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Impact of LEGO's Corporate Culture on Innovation

Research question: *How does LEGO'S corporate culture influence its consistent growth in the field of innovation?*

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Introduction and background information

The company LEGO is a Danish toy production company. Originated in Denmark and particularly famous for its colorful plastic interlocking bricks, they've now established themselves as a household name. With its incredibly simple process and no requirement for glue or gum, Lego was the pioneer of feasible, creative toys and have been living up to their name till date.

My research question is "How does Lego's corporate culture influence its consistent growth in the field of innovation?". Being a person who struggles with generating creative ideas, I have always been inspired by innovation. Lego's corporate culture seemed intriguing. Basing a business purely on creative outlooks seems dicey. The fact that LEGO, one of the most reputable brands used solely creativity and innovation; the facets usually deemed to be risky, to fuel their business further and dominate the market intrigued me. Hence this was worthy of research.

Its corporate culture plays an integral role in the performance, being the link between the workforce and the hierarchy. It is essential to gauge how the different stakeholders are influenced and molded by the corporate culture to maximize success. The research will be looking into the different aspects of their culture which enable the employees to continue the growth of LEGO in the field of innovation and engage in thinking differently which propels the company further into prosperity.

Methodology

The research conducted will be via secondary research inclusive of company websites, reports and articles. Websites provide insight on the employee's perspective on the experience with the company's corporate culture. Additionally, optimized are old research papers and case studies on the LEGO brand

giving a deeper understanding on its functioning. Other components of the research include verified blogs and interviews. Given the first person perspective, there is an inevitable bias in the information, however the range of sources provide various inputs on the matter at hand.+

Theoretical Framework

Leadership is analyzed as a tool, considering the different aspects establishing the foundation of it. Additionally, McClelland's theory is optimized to gauge the motivation of the Lego workforce along with the third tool of corporate culture.

Figure 1.1: https://www.statista.com/statistics/292305/lego-group-net-profit/[1]

The significance of innovation in Lego

Latching itself onto the target market since the 1960's LEGO has entrenched its name as one of the most popular toy brands. Transitioning from wooden toys to plastic blocks and mini-figures was a challenge filled ordeal, they also faced an unprofitable run in the late 70's due to improper market research, and mis-coordination in the creative complex. Considering 2004 hit them with a [2]26% drop in sales, tipping them over the verge of bankruptcy, LEGO has had a fair share of hiccups in the market. Their revival strategy focused on interacting heavily with the customer base in order to generate feedback on a smaller scale before investing further and bringing about fresh collaborative ideas. One of the very reasons LEGO has recovered from such vile backlashes is its prime focus fixed on this kind of open innovation. Open innovation refers to the organization focusing on external sources of ideas and promoting a flexible mindset.

This methodology paid off with the release of LEGO architecture, primarily the New York city skyline which boosted sales by 290 million euros in 2016. The LEGO friends set also popularized the brand amongst the female audience along with increasing sales by 290 million euros again in 2018.

This brand reigned the market with working on the most simple and practical ideas which hadn't been put to use yet. The reason the Lego bricks caught on so early is due to the low skill level required, and its ability to form and deform easily This made it different from the usual construction kits sold. This USP enabled it to bring about the imagination across age groups globally and appeal to the various different areas of exploration such as research, psychological practices, therapy etc. LEGO has been able to contribute with new inventions due to its flexible and adaptable cultural quotient which boosts

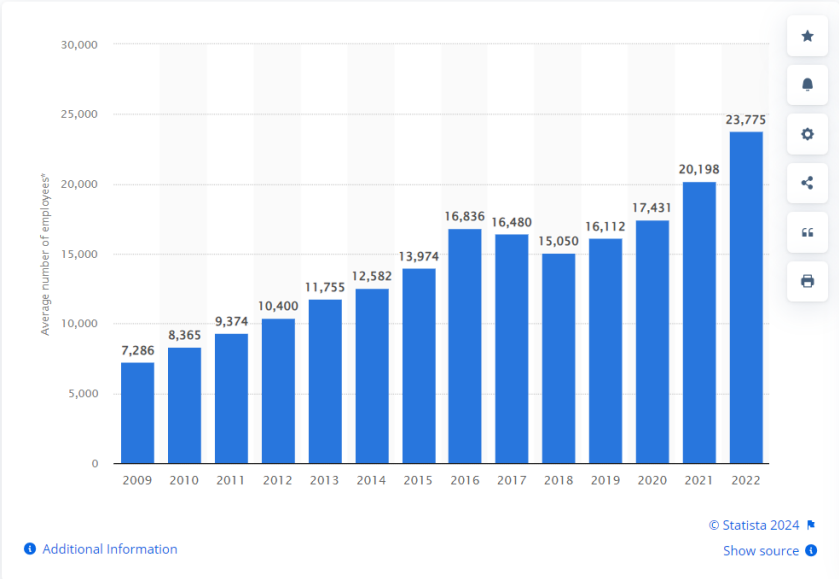
[1] Figure 1.1: https://www.statista.com/statistics/292305/lego-group-net-profit/

[2] https://www.lego.com/cdn/cs/aboutus/assets/blt07abb4b8a3da3f39/Annual_Report_2004_ENG.pdf

creative [3] thinking and enables employees to explore their potential fully. This is achieved by one facet of their corporate culture; organized workforce planning.

Lego's workforce planning

LEGO looks for the streaks of curiosity, creativity and an outgoing personality in their potential employees. The process of work is based on these 3 aspects which branch out to cover a range of other criteria a LEGO employee has to fit. Having an unquenchable thirst for exploration fuels their risk-taking ability in the employee. This is crucial in order to conduct experimentation as far as product plans are concerned which eventually leads to successful ideas. As stated by Thomas Moller Jeppesen, the HR director of the Lego group in Denmark; "Curiosity, play and experimentation are key to our culture when it comes to innovation and trying new and different things, and that is part of that uniqueness in the LEGO Group." [4]These characteristics are also essential to form an adaptable workforce, one which can be flexible and incorporate change.



[5]***Figure 1.2:*** *https://www.statista.com/statistics/292314/number-of-employees-of-the-lego-group-worldwide/*

With the constant different changes in the industry, creating a team which will withstand the hurdles in the future requires the correct combination of the mentioned caliber. LEGO focuses on those who can offer productivity with a creative outlook, as well have their share of fun and exploration to enhance potential for new innovations, regardless of the change in circumstances. The mission [6]statement "Inspire and develop the builders for tomorrow" is fulfilled by numerous dedicated professionals with unorthodox thinking. With innovation being the key aspect upon which the company establishes itself, the employment process is designed to cater to business-specific needs.

[3] *Open innovation: https://digital.hbs.edu/platform-rctom/submission/everything-is-awesome-product-innovation-at-lego/*

[4] *Jeppesen's quote:https://www.insidehr.com.au/4-ingredients-lego-employee-experience/*

[5] *Fig 1.2: https://www.statista.com/statistics/292314/number-of-employees-of-the-lego-group-worldwide/*

[6] *Mission statement: https://mission-statement.com/lego /*

The recruitment process

Interviews focus on questions which give prime importance to the employee as an individual, and their adaptability in the company and they take about 2 weeks to form a decision. After analyzing 72 questions, I derived the aspects encountered in the questions asked are-[7]

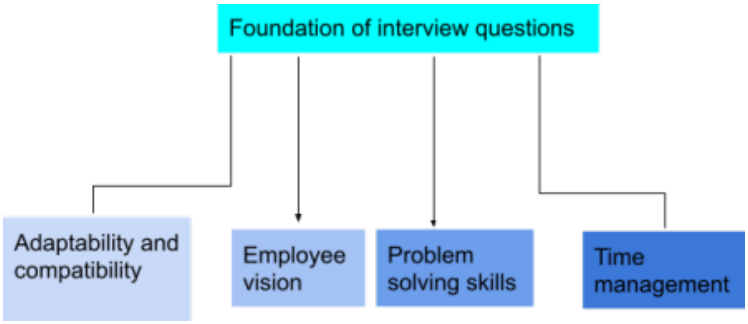


Figure 1.3

Adaptability and compatibility

Lego look at the cultural quotient of the employee. It is essential to make sure the worker's ethic compliments the business. This company is rooted strongly in team-work and people management hence checking their compatibility via putting the employee's personality, attributes and caliber in question is part of the interview. The amount of time they will take to adjust and make significant contributions to the business is also looked upon. This enables the employees to gauge within their capabilities and bring forth flexibility. Innovation can only be achieved when workers have effective communication, for which adaptability and compatibility is necessary.

Employee vision

Lego centralizes the importance of the employees having a vision for themselves and the company. For innovation to grow at its [8]finest employees have to have targets and direction in their endeavors. Micromanaging is not part of Lego's corporate culture hence gaining knowledge about the potential worker's perspective is essential.

Problem solving skills

A considerable number of questions are based on tackling work-related conflicts and creative blocks. This gives the company an idea on consistency, stealth and resilience. Lego engages heavily in autonomy hence the workers having adequate knowledge to overcome hurdles is important for product innovation and maintaining regularity.

[9]Time management

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[7] *Time taken to form a decision:* https://www.google.com/search?q=how+long+does+lego+recruitmentprocess+take&ei=ye6uYcXQHJKE4t4Pzvyh4AU&ved=0ahUKEwiF2eaY-ND0AhUSgtgFHU5-CFwQ4dUDCA8&uact=5&oq=how+long+does+lego+recruitmentprocess+take&gs_lcp=Cgdnd3Mtd2l6EAMyCAghEBYQHRAeMggIIRAWEB0QHjIICCEQFhAdEB46BAgAEEM6BAguEEM6BQgAEJECOggILhCxAxCDAToICAAQgAQQsQM6EQguEIAEELEDEIMBEMcBEKMCOgUIABCABDoHCC4QsQMQQzoFCC4QgAQ6BQgAELEDOgQIABANOgcIIRAKEKABOgUIIRCgATocECCEQFToGCCEQDRAVOgQIIRAKSgQIQRgAULEGWIy0GmDOthpoBXACeAKAAfoFiAGbQ5IBDjAuMzYuOC4wLjEuMC4xmAEAoAEBsAEAwAEB&sclient=gws-wiz

[8] *Foundation of interview questions:* https://www.globalguideline.com/interview_questions/Questions.php?sc=LEGO&id=51653

[9] *Beliefs and values:* https://inside.6q.io/company-culture-example-lego/

This in order to get an idea on the work ethic of the employee. Innovation is a qualitative concept, and the prime focus has to be managed carefully to bring in profitable results. Ideas and concepts have to be brought forth to do so. Effective time management gives the employees sufficient time and space to be creative.
Like Lego's workforce planning and recruitment process, much of their culture is established upon the very strong beliefs and value systems. This provides the business with a sense of purpose and direction.

Beliefs and value systems[10]

Its motive revolves around inspiring and developing children to think creatively, enabling the release of their potential in order to shape their future. Built on the Danish values of hard-work, humility, and teamwork its heritage remains a rudimentary element in their corporate culture despite the massive global recognition gained today. Their core values of creativity, imagination, fun learning, quality care is diligently implemented in their endeavors. Former executive CEO of the company Jorgen Vig Knudstorp suggested that having a strong culture would mean to have an instinctive sense on how to solve problems instead of referring to a generalized rule book/ manual. This perspective along with the openness in the workplace and dedication towards core values influences the company to have a transformational leadership style, which fuels innovation further given its characteristics.

Leading by innovation for innovation

Transformational leadership causes a change in the employees and social systems. It encourages and inspires the workers to innovate and make changes which will enable the firm to grow and achieve success. San's micromanaging, the people are made to feel trusted and accountable for making important decisions and navigate their way through hurdles.

Lego's aim is to have the employee pursue the best possible performance, and constant supervision barricades that. Being supportive and listening to their ideas and viewpoints increases the opportunities and enhances the outlook towards situations. Interpreting the Danish expression of "managing at eye level" there is open two-way communication and equality when it comes to importance. They intend to exemplify the ethics and moral standards, by having a clear vision of values. This allows feasiblementorship while simultaneously enabling them to take ownership of their choices. Transformational[11] leadership is executed in LEGO by ensuring that the employees follow the **4 pillars of innovation** crafted for the company.

[10] *Leadership style: https://hbr.org/2009/01/lego-ceo-jorgen-vig-knudstorp-on-leading-through-survival-and-growth*

[11] *4 Pillars of innovation: https://inside.6q.io/company-culture-example-lego/*

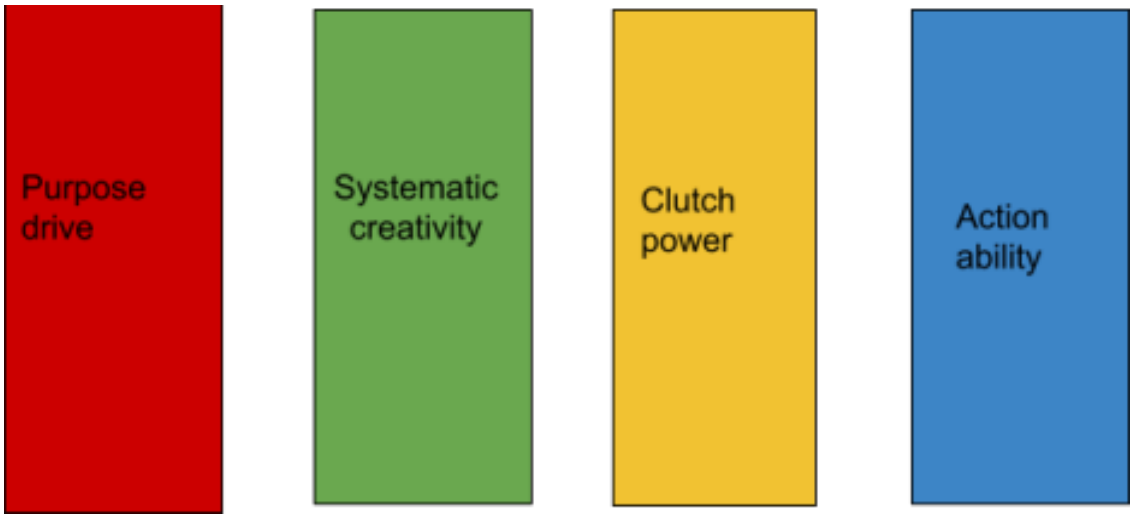

Figure 1.4: *Pillars of innovation*

1) Purpose drive

Leaders try to keep the workers informed of their ulterior motives, and give a shared sense of commitment and pride in fulfilling their mission. These include "striving to get your best everyday", "focus on quality" and "taking responsibility for doing the right thing for children, protecting and defending the reputation and ultimate purpose of the brand." Once the employees understand their own role and importance, they can contribute to the essence of the brand with the pinnacle of corporate purpose. Once this is achieved, they engage further in trying to think out of the box and innovate.

2) Systematic creativity

Transformational leadership inspires workers to collate past experiences and imagination to find the most appropriate solutions. This includes learning, developing, experimenting and continuous improvement in everyday problem solving. Many decisions and conclusions have been made when employees collaborate by building lego towers together! These unique methodologies enable the employee to have an openness to change, be flexible and have the ability to take on difficult challenges. Striving to unlock creativity, thinking and imagination gives more opportunity for the breakthrough of innovative ideas. The time dependency to come up with fresh outlooks also decreases because of this system.

3) Clutch power

This refers to the sense of belonging created amongst the employees because of transformational leadership. Making the workforce feel like part of a big family globally, socializing and active association along with the comfort of being part of a flat hierarchy makes the workplace free. It focuses on building relationships that are able to sustain changes and flexibility. The employees are taught to understand the importance of healthy conflict resolution without creating much tension, the motto being "LEGO before ego". This also shows that LEGO genuinely cares for its workforce beyond their productive contribution for the brand. The legitimate interest in the well-being of the workforce binds them to work harder, and be loyal to the mission and vision of the company.

4) Action ability

Refers to the factor of accountability and meeting deadlines. Creativity and innovation is very subjective and hence it can be extremely uncertain to depend on. This element of leadership focuses on employees taking responsibility, delivering promises and being enthusiastic with a "can do" attitude. They're directed to take initiatives, and influence practicality into their work. Transformational leadership does not micromanage, however cannot be perceived to be laid back either. "Action

ability" makes sure LEGO's freedom in the workspace is not abused, while simultaneously giving a recognized platform to build on inventions

However transformational leadership fails to work at times due to multiple reasons. Motivation is assumed to be at peak levels at all times given the enthusiastic approach expected from the employees. It is also extremely risky given the liberty restored in the workforce. Transformational leadership proceeds to be unrealistic at times given the delusional boundaries set. Hence it is important to be in control and implement this leadership style following the 4 pillars

The culture's approach on motivation

The spirit of passion and interest that goes into the products is also a major part of the high-performance culture. Lego, a company about 88 years old, is still winning awards and popularizing amongst the audience, rising to sustain the name of one of the most popular brands. The consistency of the workforce is majorly influenced by the motivation in the corporate culture. Incurring the score of 4.2/ 5 stars for culture on a review based off of the feedback of 415 Lego employees, it is safe to say that the workers are inspired and dedicated to the people culture conducted. To extend the research further Mcleland's theory in order to analyze the methodologies of motivation utilized.

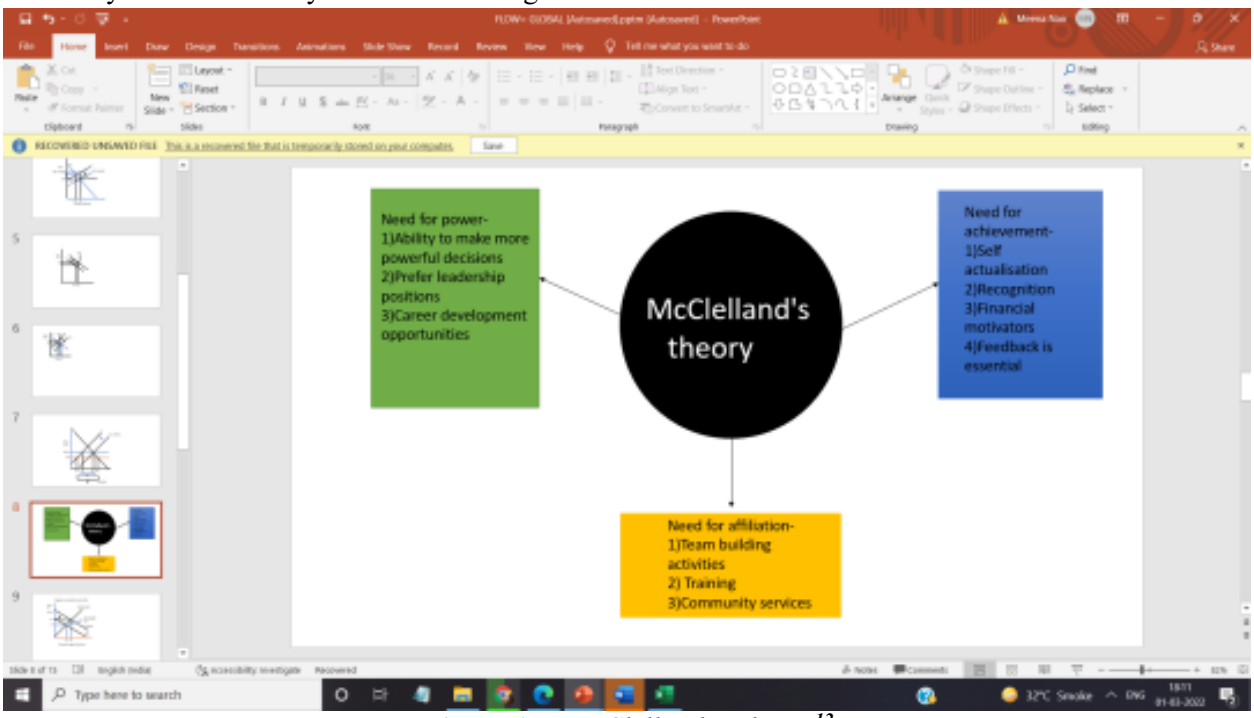

Figure 1.5: *McClelland's Theory*[12]

[13]**Need for achievement:** LEGO employees are trained to be self-motivated and inculcate the drive to work harder and better in order to bring more success to the organization. The employees do not work towards just the benefit of the company, but also gain a sense of satisfaction and earn recognition for their efforts. Constant feedback for employees with this nature is ensured in order to keep the flame of motivation alive with a sense of control and direction.

[12] https://www.lego.com/cdn/cs/aboutus/assets/blt19f572ab26a9af07/Responsibility-Report-2016.pdf

[13] https://www.lego.com/cdn/cs/sustainability/assets/blt123637cf697b8687/1023787_LEGO_Responsible_Business_Principles_130618_FINAL.pdf

Need for power: Being a flat hierarchy, there is not much potential for a promotion, transformational leadership anchoring the corporate culture, the employees with a need for power are handled with imposing the ability to make more influential decisions given their caliber. Introducing career development options and opportunities for further horizontal growth given the culture's wide span of control also works. However, it is essential for Lego to give designated positions and have more motivators as far as power is concerned. Currently Lego has scope for improvement in this facet. This will give more credibility to authoritative figures in the business and also increase the inclination workers have towards achieving more influence, directly affecting productivity in a good way. Need for power will also satisfy esteem needs from Maslow's hierarchy hence benefiting the firm for the better.

Need for affiliation

There are various team building activities which influence inventions and build employee relations. This satisfies the social needs of the workforce. Collaborative sessions emphasized on leadership dynamics, group communications, cognitive skills, conflict cooperation all involve the building of corporate culture. This gives the employee a sense of belonging and involvement, boosting their morale to work for something greater than intrinsic motives. LEGO also indulges in community outreach [14]programs that enables engagement between the consumers and employees, these include local school visits, events, sustainability workshops as part of the job. Workers can gain qualification to facilitate [15]these events in local communities and bring about development, along with learning new information on the market to give direction to their innovative ideas.

Experience is extremely important to the LEGO group. They strive to create an engaging, empowering atmosphere and make sure that the staff at all levels of the organization know their opinions are valued. This credible validation encourages employees to take more risks and come up with absurd, genius ideas which might be the next breakthrough. Lego ensures to get feedback with an employee survey to know more about employee motivation, satisfaction and the difficulties faced.

Showing genuine concern towards employee feedback creates a better relationship between the company and the workforce. In addition, the concept of LEGO's "people promise" expands the boundaries of the motivation in the corporate further. The "people's promise" is a crucial part of the brand's framework [16]which gives established ground to build the foundation of the strategies and objectives. This prioritizes employees. If they undergo an experience which goes against the people's promise it has to be communicated to the appropriate authority. The role of it is to facilitate execution of business strategies and build the company's long-term health, it is the reason why employees should choose to commit the best, most productive version of themselves for the benefit of LEGO.

Along with the leadership style, motivation and workforce planning, LEGO also initiates inspiration for innovation by creating a lively and inviting environmental design. As stated by Jeppesen, "the key to releasing employee creativity is with the creation of a workplace with a good atmosphere."

Contribution of the environment's aesthetic towards innovation

[14] https://www.lego.com/en-sg/sustainability/children/local-community-engagement/

[15] https://sustainablebrands.com/read/product-service-design-innovation/lego-group-investing50m-in-r-d-for-sustainable-materials

[16] *People's promise:* https://www.insidehr.com.au/4-ingredients-lego-employee-experience/

In the company's HQ, every cubicle has a sculpture that represents the accommodater's personality. [17]LEGO has optimized their own products to create 2 feet tall bright pencil or paper clip holders. There are also table tennis and foosball tables, flat screen televisions with wii game controls, volleyball and basketball courts outside. The various options for recreation break the monotony of work, increased movement increases brain activity, facilitating a fresh flow of creative ideas.

Motivational quotes are painted across the wall on a lenticular wall installation, created from miniscule 1*1[18]

Figure 1.6

They've been constructed with great intelligence, hence when viewed from one direction it spells out the original motto of LEGO's founder Ole kirk Christiansen, stating "only the best is good enough.". However, when read from the other side it reveals the company's mission statement "inspire and develop the builders of tomorrow." The innovative thought put into this creation sets an example for the workers to view situations with a different outlook. Their pillars, stairs and enormous pieces of furniture are made to look like it's actually constructed by gigantic Lego bricks, with soft installations made out of their very own product. The office is also designed in order to increase the number of collaborative experiences the employees have together. The work zones are flexible, and adapted for certain tasks. A particular designation of a desk or a cabin is not relevant and the concept of the higher authority having different cabins doesn't exist.

LEGO focuses on giving employees the freedom of management and hence follows activity-based working; thus, each area is designed in order to suit the employee's choice of work. Individuals who prefer autonomy and a quiet atmosphere have soundproofed rooms, along with casual spaces for meetings. Presentations take place in a more formally furnitured room, with coffee machines installed it can be an appropriate area for employees to catch up. However, the fluid nature of the working spaces; not having a designated desk can also act as a source of demotivation. Workers may want a permanent,

familiar, personalized space to completely engross themselves to gain inspiration, unable to adapt to the temporary areas. Moving on, the architecture is lively, positive and motivating. With stuff already made of lego in the very workspace, it gives employees a new environment to immerse themselves in and get inspiration from. This helps innovation to flow freely in the workspace.

Research and Development

Lego has optimized its resourceful culture to bring innovation to its peak by opening up new methods to gain ideas. To keep improving and gain fresh insight, LEGO created a crowd-sourcing platform where its target market could give in their inputs and ideas about new products. This open innovation has led to significant successes, and their customer central culture has paid off when it comes to consumer relationship and satisfaction. The crowd sourcing platform allows fans to design their

[17] *Environmental aesthetic: https://theteam.co.uk/blog/workplace-design-lego-instructions-to-the-perfect-working-environment/-lego-instructions-to-the-perfect-working-environment/*

[18] *People's promise: https://www.insidehr.com.au/4-ingredients-lego-employee-experience/*

own sets, gather [19]support from other fans (10,000 votes is the cut off) and eventually get their designed set produced officially by LEGO as one of their standard lines. Successful examples of this open innovation are -2013, In Back to the Future's DeLorean set; proposed by Masashi Togami and Sakuretsu, sold for $50. [20]Masashi received 1% of Lego's worldwide profits. This [21]401-piece set includes a brick version of the highly modifiedDeLorean seen zipping around in the movie trilogy, and it's full of little details that satisfy Lego enthusiasts.

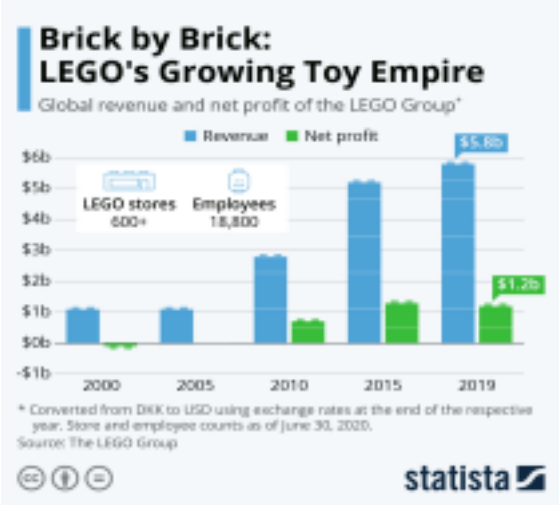

Figure 1.7

Another prominent example is the ghostbusters ectomobile which became extremely popular. Launched in 2014, it helped the Lego sales significantly, selling at $199.9. Lego architecture which was launched in 2008 broadens their customer range from just kids to adults, was also pitched by a Chicago architect who believed Lego can be used as potential miniature modeling for bigger projects. Although this was resisted at first, the open-minded Norwegian Lego executive saw promise in the idea and found it worthy to be invested in. The product range has been reviewed favorably by many commentators. All of these inventions were created in the range of 2010-2015, open innovation helped increase the revenues and net profit as the graph suggests.[22]

Over 13000 projects have been submitted via crowdsourcing and the open innovation has enabled Lego [23]to have impressive scores on brand strength index, corporate reputation, familiarity, loyalty, promotion, and huge profits of over $1.34 billion profits in 2015.

Low risk experimentation culture

Given Lego's flexible culture, experimentation and risk taking is important to the business. Empowering [24]the employees to make decisions has always been an ordeal, however this temperament can always end up being costly. Lego needed to find a cost effective yet empowering balance between innovation and resources hence the Lego future lab was created.

[19] *19* https://chaordix.com/resources/when-community-clicks-lego-ideas-story

[20] https://www.thebrickfan.com/lego-cuusoo-back-to-the-future-delorean-time-machine-achieved/

[21] https://digital.hbs.edu/platform-digit/submission/building-together-how-lego-leverages-crowdsourcing-to-sustain-both-innovation-and-brand-love/

[22] https://crowdsourcingweek.com/blog/lego-success-through-crowdsourcing/

[23] https://www.ideaconnection.com/open-innovation-success/Lego-Success-Built-on-Open-Innovation-00258.html

[24] https://theleadershipnetwork.com/article/lego-sustainable-innovation

Formed in 2012, by merging the new business group [25]and concept lab departments, it is responsible for the innovation agenda of the company.

The lean startup: Lego has adapted this approach to experiment and test their ideas with safety measures, [26]without blowing up the brand. For instance, LEGO universe, an online game that was similar to world of warcraft, was stopped following a year of its launch. Launched in 2012 because a satisfactory revenue model wasn't created. The experiment did not injure Lego's reputation, instead providing various different insights and learnings to establish the company on digital platforms. Another example would be another game Lego launched in 2015, Lego portal racers ; in partnership with Metaio, an augmented [27]reality company. The game uses an Intel RealSense camera and depth technology to allow users to play without their hands, using head movements to steer left or right instead. This remains a learning experience for lego to experiment with different technologies. The lego future lab has enabled employee empowerment by encouraging and exploring new avenues, with a saturated risk level.

The following are the learnings I derived from the Lego future lab-

●	Innovation without direction is risky
●	To experiment and test in safe ways, start with small objects, budget, experiment and prove with learning.
●	Cater to open innovation and take customer feedback[28]

● The innovation culture should give people freedom to be creative and the direction and focus to deliver productive innovation.

[25] https://www.google.com/search?q=lego+future+lab+formation&oq=lego+future+lab+formation&aqs=chrome..69i57.1717j0j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8

[26] https://michaelfearne.com/lego-future-lab-the-rebels-of-innovation-at-lego/

[27] https://www.eurobricks.com/forum/index.php?/forums/topic/104513-lego-portal-racers/

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Conclusion

Lego has injected innovation thoroughly into their corporate culture. Ranging right from its values and beliefs, open innovation is given primary importance for further growth. As analyzed above, this propels them further to achieve success. Lego has utilized the areas of workforce planning, leadership, motivation, environmental aesthetic and research and development to implement innovative ideas and maintain strong culture. The entire atmosphere in which a Lego employee operates has been designed to influence peak, innovative performance.

Given the multiple recreational activities and flexible work patterns the employees are given a fair degree of autonomy. This combined with accountability and responsibility prepares the workers to have a creative outlook within a realistic time frame, boosting their inventive thinking. This essay has the potential to be gauged into considering the unlisted statistics which influence the innovation as well.

Consistency is achieved by continuously inspiring and motivating the workforce, establishing the purpose of the brand beyond intrinsic motives. The culture forms a family within the workspace, molding everyone to contribute towards the vision of the brand, which is consistent growth in the field of innovation.

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