not be in my area and it might not be in my remit but I think this is a challenge, and to have your CEO, have that conversation with you and go 'tell me about this explain to me, let me know, why is it a problem? What's the issue?' And then feel comfortable enough to say, look, are you happy to go with that person discuss it. Rather than you know, it's not a matter of going behind people's backs, if you want to challenge something, that's cool, but you're going to need to go challenge them yourself, you're going to need to put your big boy pants on and have a difficult conversation sometimes. And I think that's where that comes from sometimes, the willingness to back yourself and to back your ideas, and everything you're thinking, but you have to also be able to have challenging conversations, and sometimes have them openly. Because that's the way to foster trust - if the cards are on the table and no one's cheating. And that starts with the senior leadership in the business having your best interests at heart and being very clear in how they're communicating your interest, their interest, and the business interests together as a collective. That's how you build trust, with that transparency and honesty.

30:05

And I suppose as well kind of handing the baton over to somebody there to, you know, go up to a senior leader and, you know, challenge a particular idea, I suppose that is sort of investing in their development even more, isn't it by giving them that platform to do that, because they are going to gain so much from that experience of, you know, going and backing themselves going and sharing this idea and going explaining why they might not agree with a particular idea or a particular thing?

30:30

Yeah, absolutely. And, you know, be willing to be challenged yourself. A lot of people we see this, I see this an awful lot is that people would rather just disappear than have a challenging conversation sometimes. They'd rather just not say something than run the risk of maybe having to say they don't think someone's idea is a good one and that can be a slow way to kill a business. You shouldn't go look; it'd be so much easier if I just didn't challenge this, and I just sat on my hands for this one. But then down the line, are you really pulling for that to succeed if you didn't believe it in the first place? I will not accept the 'I told you so' mentality. If you knew that was a bad idea but you didn't say anything? I think that makes you a coward because if you're willing to see something fail, rather than have a difficult conversation with somebody, then that's quite weak in my eyes, that way, but we need to make sure that people feel comfortable to have that challenge and that's the cultural piece. If it's a business where if you challenge, you get fired then that's very difficult to hang your hat on, I suppose. It's difficult to say, you must be honest but that's not really incentivizing honesty, is it? That's not encouraging truthfulness, and transparency, if everyone's terrified of saying the wrong thing. That's crucial.

31:49

Exactly, and that's something that leadership has got to get right, isn't it, creating that environment. Obviously, people don't have to worry about their next being on the line for it. But it just goes to show, doesn't it? How we spoken about this, that the challenge elements? It's so key for innovation, because sometimes it's the challenge that gets you back on the right track with a particular idea or with the entire course the business is going on?

32:12

Yeah, I mean, innovation is about changing the norm, right. So that it's a constant challenge mechanism.

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Why are we doing this? Can we do it better? What's wrong with? It doesn't matter? If it's good? Could it be great? How hard would it be great? Is

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it worth the investment in making it from good to great? Or is it really not worth it? Is incremental improvement good enough and transformational here? Do we need to be a little bit better? Or do we need to completely tear this down and start again, the whole piece of innovation is about not accepting the status quo and trying to do something better. And that that is that hard innovation is not accepting? You know what we hear what we know and what we see - that's the underpinning of innovation. Is that that creative mindset that says does this work? Is it the best? Then if someone says, yes, the best we can do then go, okay, that's fine, but could be better somewhere else? Or if the right is just the right way to apply it to the business, it might be the right tool, but is it in the right area? Is it being used by the right people? Have they been adequately trained? All these things come into this innovation mindset, you don't just look at something and go, that is a thing and that's how it works. True innovation involves seeing something and wanting to seek to understand it. So, I want to tear it to pieces, I want to look at different directions I want to go I want to stand up and look at it from the top, I want to go underground looking from the bottom I want to I want to get a handle on what this is, rather than just accept it for how I'm being presented it. And that's a really hard mindset to foster in people. And it takes everything we talked about. It takes a lot of senior direction to create that environment. And that's the hard bit for me that's what I think is the hardest thing.

33:52

Yeah, it is challenges and plenty of food for thought for anybody tuning in who may have their own business and like say just a reminder to viewers as well listening into this. I mean, if you are a business owner or the head of an organisation yourself who you know, would like to talk to us about your views on innovation or even any issue relating to your business. Of course, you can very much do that by applying to be on the programme via [leaders council.co.uk/applies](https://leaderscouncil.co.uk/applies). Rich, I have to say yeah, it's been fantastic having you on the programme today. Amazing talk about the depth of innovation that's there, the different types of innovation going on within Techbuyer and what sort of a positive culture can do for driving progress forward.

34:37

Thank you for your time, I really appreciate it. Good to talk to you

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It has been fantastic, Rich. And just lastly, yeah, before we finish up, given the fast changing nature of the tech industry, I suppose over the next 12 months, there are a lot of innovations behind the scenes at Techbuyer and I was not going to ask you for too much detail because I appreciate this can be quite sensitive but I imagine there's plenty on the horizon for yourselves to be to be working on in terms of progress and challenging the norms.

35:03

I understand that the number of projects we've got going right now is probably quite staggering for most organisations of our size. But it's those constant challenges that are most constant innovations that help us grow by up to 50% year on year for the last 17 years. So there's huge projects in place. Whether it's the work we're doing with interact and the business we're doing around producing significant reductions in carbon and costs and energy for customers. Whether it's the circular packaging solutions we're putting in place at the moment. Whether it's the research team creating peer reviewed articles around the impacts of hardware and the impacts of circular economy. There's, there's stuff going on in the business all the time. That's, that's truly incredible. And we only as a business sometimes only see a snapshot of each of them. So that communication piece in the business and communicating to the community outside of the tech space is quite important. But it's one of the hardest things because you don't want to be bragging about what you're doing but there's some stuff going on that's really world changing.

36:02

Yeah, absolutely. Yes. And I'm looking forward to seeing what comes out of that over the course of the next 12 months. I'm sure we all here at the Leaders Council, share that sentiment, Rich. Once again, thank you ever so much for taking the time to join us on the programme. And I think it'd be great to perhaps catch up at some point in the next year just to see how all of those projects might be coming along.

36:22

Yeah, sounds great. Thanks for having us.

36:23

It's been fantastic. And as I say to everybody tuning into the programme today, I do hope that you've thoroughly enjoyed the interview between myself and Rich Kenny from techbuyer. And just again, just to remind everybody, you can of course apply to be on the show yourself and that will be by [leaders council.co.uk/apply](https://leaderscouncil.co.uk/apply) if you'd like to talk about anything that we've raised on this programme, or even anything relating to your own business. Until next time, you've been listening to the Leaders Council podcast with Scott Challinor your host today. Please take care and goodbye.