

Symphonic Improvisation: CREATING A CULTURE OF INNOVATION COMPETENCY

INNOVATORS' ROUNDTABLE SUMMARY REPORT

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Like a finely tuned symphony orchestra, a high-performing company can execute prescribed processes with clarity, consistency and seamless efficiency. Well-practiced techniques that enable superb performances do not, however, lend themselves easily to improvisation, or “riffing,” such as you’d find among musicians in a jazz combo. And yet, extemporaneous, jazz-like flexibility is precisely what many big companies must master in order to innovate and remain competitive.

This challenge — simultaneously embracing orchestral excellence and jazz-inspired dynamism — was the main theme of the spring 2012 Innovators’ Roundtable, a periodic conversation among senior leaders from some of the world’s largest and most innovative firms. The Roundtable, an initiative of Darden’s Batten Institute for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, included executives from **Corning, Siemens, Northrop Grumman, MeadWestvaco** and **CSC**. During a daylong discussion at the University of Virginia, members debated issues related to workforce agility, strategies for managing global research and development, and the challenges of remaining innovative in a sluggish economy. The following briefing is a summary of the day’s conversations, highlighting the main themes, questions and conclusions of Roundtable members.