



SUPPORT SHAPES WHETHER INNOVATIVE IDEAS SURVIVE

RESEARCH SUMMARY

Innovation does not fail because of ideas alone. It often fails because of how others respond when those ideas encounter difficulty. The support innovators receive can determine whether ideas move forward or quietly stall. The key insight is not simply that support matters, but that **how it is delivered** shapes persistence, ownership, and progress.

Why it matters

- ▶ Organizations invest heavily in innovation, yet many promising **ideas lose momentum** before implementation.
- ▶ How colleagues and leaders **respond** in these moments shapes whether individuals persist or disengage.
- ▶ Misaligned support can **unintentionally undermine motivation**, ownership, and progress.

How we know

- ▶ Multi-method research examining **how innovators experience support** during the development of new ideas.
- ▶ Focus on moments when innovation efforts encounter **obstacles or resistance**.
- ▶ Analysis of how different forms of **interpersonal engagement** influence persistence and idea advancement.

What researchers found

- ▶ The effectiveness of support depends on its **alignment** with the innovator's needs in the moment.
- ▶ **Well-calibrated** support helps individuals persist, adapt, and refine their ideas.
- ▶ A key mechanism is **interpersonal holding**: how others engage with innovators during difficulty.
- ▶ The most effective support **balances** guidance with autonomy, preserving **ownership** while enabling forward movement.

What this means

- ▶ Innovation is a **relational process**.
- ▶ Leaders play a critical role in shaping how setbacks are **experienced and interpreted**.
- ▶ **Everyday interactions** can determine whether ideas gain traction or quietly disappear.

Now what?

To better support innovation in practice, we suggest:

- Leaders should focus on how they engage in moments of difficulty, not just whether they engage.
- Create environments where setbacks are treated as part of the process.
- Develop leadership capability around reading context and responding with empathy, judgment, and restraint.

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