



# Building the Future: Big Teaming for Audacious Innovation

By Amy Edmondson, Susan Salter Reynolds

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## Building the Future

Machiavelli famously wrote, “There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things.”

That's what this book is about—innovation far more audacious than a new way to find a restaurant or a smart phone you can wear on your wrist. Amy C. Edmondson and Susan Salter Reynolds explore large-scale systemic innovation that calls for “big teaming”: intense collaboration between professions and industries with completely different mindsets. This demands leadership combining an expansive vision with deliberative incremental action—not an easy balance.

To explore the kind of leadership required to build the future we need, Edmondson and Reynolds tell the story of Living PlanIT. This award-winning “smart city” start-up was launched with a breathtakingly ambitious goal: creating a showcase high-tech city from scratch to pilot its software—quite literally setting out to build the future. This meant a joint effort spanning a truly disparate group of software entrepreneurs, real estate developers, city government officials, architects, construction companies, and technology corporations. By taking a close look at the work, norms, and values in each of these professional domains, we gain new insight into why teaming across fields is so challenging. And we get to know Living PlanIT's leaders, following them and their partners through cycles of hope, exhaustion, disillusionment, pragmatism, and renewal. There are powerful lessons here for anyone, in any industry, seeking to drive audacious innovation.

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- Rank: #990075 in Books
- Published on: 2016-04-18
- Released on: 2016-04-18
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.40" h x .80" w x 6.30" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 240 pages



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## Editorial Review

### Review

“*Building the Future* provides a rare inside look at how a start-up company takes on the world and copes with numerous challenges along the way. Go it alone or partner? Keep the bold goal or go for small wins? Seize other opportunities in technology or stick with the smart-cities plan? Edmondson and Reynolds present thought-provoking lessons for those who want to dream big and need big teaming to get the work done.”

—**Rosabeth Moss Kanter, Professor of Business Administration, Harvard Business School, and bestselling author of *Confidence and Move***

“This unique book by a brilliant researcher and a veteran journalist not only illuminates the problems of large-scale innovation for a sustainable future but, in the process, teaches us about industry cultures, leadership, and the massive problems of collaboration in an increasingly complex multicultural world.”

—**Edgar Schein, Professor Emeritus, MIT Sloan School of Management, and author of *Helping, Humble Inquiry, and Humble Consulting***

“*Building the Future* just may be one of the most important innovation books ever written. It explores how to build and spread a bold vision of the future—how to turn an audacious innovation into reality by bringing together people with different skills and beliefs (even if they have ignored or despised each other in the past). And best of all, Edmondson and Reynolds offer a way for tenacious leaders and teams to use small actions to slowly build big, bold innovations—including better companies, industries, and cities.”

—**Robert Sutton, Professor of Management Science and Engineering, Stanford Graduate School of Business, and coauthor of *Scaling Up Excellence***

“This book provides an entirely new way of looking at how teaming can—and will—help us create a new world!”

—**Marshall Goldsmith, Thinkers50 #1 Leadership Thinker in the World and New York Times bestselling author of *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*, *Mojo*, and *Triggers***

“Given rush hour and all the many other failures produced by urban evolution, one has to feel that planning and engineering better cities is at the very least an effort worth attempting. This book—exhaustively researched and written with unusual clarity—constitutes a map of the impediments and possibilities. It is also a fascinating case study of technological adventure.”

—**Tracy Kidder, author of *The Soul of a New Machine*, winner of the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award**

“City building may be the most important challenge of the 21st century, and it is a challenge that needs entrepreneurial brilliance as much as engineering. Edmondson and Reynolds provide an engaging glimpse at innovators—such as Living PlanIT and Quintain Construction—who are changing our urban world. This thoughtful book is full of managerial wisdom and urban insight.”

—**Edward Glaeser, Glimp Professor of Economics, Harvard University, and author of *Triumph of the City***

“*Building the Future* is a remarkable book. It introduces readers to the cross-industry teaming that's needed to build the cities of tomorrow and offers an urgent reminder that technology alone can't solve global problems—cooperation, ingenuity, and empathy are needed to innovate on a grand stage. A must-read for

anyone interested in the future of business or the future of the planet.”

—**Douglas Stone, Lecturer on Law, Harvard Law School, and coauthor of *Difficult Conversations and Thanks for the Feedback***

“Every start-up wants to change the world and disrupt an industry or two along the way. But what happens when you don’t? Edmondson and Reynolds glean important lessons from the story of one such company grappling with the biggest challenge of our time: building more sustainable cities. Their inside account of setbacks and brushes with failure has more to teach us than any just-so stories of success.”

—**Greg Lindsay, coauthor of *Aerotropolis* and Senior Fellow, New Cities Foundation**

“What we witness in this thoughtful and compelling study is one of the heroic battles that are being enacted across the globe as visionary, fleet-footed technology start-ups collide with big business and the politics of government. As the urbanization of the planet gathers pace and governments grapple with the fateful consequences, can technology support a better future for our cities? *Building the Future* follows a small start-up business that believes it can and examines the leadership demands of ambition on this scale.”

—**Andrew Comer, Partner and Director of the Cities Group, BuroHappold Engineering**

“Get ready. What you are about to read is unlike anything you’ve read before on innovation, teams, the built environment, or even leadership. Edmondson and Reynolds—a world-class academic and journalist—have joined forces to explore, document, and understand how complex innovation actually unfolds and the leadership required for its success. Based on multiyear observations of an entrepreneurial effort to build a smart, green city, *Building the Future* brings the challenges of the future into the present so we can see what it will take to create a world that works for all of us.”

—**Diana McLain Smith, author of *The Elephant in the Room***

## About the Author

Amy C. Edmondson is the Novartis Professor of Leadership and Management at Harvard Business School. She is the author of *Teaming to Innovate*, *Teaming*, and *A Fuller Explanation*, along with over seventy articles on leadership, teams, innovation, and organizational learning. She has received many awards, including the Accenture Award for significant contribution to improving the practice of management.

Susan Salter Reynolds is a former Los Angeles Times features writer and columnist. For twenty-three years, she covered thought leaders, cultural trends, and controversial issues and continues to write for a variety of magazines and newspapers, including the Daily Beast, Newsday, Los Angeles Magazine, and others.

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## PREFACE

CURIOS ABOUT INNOVATION IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT, WE JUMPED at the chance to study a startup with the audacious goal of transforming the urban landscape with technology. Wherever you work, the demand for innovation is likely intense. After all, developing great new products that delight customers is a surefire way to win in a competitive marketplace. But this book tackles a different kind of innovation challenge—the kind that involves introducing not a new product but an entire new system.

Consider two history-shaping innovations found in the kitchen of most modern households. One, the refrigerator, transformed how we eat by enabling the preservation of perishable foods for days and even

weeks. The other, the telephone, a smaller object with far greater physical reach, puts us in instant contact with distant friends and colleagues. Today both are taken-for-granted household objects.

A crucial difference between these familiar innovations is that one is a stand-alone product and the other functions as part of a complex system. That difference motivates this book. The refrigerator can be purchased, delivered, and used—like hundreds of other products we might find in the home. The telephone, in contrast, does little on its own. To have practical use, an entire system of components, wires, poles, regulations, services, and customers had to be developed around it, involving players from multiple industry sectors. Putting Alexander Graham Bell's 1876 patent for a device to transmit the human voice through an electric current into worldchanging use required, in short, the cooperative action of technologists, service personnel, government regulators, real estate owners, designers, builders, electricians, lumber companies, operators, and more. When the first telephone exchange—with 21 subscribers—was built in 1877 in New Haven, Connecticut, a few of these players had come together to present a first, small-scale demonstration of a telecommunications system.

It would be many years before thousands of people participated in the telecommunications system, even more years (and more technological innovation) before the first transcontinental call in 1915, and another decade still before the first transatlantic call in 1926. Although continued innovation in telecommunications has occurred in every decade since, the massive world-changing innovation lay in the creation of that first telephone exchange system. Interestingly, that innovation was inspired by a lecture given by Bell but was not created by him. Its lead creator, George Coy, not a household name like the famous Bell, nonetheless played an essential a role in building the future of telecommunications.<sup>1</sup>

Just as a telecommunications system could not be developed by a single individual or a single product development team, or even by a single company, the innovation journey we highlight in this book also involves players from multiple industries. And as we argue in this book, introducing system innovations, no matter how audacious, starts small, with a pilot of some kind from which people can learn—the equivalent of that New Haven exchange.

Because it is hard for most of us to imagine a world before telephony, we rarely step back to consider What does it take for determined visionaries to mobilize people and technologies to build the future? That is the question we tackle in this book. Certain kinds of audacious, world-changing innovations—like smart, green, livable, human-scale cities—are difficult to bring into being because there are simply too many things that have to change in a coordinated manner. These are the very real challenges of building the future, of bringing desired new and complex possibilities into existence, on purpose. They are considerable and at times overwhelming to contemplate, but they are surmountable, as human history has shown.

To bring to life the human story that underlies multisector collaboration and future-building, we decided to take a deep dive into a single case study of audacious innovation.<sup>2</sup> We followed the journey of a smart-city startup and found that it offered a fascinating and intimate glimpse of the people—their ideas and their interactions—behind audacious innovation. Preface xi One of us (Amy) is a management professor and expert in leadership, teaming, and innovation; the other (Susan) is a seasoned journalist who has written countless pieces in the popular press that bring engaging human stories to a wide audience. We hope you will find that the combination of our backgrounds brings timely leadership lessons to life in a new and compelling way.

As is true for all startups, the odds were stacked against the young company you'll get to know in the pages ahead. Most startups fail—90 percent, according to Fortune magazine<sup>3</sup>—yet most entrepreneurs are confident that their new enterprises will defy the odds. The inherently overconfident (some might say

delusional) nature of the entrepreneur is part of the phenomenon we encounter when we study future-building. But most books about startups look back through hindsight-tinted glasses to describe the fortuitous beginnings of iconic companies like Apple or Google. Instead we took the risky path of following a startup in real time, from its initial coalescing around a big vision through its next few years. Without knowing the ultimate fate of the company, much can be learned about building the future from studying its journey. We are grateful for the privileged access the founders gave us, and of course we agreed not to disclose information they wished to keep confidential. At times that agreement limits our narrative, but it does not hamper the development of broadly applicable leadership lessons from our research.

The context we chose for studying audacious innovation is the smart-city industry. This new and fast-growing domain is focused on transforming the potential of cities to be green and livable by integrating the latest information technologies into the urban built environment. Few arenas offer more potential to transform the future—nor more hurdles to doing so.

One hurdle in particular emerged early in our research and became the central thread throughout this book: the need for what we now call Big Teaming to design and deliver transformational change in the built environment. Big Teaming takes cross-disciplinary teamwork to the next level, to a larger stage than prior books on this topic. We show why crosssector teaming is so hard, and we offer research-based ideas for how to do xii Building the Future it well in the pursuit of audacious innovation. In so doing we hope that this book contributes a small piece of a complex, adaptive blueprint for building the future.

Amy C. Edmondson and Susan Salter Reynolds  
October 2015

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Catherine Crider:**

Do you have favorite book? In case you have, what is your favorite's book? E-book is very important thing for us to learn everything in the world. Each guide has different aim or even goal; it means that guide has different type. Some people truly feel enjoy to spend their time and energy to read a book. They are really reading whatever they take because their hobby is definitely reading a book. What about the person who don't like studying a book? Sometime, person feel need book once they found difficult problem or maybe exercise. Well, probably you will need this Building the Future: Big Teaming for Audacious Innovation.

#### **Allison Stifler:**

As people who live in the modest era should be revise about what going on or details even knowledge to make these people keep up with the era that is certainly always change and move ahead. Some of you maybe will update themselves by studying books. It is a good choice to suit your needs but the problems coming to an individual is you don't know what one you should start with. This Building the Future: Big Teaming for Audacious Innovation is our recommendation to help you keep up with the world. Why, as this book serves what you want and need in this era.

**Fern Marshall:**

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**Phyllis Ramirez:**

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