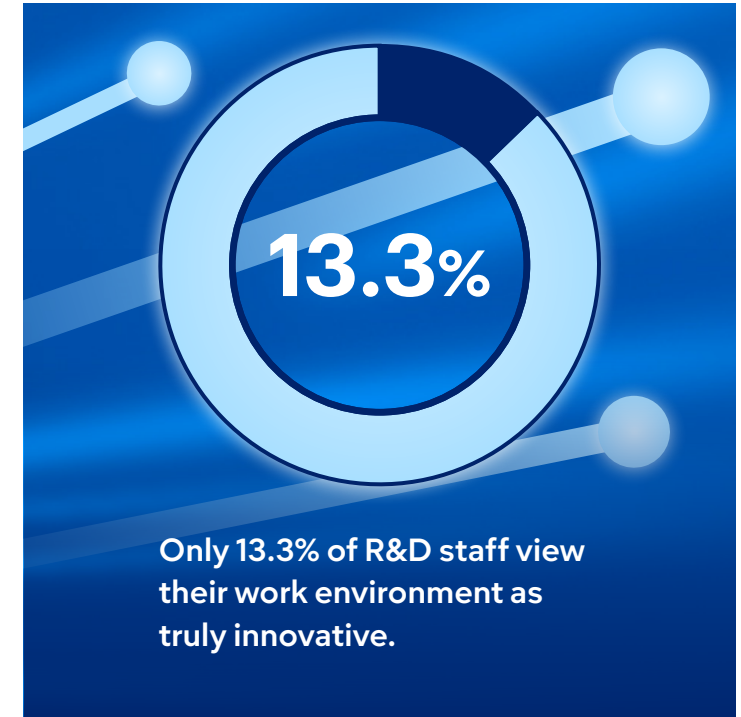
The background is a dark blue gradient with several white lines and dots. The lines are of varying lengths and orientations, some pointing upwards and to the right, others downwards and to the right. The dots are also white and appear to be at the end of the lines. The overall effect is a sense of movement and direction.

Increase the Credibility  
of R&D Culture of  
Innovation Efforts

R&D leaders often emphasize innovation as a top priority, yet fail to support these claims with credible actions. As a result, few R&D staff perceive their organizations as truly innovative. The disconnect between leaders' messages and the reality experienced by R&D staff erodes employee engagement, stifles creativity, and increases turnover, especially as automation and generative AI shift organizational priorities away from human-centric capabilities.

**This report outlines actions R&D leaders can take to cultivate a credible culture of innovation within their teams that boosts both employee engagement and R&D output.**



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## Move beyond “hearing” innovation

To build a strong R&D culture of innovation, leaders must ensure their teams consistently hear, see, and feel the organization’s authentic commitment to innovation.

Too often, leaders rely on messaging (“hear”) without meaningful action (see Figure 1). This approach is especially insufficient in today’s work environment, characterized by declining trust in organizations and corporate leadership and a growing dependence on GenAI tools to maximize individual productivity. Past Gartner insights and client feedback indicate that these trends collectively erode employee engagement, discretionary effort, collaboration and, ironically, productivity, while fueling anxiety and skepticism.

Given this context, merely signaling support for innovation is less effective than ever. R&D leaders must instead demonstrate a visible commitment to innovation (“see”) and foster a consistent environment where staff experience innovation as a core organizational priority (“feel”). This approach is crucial for rebuilding trust, enhancing engagement and sustaining a credible R&D culture of innovation.

Figure 1: Gartner culture of innovation model



Source: Gartner

## “See” innovation

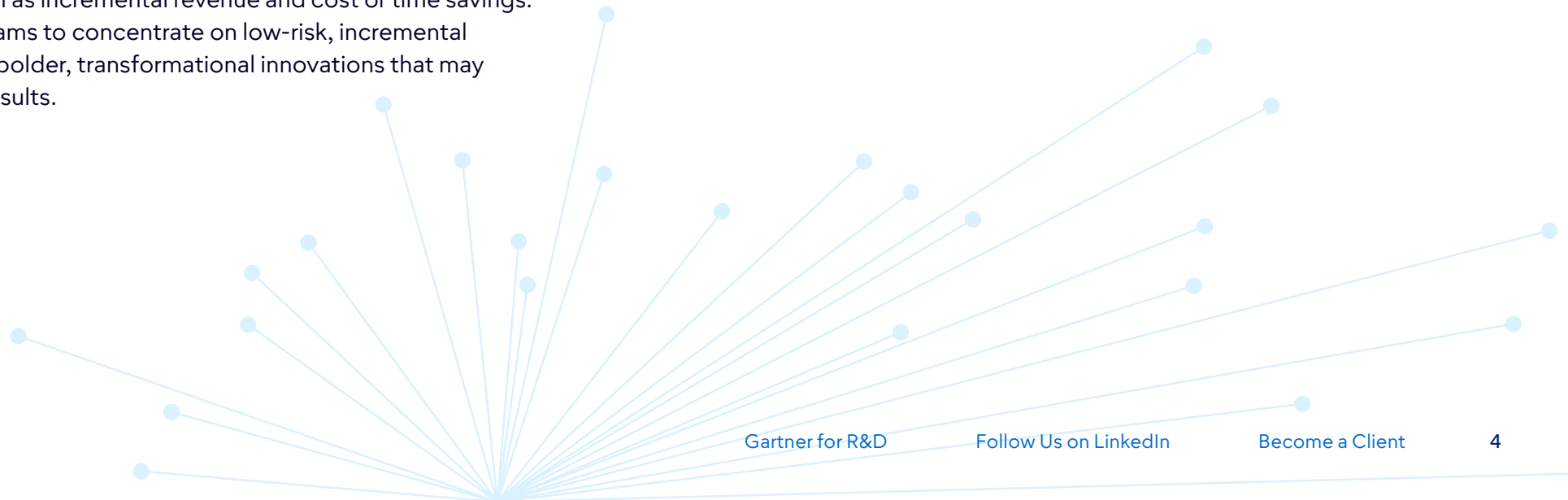
Ensure R&D employees see leaders actively prioritizing and investing in innovation initiatives.

### Current state

While organizations routinely feature innovation as a central pillar in their R&D strategies — often encapsulated in taglines like “we drive growth through innovation” — these statements quickly lose credibility when they remain superficial slogans, unsubstantiated by concrete actions or targeted investments that truly prioritize innovation.

In practice, organizations actively undermine their commitment to innovation by deprioritizing hard-to-quantify innovative projects in favor of initiatives with easily measurable outcomes, such as incremental revenue and cost or time savings. This naturally encourages R&D teams to concentrate on low-risk, incremental investments rather than pursuing bolder, transformational innovations that may not yield immediate or tangible results.

This dynamic will likely intensify with the rise of GenAI capabilities, as organizations and leaders face increasing pressure to keep pace with competitors and rapidly evolving technologies. As the demand for quick wins escalates, leaders may further prioritize short-term, incremental investments and pass this urgency on to their teams. This tendency risks further deprioritizing innovation initiatives, thereby deepening employee skepticism toward corporate messages that promote innovation.



## “See” innovation

### Recommended approach

Rather than relying on rhetoric, demonstrate the organization’s genuine commitment to innovation by ensuring that R&D staff see leaders consistently selecting and allocating resources to transformational innovation opportunities. This alignment between actions and stated strategic objectives is essential for reinforcing organizational credibility and trust among staff.

When planning the R&D portfolio:

1. **Dedicate** a portion of resources (e.g., money and time) to supporting ambitious, high-impact innovation initiatives.
2. **Next, safeguard** these resources from being reallocated or deprioritized, especially when leaders face off-cycle pressures to redirect R&D’s focus away from longer-term and riskier projects.
3. **Finally, revise** the organization’s evaluation and selection processes to ensure that innovative ideas with less predictable outcomes receive fair, or even preferential, consideration for investment.

This approach fosters an R&D culture where innovation is actively encouraged, supported and sustained.

## “Feel” innovation

Ensure R&D employees feel that innovation is supported in the R&D community.

### Current state

Organizations commonly demonstrate their openness to innovation through sporadic and inconsistent events, such as ideation contests and hackathons. However, these initiatives typically prioritize the initial collection of ideas rather than the longer-term, collaborative development of innovative concepts. Consequently, such events rarely foster a genuine sense of ongoing leadership support or peer-driven momentum for innovation, and they do little to embed innovation as a core element of R&D’s culture.

The issue is exacerbated when organizations fail to act on the ideas generated. Employees perceive these initiatives as opaque “black box” processes, where ideas are submitted but seldom acknowledged, developed or implemented. The absence of transparent follow-up or feedback erodes employee trust and diminishes the perceived value of participation, ultimately stifling engagement and enthusiasm for future innovation efforts.

The increasing adoption of GenAI tools presents an additional layer of complexity. While these technologies excel at automating incremental tasks and supporting technical skill sets, they often deprioritize human-centric capabilities such as creativity, ideation and collaboration. As organizations pivot toward technological solutions, there is a risk of marginalizing the soft skills and collaborative behaviors that underpin transformational innovation, further weakening R&D’s culture of innovation.

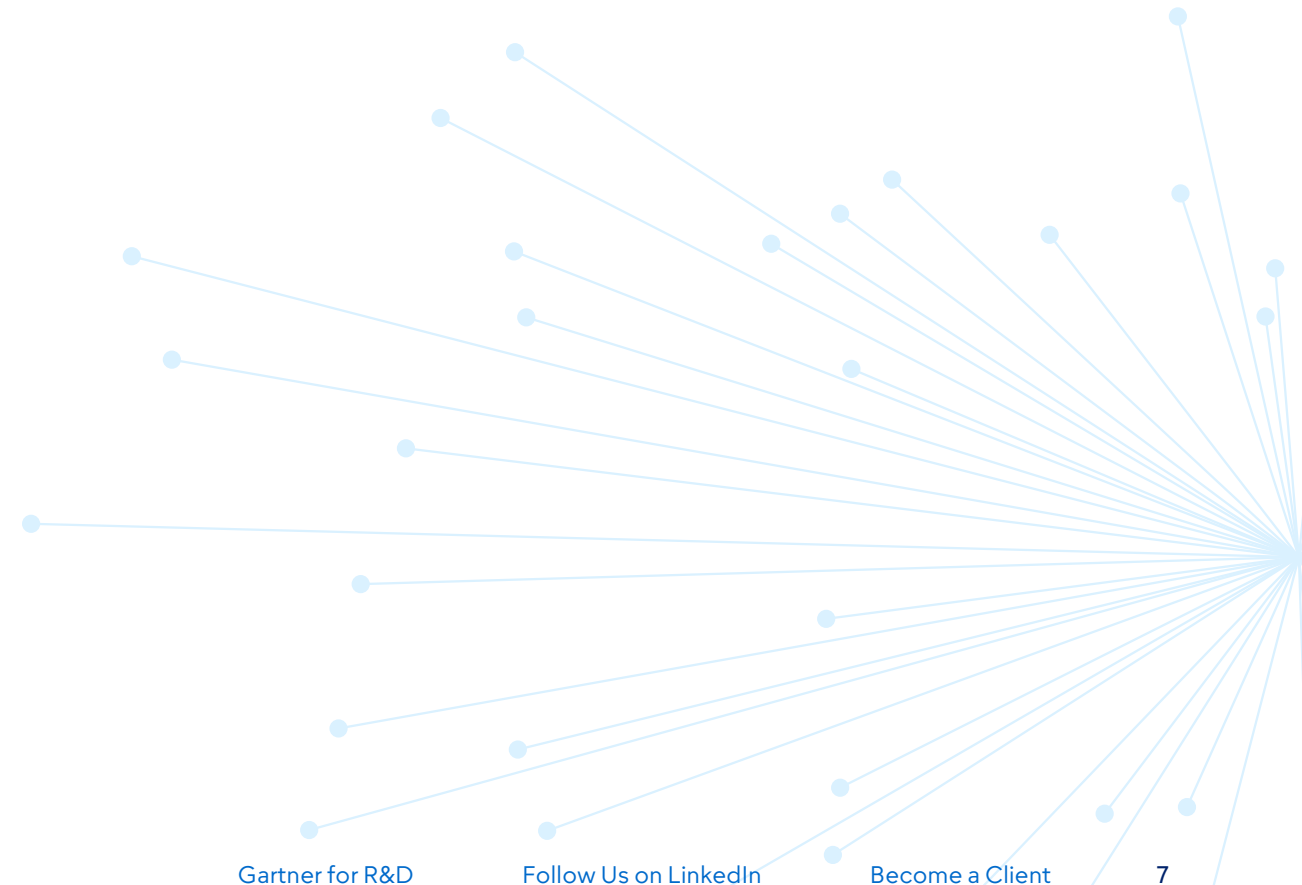
## “Feel” innovation

### Recommended approach

Rather than focusing solely on periodic, high-profile innovation contests and events to encourage R&D staff to contribute innovative ideas, foster an ongoing, internal, grassroots community where staff feel supported in sharing and co-developing innovative ideas. Staff must believe that innovation is genuinely welcomed and actively supported by leaders and peers, and they must be able to trust that their ideas will be taken seriously and given due consideration for further development.

Achieving this requires a deliberate, year-round strategy that employs diverse tactics to provide meaningful support for innovation upskilling and structured opportunities for ideation:

- **Facilitate** shared experiences that normalize innovation as part of the everyday work fabric. For example, plan regular forums, idea-sharing platforms and internal showcases to present promising ideas, receive constructive feedback and learn about innovative work happening across the organization.
- **Establish** mentorship programs to strengthen employees’ innovation capabilities and coach staff through the process of refining and advancing promising concepts.
- **Ensure** transparent and fair consideration of submitted ideas, and provide constructive feedback to all contributors.
- **Allocate** sufficient resources to pursue high-potential ideas.



## Summary of recommended actions



**Ensure** R&D teams consistently hear, see and feel your organization's commitment to innovation. Move beyond messaging by having R&D leaders visibly champion innovation and by fostering an environment where innovation is embedded as a core organizational value.







**Demonstrate** a visible commitment to innovation by consistently selecting and allocating resources to high-impact, transformational innovation opportunities. Proactively safeguard funding for innovation initiatives and update your evaluation processes to ensure innovative ideas receive fair consideration.



**Cultivate** a sustained, grassroots innovation community where staff are empowered and supported in sharing and co-developing ideas. Invest in targeted upskilling, provide structured ideation opportunities and facilitate collaborative experiences that integrate innovation into daily work practices.

# Actionable, objective insights

Position your R&D function for success. Explore these additional complimentary resources and tools for innovation leaders:

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