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Barriers Faced by Corporate Entrepreneurs in the Idea Implementation Process: Uncovering Organizational Impediments in Japan

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Abstract
This study conducted interviews with 27 individuals to investigate what kinds of organizational impediments individuals with an entrepreneurial mindset have faced when realizing their ideas. The results revealed the following four points. First, many corporate entrepreneurs who proposed new ideas encountered some barriers during the implementation process of realizing ideas. Second, half of the corporate entrepreneurs who faced the barriers subsequently lost their working motivation. Third, it was found that a change in the attitudes of those around corporate entrepreneurs from before to after their ideas were proposed was a main reason for their decline of working motivation. Fourth, the reasons for these changes in the attitudes included a lack of incentives for supporting subordinates, a lack of experience among managers in driving cross-departmental projects, and differences in perceptions of the legitimacy of their roles due to differing positions.

Keywords: corporate entrepreneur, organizational impediment, inventor, innovative work behavior

1. Introduction

Innovation ultimately originates in the idea of a single individual. Radical ideas tend to receive unfavorable evaluations and often become targets of criticism (Kirsner, 2018). Anticipating both the effort required to carry an idea through and the opacity of the process that governs it, many individuals ultimately choose not to express their ideas at all (McClean and Collins, 2011). In response to this challenge, firms have established dedicated processes and evaluation criteria for new products, services, and business development, exempting such work from conventional management routines (Govindarajan and Trimble, 2005).

Nonetheless, in some organizations and under certain circumstances, individuals who propose innovative ideas may face marginalization or resistance (e.g., Schimmel and Muntslag, 2009). This phenomenon, known as an organizational or institutional impediment, functions as a sanction against such individuals (e.g., Tourigny and Le, 2004; McLean, 2005). In Japan, the proverb "the stake that sticks out gets hammered down" (*deru kui wa utareru*) warns that those

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who stand out or act independently face criticism and punishment (Sanseido Japanese Dictionary, 8th ed., 2021). Here, the "stake that sticks out" symbolizes individuals—such as entrepreneurs—who disrupt organizational harmony and often encounter resistance or obstruction.

Perceptions of organizational impediments vary depending on individual interpretation (e.g., Yun-Lin and Liu, 2012). These impediments include criticism, unfair evaluation, or isolation resulting from pursuing one's own ideas. While others' responses can be seen as objective facts, whether an individual feels defeated by them depends on their personal interpretation. Thus, individuals facing identical situations may interpret them quite differently.

Research on psychological climate—which captures employees' perceptions of organizational policies, practices, and procedures—has demonstrated that such perceptions can profoundly shape employees' subsequent attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Tesluk et al., 1997; James et al., 2008). Combining insights from psychological climate research and corporate entrepreneurship literature, we conducted qualitative interviews to explore how corporate entrepreneurs interpret others' responses and subsequently adjust their behavior. This study aims to investigate what sanctions and barriers entrepreneurially minded individuals perceive in organizations and how they respond to such challenges.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Corporate Entrepreneurs

Research on corporate entrepreneurship (CE) has accelerated in recent years, highlighting how proactive risk-taking enhances firms' competitiveness (e.g., Lee and Peterson, 2000). Individuals who drive such activities are labeled corporate entrepreneurs (CEs), with related terms including intrapreneurs and corporate venturers (e.g., Blomkvist et al., 2024; Santos et al., 2026). Parallel research explores methods to stimulate their proactive behaviors (e.g., Yitshaki et al., 2026; Fayolle and Liñán, 2014). Miles and Covin (2002) emphasize that cultivating CEs fosters organizational innovation and adaptability. Consequently, identifying and developing CEs has become a strategic priority across organizations (Köhn et al., 2025; Yitshaki et al., 2026; Girma et al., 2025; Santos et al., 2026).

Kuratko et al. (2015, 2021), referencing Hornsby et al. (2002), define CEs as individuals who pursue new products, services, processes, or organizational changes by securing resources and approval within their firms. While CEs can be one of the most effective strategies for achieving innovative outcomes in today's firms, its elusive nature means that many companies have yet to leverage it successfully.

Kuratko et al. (2023a) identify five key CE activities: (a) adoption of a new strategy, (b) introduction of a new product into an existing category, (c) reconfiguration of existing product or market categories, (d) internally focused innovation for strategy improvement, and (e) redesign of existing business model. These activities are interconnected and often influence each other.

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Given the limited capacity of individuals acting alone, organizational support is essential. Thus, organizations must not only support individual CEs' efforts but also amplify their impact across the entire company. Consequently, research has expanded from understanding CE itself to exploring its effective management.

2.2 Management of Corporate Entrepreneurs

As CEs gain recognition, firms face a key challenge: how to enable employees to develop and implement innovative ideas within established organizations (e.g., Miles and Covin, 2002; Yitshaki et al., 2026). Extensive research focuses on the work environment and management practices that encourage employee entrepreneurial activity.

Research on innovative work behavior (IWB) examines how employees generate and implement novel ideas to create new products, services, and organizational processes (Janssen, 2000; De Jong and Den Hartog, 2010). Despite a growing body of research, effective organizational structures and management practices to foster IWB remain poorly understood (Kuratko et al., 2021). Ideally, the organization should function as a system that supports and reinforces the entrepreneurial mindset of each individual employee, in which all managers embrace and actively support the abilities and willingness of entrepreneurially minded individuals (Kuratko et al., 2014b). Because innovation originates from individual ideas, fostering an environment that cultivates personal creativity is essential.

Kuratko et al. (2023a) argue that internal changes in processes like product development and marketing are key indicators of effective CEs. However, their analysis indicates that most firms have made only partial progress. Despite nearly two decades of research and managerial attention, successfully implementing CEs remains challenging for many organizations.

Govindarajan and Trimble (2005) were among the first to identify the challenge firms face in simultaneously managing existing and new businesses. They argued that new ventures require a separate organizational identity distinct from established operations, demanding unique management, processes, and performance metrics. Their concept of dual-purpose design emphasizes preserving this autonomy until the new venture matures enough to leverage the parent company's assets—such as distribution, production, brand, and supply chains—to scale. This approach fundamentally challenges the traditional model of managing corporate entrepreneurship within established firms.

Dellova and Tian (2024) argue that instead of dividing responsibilities between existing and new business units, organizations should foster employees who innovate within current operations. This approach aligns with firms that maintain membership-based employment practices. While it supports the recent shift toward cultivating CEs in established companies, progress remains limited.

Research shows mixed outcomes in managing CEs. Some organizations successfully harness their CEs' initiatives to boost competitiveness; in others, entrepreneurial individuals often leave

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when they find that the environment clashes with their mindset. This contrast highlights the ongoing challenge of engaging entrepreneurial talent effectively.

2.3 Roles of Executives and Middle Managers

The effectiveness of CEs hinges on the organizational support afforded to individual entrepreneurs, with top management playing a pivotal role (e.g. Hornsby et al., 2009; Kuratko, et al., 2023b). Kuratko et al. (2023a) distill this support into five key managerial dimensions: (1) top management support—senior leaders' explicit endorsement of entrepreneurial behavior; (2) work discretion—the autonomy that allows employees to act and decide quickly in realizing their ideas; (3) rewards and reinforcement—incentives that recognize employees' IWB ; (4) time availability—workloads structured to leave room for pursuing new initiatives; and (5) flexible organizational boundaries—structures that allow free movement and collaboration across departments and divisions to facilitate idea sharing and cooperative execution.

Middle managers also serve as essential catalysts for innovation within organizations. Kuratko et al. (2005) position them as pivotal actors who not only originate innovative ideas but also actively engage with and support the ideas proposed by their subordinates. Their comprehensive understanding of organizational policies and procedures equips them to mentor and guide less experienced employees as they engage in IWB. This guidance ensures adherence to necessary protocols and facilitates access to critical organizational resources and support, thereby enabling effective innovation implementation (Hornsby et al., 2009).

2.4 Impediments to Individual Entrepreneurship

As established, fostering individual IWB demands a supportive corporate environment. Yet, what barriers undermine this support? Despite broad acceptance of CE's value, what hinders entrepreneurial employees and diminishes their drive for change?

A 2018 Harvard Business Review article titled "Why There's No Such Thing as a Corporate Entrepreneur" sparked widespread discussion. Of particular interest is the following passage (Kirsner, 2018):

> *The more you try to do things differently and herd colleagues in a new direction, the more they try to get you to abide by the rules. The more you try to bring in other "startup people," the more likely you are to create a subculture that the rest of the organization instinctively wants to reject.*

This passage identifies two factors that impede CEs: first, the enforcement of conformity to rules, and second, the instinctive rejection by organizational members.

Excessive rule enforcement limits individual creativity by concentrating decision-making in the hands of senior executives, which undermines employees' motivation to innovate (Hirst et al., 2011). Formalized organizations, with explicit rules and standardized procedures, further restrict

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employee discretion (Hunter et al., 2007). Although related studies exist, direct research on individual IWB under strict rule compliance is limited.

The second barrier, "instinctive rejection," remains underexplored because it is deeply tied to organizational culture and climate. Innovation inherently involves risk and failure, which trigger emotions such as grief and disappointment. A culture that tolerates failure and a climate that normalizes setbacks are essential for learning from setbacks and fostering new entrepreneurial efforts (Shepherd et al., 2009; Shepherd and Kuratko, 2009).

What exactly do “rules” and “organizational climate” mean in this context? How do they develop, and how can they be changed? Are they separate concepts or interconnected? Answers depend heavily on context, which has left these issues largely unexamined beyond a few case studies. While many executives recognize the need to update rules and reshape organizational climate, it remains unclear where these barriers actually exist within the organization (Kuratko et al., 2014a).

This study examines how employees with strong entrepreneurial drives perceive and respond to sanctions and barriers within their organizations, focusing on formal rules, organizational culture and climate. Drawing on interviews with individuals who have faced such obstacles while pursuing their ideas, the research captures detailed accounts of their coping strategies.

3. Method

3.1 Interview Procedure

This research interviewed 27 corporate employees between January 2022 and February 2025. Initially, six unstructured interviews were conducted with managers at or above the department head level in R&D or business development across four companies. These discussions explored managers’ expectations regarding creativity and initiative in their teams, the gap between expectations and reality, and their strategies to bridge this gap. Four interviews were held in person, two online, each averaging 65 minutes. At the end of each interview, participants identified two or more current or former subordinates recognized for significant contributions to their company.

This research conducted structured interviews with 21 non-managerial employees from seven companies. Of these, 14 were recommended by managers during preliminary interviews; seven were directly contacted by the author. All participants demonstrated creative contributions to innovation initiatives, including new product and business development. Their ages ranged from 26 to 44 years. Educational backgrounds included two doctoral, 14 master’s, and five bachelor’s degrees. Thirteen were male and eight were female. Five interviews were conducted face-to-face and 16 were conducted online, averaging 45 minutes each.

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3.2 Interview Items

Table 1 presents the interview protocol for non-managerial employees. Question 1 consisted of a checklist designed to assess interviewees' personality traits and psychological capital. In face-to-face interviews, participants received a printed checklist; in online interviews, it was shared on screen. Participants rated each item on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The personality measures covered the Big Five traits—neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (Oshio et al., 2012; Gosling et al., 2003). Psychological capital was assessed using eight items, with two items each for self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience. These items were adapted from Luthans et al. (2007) and Luthans and Youssef-Morgan (2017), and were then translated into Japanese by the author.

Following Question 1, the interview addressed participants' experiences of expressing new ideas at work. In Question 2, 16 participants clearly reported having expressed a new idea at work, while 5 participants gave unclear answers. Accordingly, Questions 4 and 5 were administered only to the 16 participants who clearly confirmed having expressed a new idea at work.

Table 1. Interview items

No.	Item	Question
Q1	Personality and psychological capital	(Present the checklist)
Q2	Opportunities to express ideas	Have you ever expressed a new idea at work? If so, how frequently have you had opportunities to do so?
Q3	Concerns before expressing an idea	Before expressing your idea,did you have any concerns? If so, how did you adress them?
Q4	Reactions from others after expressing an idea	What responses did you receive after expressing the idea? Who responded, and what were their organizational roles? How did you respond to their reactions?
Q5	Future outlook / ways to avoid barriers	How do you intend to approach idea expression in the future? If you encountered any barriers during the process discussed in Question 4, what support or actions might have helped you avoid or overcome them?

4. Results

4.1 Assessment of Sample Bias in Personality and Psychological Dispositions

Table 2 reports the means and standard deviations of the personality items, measured on a seven-point Likert scale, with two items (one positively and one negatively worded) per Big Five dimension. Participants scored relatively high on extraversion and openness and low on neuroticism. This skew likely reflects our purposive sampling strategy: because the study examines the barriers to idea realization and how employees overcome them, interviewees were

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referred by managers as current or former subordinates or team members who had visibly contributed to innovation.

Table 2. Aggregated results for Personality

Personality	Self-description (I see myself as…)	Mean	SD
Extraversion (+)	Extraveted, energetic.	4.11	1.66
Agreeableness(+)	Considerate of others, warm.	3.57	1.21
Conscientiousness (+)	Dependable, self-disciplined.	3.11	1.74
Neuroticism (+)	Anxious, easily upset.	2.70	1.08
Openness to experience (+)	Open to new experiences, holding unconventional ideas.	3.85	2.01
Extraversion (–)	Reserved, quiet.	3.08	1.22
Agreeableness(–)	Dissatisfied with others, prone to conflict.	2.95	1.04
Conscientiousness (–)	Sloppy, careless.	3.55	1.39
Neuroticism (–)	Calm, emotionally stable.	3.68	1.21
Openness to experience (–)	Conventional, uncreative.	3.72	1.11

Table 3 reports the psychological capital items, aggregated as in Table 2, with two items each for self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism. Participants scored relatively high on resilience and optimism. This pattern introduces a further source of sample bias, but one we consider acceptable: because the study examines the barriers that arise when employees pursue their ideas and how they perceive those barriers, participants lacking resilience and optimism would likely have abandoned the process before completing it—and thus had little to report.

Table 3. Aggregated results for psychological capital

Psychological capital	Item	Mean	SD
Self-efficacy	I feel confident analyzing a long-term problem to find a solution.	3.35	1.08
	I feel confident helping to set targets/goals in my work area.	3.77	1.55
Hope	If I should find myself in a jam at work, I could think of many ways to get out of it.	3.52	1.28
	Right now I see myself as being pretty successful at work.	2.99	1.24
Resilience	I usually handle stressful things at work calmly.	4.01	1.39
	I feel I can handle many things at a time at this job.	3.84	1.04
Optimism	When things do not work out at work, I take it in stride.	3.66	1.65
	I'm optimistic about what will happen to me in the future as it pertains to work.	3.79	1.62

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4.2 Opportunities for Idea Expression

Question 2 asked whether participants had opportunities to express genuinely novel ideas at work. We defined idea expression as communicating to others, in any form, an idea that could lead to a new product or service, a new business, or organizational reform. Because such ideas vary widely in scale and level of abstraction, we anchored the construct in Kaufman and Beghetto's (2009) Four-C model and focused on Big-C and Pro-c creativity, the two levels that operate in professional settings. All subsequent responses were elicited within this framing.
Sixteen of the 21 participants reported having at least one opportunity to express such ideas per year. They described these opportunities as arising in two primary contexts: in day-to-day work and in organization-wide initiatives and programs (Table 4).

Table 4. Illustrative Responses Regarding Opportunities to Express New Ideas

Category	ID	Participant profile	Example Responses on Opportunities to Express Ideas
In day-to-day work	c	Female, 30s	"My day-to-day work is largely routine, so such opportunities are limited. Still, even without a designated occasion, I can create an opportunity through conversation when I have an idea. I prepare a brief document, show it to my immediate supervisor, and then wait for the outcome when it is discussed in a meeting."
In organization-wide initiatives and programs	b	Male, 20s	" There are many opportunities across the company. We have two proposal-based initiatives each year, as well as several training programs in which participants are asked to generate ideas. Altogether, these opportunities arise four or five times a year."
	h	Female, 30s	"There are two organization-wide opportunities each year and one in my department. In both cases, my supervisor encourages us to keep putting forward ideas."

4.3 Presence or Absence of Concerns Prior to Idea Expression

Question 3 asked participants to select one focal idea for the remaining items and to describe any concerns they had before expressing that idea (Table 5).

Thirteen of the 16 participants reported no concerns prior to expressing their ideas. Some described being encouraged by colleagues or supervisors to put their ideas forward (cases g and k). The remaining three participants reported concerns about rejection, including the expectation of opposition from colleagues or members of other departments (case j). Participants who had experienced both types of situations were asked to select the idea that had most strongly affected their subsequent approach to work.

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Table 5. Illustrative Responses on Concerns Before Expressing Ideas

Category	ID	Participant profile	Example Responses on Concerns Before Voicing Ideas
No concerns reported (13/16)	g	Female, 20s	"At first, I submitted ideas on impulse, so I had no particular concerns, although I was not confident in the ideas themselves. We were encouraged to submit ideas to voluntary initiatives, so I decided to enjoy the process."
	k	Male, 20s	"If anything, I wondered whether someone like me should submit an idea, or whether more experienced colleagues should do so instead. My supervisor told me that experience can sometimes constrain ideas and that younger employees can offer perspectives that others cannot."
Concerns about rejection (3/16)	j	Male, 30s	"I expected opposition. So I spoke with colleagues and people in other departments, one by one, and developed a rationale that reflected their perspectives."

4.4 Reactions to Idea Expression

Question 4 asked how others responded to the ideas participants had expressed. Three themes emerged (Table 6): negative responses; initial support that became ambiguous; and consistently favorable responses.

First, three participants were told that their ideas were not feasible. Participant o remained unconvinced by this judgment but redirected their efforts to other work.

The second theme was the most common, reported by 11 of the 16 participants. Others responded favorably at first, yet their positions became increasingly ambiguous as the idea took concrete shape. In some cases, the idea was also measured against internal rules and precedents, and the burden of working around these constraints fell to the individual—leaving participant h, for example, at an impasse.

The third theme, reported by two participants, consisted of consistently favorable responses that sustained the idea's development.

Table 6. Illustrative Responses Regarding Others' Reactions to Idea Expression

Category	ID	Participant profile	Example Responses Regarding Others' Reactions to Idea Expression
Negative responses (3/16)	o	Male, 20s	"I showed my supervisor a proposal for developing a new technology. He told me outright that it was not feasible at this company. I could not accept his reasoning, but I was able to move on."
Initial support becoming ambiguous: appeals to precedent and requests for guaranteed outcomes (11/16)	p	Male, 30s	"My immediate supervisor initially said the idea was interesting. Over time, though, he kept asking what concrete benefits its implementation would produce, and the proposal stalled. I also spoke with people in other departments, but they mainly asked which regulations applied and whether I had followed the formal process. Few responded to the substance of the idea."
	h	Female, 30s	"I showed the full proposal to my supervisor, but it remained unresolved for about three months. When I asked for clarification, I was told that there was no precedent and no formal process for it. I was eventually advised to drop the proposal. It left me feeling that the organization only pursues ideas it already knows are feasible."
Consistently favorable responses (2/16)	c	Female, 30s	"Many people said the idea was interesting. My supervisor and senior colleagues told me that they would never have thought of it when they were younger, and that I had done my homework."

4.5 Avoiding Barriers to Idea Expression

Question 5 asked participants how the barriers they encountered after expressing an idea might be overcome. Four themes emerged (Table 7).

The first theme, building one's own capability, was raised by two participants. Participant k pointed to the knowledge and reasoning skills needed to substantiate an idea and address gaps in it.

The second theme, building support informally, was raised by four participants. They described cultivating agreement in advance—both inside and outside their own department—and securing the backing of customers and users before a proposal was formally raised. This theme was most pronounced among participants whose ideas had earlier been assessed against internal rules and precedents, as the accounts of Participants f and g illustrate.

The third theme, accumulating a personal track record, was raised by two participants, who were again concentrated among those whose ideas had been assessed against precedent. These participants observed that some supervisors judge the proposer rather than the proposal. A record of delivered results, they reasoned, substituted for precedent: once the person is trusted, their ideas are accepted along with them.

The fourth theme, withholding idea expression, was the most common, raised by eight participants—half the sample. Rather than identifying a way around the barriers, these participants concluded that none existed and that they would stop putting ideas forward. We return to this finding in the Discussion.

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Table 7. Illustrative Responses on Avoiding Barriers to Idea Expression

Category	ID	Participant profile	Example Responses on Avoiding Barriers to Idea Expression
Building one's own capability (2/16)	k	Male, 20s	"I need to broaden my knowledge—not only technical knowledge, but also knowledge of customers, costs, and the organization. Communication skills are equally important."
Building supportive relationships in advance (4/16)	f	Female, 30s	"I think it is important to identify people who will support the idea. Involving customers is particularly helpful. If you already have a relationship with a customer, you can share the proposal materials with them. It may also help to approach a senior manager in a different department—someone above you, but outside your own chain of command.
	g	Female, 20s	"No matter how much I refine the proposal, many people signal opposition within the first two pages. I need to build relationships with them beforehand and avoid taking an adversarial stance. It is burdensome, but necessary."
Establishing a personal track record (2/16)	i	Male, 20s	"After one of my ideas was rejected, I learned that people often evaluate the person making the proposal rather than the idea itself. I saw very different reactions when essentially the same point was made by different people. It was frustrating, but I think an established track record makes a difference."
No longer willing to propose ideas (8/16)	q	Male, 30s	"I have tried different approaches, but I am unlikely to submit another proposal. Unless the company changes substantially, I would not recommend that junior colleagues do so either. It feels as though we wasted time and energy on something futile."

5. Discussion

This study examined the barriers that entrepreneurially minded employees in established firms encounter in pursuing their own ideas, and how they respond to those barriers. We interviewed 27 employees and focused on the 16 who had expressed a wholly novel idea, asking what concerns they had held before speaking up and how others had reacted afterward. Two points merit discussion.

5.1 Half of the Participants Had Stopped Putting Ideas Forward

Eight of the 16 encountered a barrier after expressing an idea and saw no way around it (Table 7). All eight said they would not put an idea forward again, at least not without a compelling reason.

Prior studies note that despite broad recognition of CEs, barriers severe enough to erode entrepreneurially minded employees' motivation to pursue change remain common (Kirsner, 2018; Kuratko et al., 2023a). Our findings suggest that such barriers persist in Japanese firms as well.

Table 8 presents representative reasons. The most telling pattern was disillusionment with organizations and superiors who encouraged idea generation but then took no clear stance: "I do not think the company genuinely wants new ideas. It seems more concerned with keeping up appearances or generating enthusiasm" (g). A second pattern was exhaustion during

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implementation, as participants dealt with uncooperative colleagues: “All I did was receive one request for additional work after another—without knowing whether any of it mattered—and send it back” (h). She concluded that “the process gradually undermined my sense of agency” (h).

In every case, participants met barriers they had not anticipated, and their accounts convey clear bewilderment at the gap between how others responded before and after they expressed an idea. This gap, we argue, is one mechanism that suppresses the IWB of entrepreneurially minded employees. We examine it further below.

Table 8. Reasons Why Participants Would No Longer Express Ideas

Category	ID	Participant profile	Reasons for Discontinuing Idea Expression
Disillusionment with organizational and supervisory ambiguity	q	Male, 30s	“If supervisors have a preferred answer or an acceptable range of ideas, I wish they would say so from the outset. They tell us to submit any idea, but that is not how it works in practice. When I asked my supervisor for clarification, I was told that identifying the right answer was part of my job. I understood the logic, but it made me wonder what supervisors are there for.”
	g	Female, 20s	“I do not plan to submit ideas on my own initiative again. I do not think the company genuinely wants new ideas. It seems more concerned with keeping up appearances or generating enthusiasm. I see no value in being drawn into that process.”
Exhaustion from unproductive interactions	h	Female, 30s	“I do not want to go through that again. The people in other departments were not openly negative, but they were not supportive either. All I did was receive one request for additional work after another — without knowing whether any of it mattered—and send it back. No one may have intended to obstruct me; they may simply have been doing their jobs. Still, the process gradually undermined my sense of agency. I learned that it is much easier to remain passive.”
	e	Male, 30s	“In my experience, people support a new idea in principle but raise strong objections once the discussion turns to details. Addressing those concerns requires extending the proposal into the work of related departments. That creates an endless set of issues to consider, and the original idea gradually loses its distinctiveness.”

5.2 Why Support Fades After an Idea Is expressed

What changes in an employee's environment once an idea is expressed? Figure 1 models this shift, drawing on responses to Questions 3 and 4 (Tables 5 and 6).

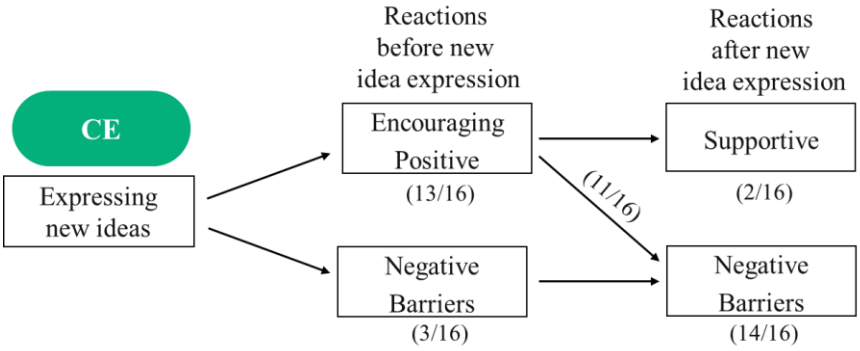
Participants experienced a reversal once they expressed an idea. Beforehand, most participants worked in settings that actively encouraged ideas (13 of 16), and all six managers in our preliminary interviews reported urging subordinates to speak up. Afterward, most participants found that this support had weakened or vanished (14 of 16).

Support fades from two directions: supervisors, and the colleagues and members of other departments whose cooperation implementation requires. Participants described both as uncooperative.

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Figure 1. Changes in the responses of those around the individual before and after idea expression



(1) When Supervisors Withdraw Support

Sustained managerial support is a well-established precondition for corporate entrepreneurship. Kuratko et al. (2023a) specify five top-management roles: (1) top management support, (2) work discretion, (3) rewards and reinforcement, (4) time availability, and (5) flexible organizational boundaries. Our preliminary interviews suggest that in Japanese firms such support remains uncommon, and that the reversal shown in Figure 1 may be dampening the motivation of the most entrepreneurially inclined employees. Three reasons stand out.

The first reason lies in how supervisors are rewarded. The firms we studied solicited ideas through internal contests, and supervisors urged their subordinates to apply. In some firms, the number of volunteers was itself a performance indicator. Supervisors were thus rewarded for submissions—and only for submissions.

Support after submission carried no such incentive; it was left to individual discretion. This asymmetry in incentives produces the asymmetry in support that Figure 1 documents. The pattern extends Kuratko et al.'s (2023a) call to reinforce rewards: rewards must reach not only the entrepreneurs themselves, but the supervisors who carry their ideas forward.

The second reason is that supervisors have little experience with new business creation. Most had spent their careers inside established divisions, and they said so themselves: they could not guide subordinates through work they had never done. Kuratko et al. (2005) and Hornsby et al. (2009) assign supervisors the role of guiding inexperienced subordinates through appropriate innovation processes. These supervisors lacked the experience that role presumes. They therefore judged new proposals against the conventions of the divisions they knew.

The third reason is a mismatch of scope. A new idea rarely stays inside the division where it originates; it cuts across the organization. A supervisor's authority does not: a department manager can act within the department, a division head within the division. Beyond that

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boundary, coordination costs rise sharply. Supervisors therefore stall—handing the initiative back to the entrepreneur, or leaving requests for advice unanswered.

Entrepreneurs read this silence as a hidden standard. As participant q put it, "If supervisors have a preferred answer or an acceptable range of ideas, I wish they would say so from the outset." Participant q also pointed to the gap between invitation and practice: employees are told to submit any idea, but the reception after submission tells them otherwise (Table 8).

(2) Support from Colleagues within the Organization

Section 2 reviewed how firmly the barriers to individual entrepreneurship are entrenched. One claim that recurs across that literature is that organizations press CEs to comply with established rules. Hunter et al. (2007) and Hirst et al. (2011) report that as decision-making becomes more formalized, employees hold less discretion and find it harder to sustain entrepreneurial effort. Rigid, standardized procedures thus operate as deference to precedent—the first barrier an entrepreneur encounter.

Yet rule adherence is not simply an obstacle. Employees often treat it as what keeps the firm stable, valuing the consistency that uniform procedures give management (Khalili, 2016). Deference to precedent therefore carries a double meaning: the practice that protects the organization is the same one that constrains the entrepreneur. This tension surfaced clearly in the Japanese firms we studied.

Entrepreneurs in our sample met the same questions from other departments: which regulations the proposal conformed to, and whether the formal procedures had been followed. Proposals were rejected, or simply left unanswered, for lack of precedent. Their frustration took a recurring form—they were acting for the future of the company, yet everyone around them applied the brakes. The colleagues asking these questions were doing their jobs. Checking procedure and precedent is how organizations avoid confusion. Both sides have a legitimate claim. What differs is the position from which the same situation is read—and that difference in reading produces markedly different action.

This duality is the central implication of our findings. Factors that inhibit IWB can be identified, yet they remain rational from another position. A "barrier to entrepreneurship" is not by definition a sign of dysfunction. Prior studies respond to such conditions by calling for looser boundaries across functional silos, but that prescription es structure while the disagreement we observed concerns legitimacy—and no structural change settles which side is right.

6. Conclusions and Limitations

CEs have drawn sustained attention since the 2000s, and a substantial literature links the proactive, risk-taking behavior of CEs to the competitiveness of established firms. As that link has become accepted, the question facing firms has become a practical one: how employees come to express innovative ideas, and how those ideas are carried through.

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Yet firms routinely sideline the employees most inclined to express new ideas—a pattern of organizational impediment that concerns practitioners and researchers alike. This study therefore asks what barriers CEs face in realizing their ideas. Drawing on a review of the prior literature and interviews with 27 employees at established firms, we report four findings.

First, many employees who expressed an idea met some form of barrier once they tried to implement it. Outright rejection was rare. Far more often, proposals sat unanswered with their evaluation left vague, or were checked against internal rules and precedents until the initiative stalled.

Second, half of those who met such barriers lost motivation and no longer intended to propose anything new. Some said they would first build their own capabilities and a track record before trying again. Most, however, said they would hold back until the organizational climate changed. Third, this reluctance can be traced to how supervisors and colleagues respond. Before an idea is expressed, the climate strongly encourages speaking up. Once it is on the table, support thins, and supervisors and colleagues begin—as the employees saw it—to act as a brake.

Fourth, three factors explain this shift: (1) managers have no incentive to support CEs; (2) they have little experience with cross-departmental change; and (3) employees in different organizational positions disagree on whether the work is legitimate. Together, these factors hold back the very employees most inclined to act entrepreneurially.

This study has several limitations. The design was qualitative and interview-based. Such designs are best suited to generating and extending theory, exposing gaps in existing accounts, and making sense of complex phenomena (Nickels et al., 2022); they are especially well suited to tracing the fine-grained detail of particular events and processes (Gaya and Smith, 2016). These properties are precisely what enabled the present study to document the barriers Japanese corporate entrepreneurs encounter at close range. The same properties, however, carry a cost: findings drawn from a small number of cases do not generalize readily (Lindgreen et al., 2021). Survey research should therefore test whether the mechanisms identified here hold at scale.

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