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Innovation in Turbulent Times

Key ideas from the [Harvard Business Review](#) article By Darrell K. Rigby, Kara Gruver, James Allen

The Idea in Brief

Too few businesses have creative, right-brain types in leadership positions. That leaves innovation especially vulnerable to unwise cost cutting during hard times. Decisions about slashing versus retaining projects are made by analytic, left-brain leaders unsuited to evaluating innovation portfolios.

The fashion industry is worth emulating:

- Its businesses are "both-brain," run by pairs of powerful executives with complementary--creative and analytic--styles.
- They are structured to support left-brain-right-brain partnerships; hiring at all levels seeks a mix of cognitive styles.
- Innovation becomes a way of business life, not a marginal activity.

Both-brain pairs have been found elsewhere: Apple CEO Steve Jobs and COO Tim Cook; Procter & Gamble's chief of global design, Claudia Kotchka, and CEO A.G. Lafley; high-tech engineer Bill Hewlett and business leader David Packard. Such partnerships could help innovation thrive in your business.

The Idea in Practice

Traditional, left-brain-dominant business leaders typically can't tell the difference between good and bad innovations. Nor do they appreciate the skills needed to build and sustain a culture of creativity and constant reinvention. A leadership duo that unites right-brain creative skills and left-brain management skills offers the best way of ingraining innovation in a business, making it valued in all economic climates.

But there's more to the formula than throwing two people together. What makes for a superlative "both-brain" team? In many ways such a partnership is "truly like a marriage," says Gucci Group CEO Robert Polet. "It has ups and downs, and you have disagreement, [but] with a common purpose and within a common framework."

The authors have studied a number of creative-commercial partnerships, both successful and unsuccessful, and identified seven characteristics common to success:

Awareness of strengths and weaknesses. Partners realistically assess what they do well and where they need help. They often joke openly about their own shortcomings to help others see the value of partnership.

Complementary cognitive skills. Partners seek those who balance their own working styles and decision-making approaches. They learn to draw on each other's capabilities to the proper degree and at the right times.

Trust. Partners trust each other and are willing to put each other's interests ahead of their own.

Raw intelligence. Partners bring insightful observations and good judgment to the team's decisions.

Relevant knowledge. Partners bring experience that applies directly to the challenges they face.

Strong communication channels. Partners speak to each other frequently and directly. They often work in the same or adjacent spaces.

Motivation. Partners are highly committed to the success of the business and each other.

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