

CHARACTERISTICS OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA AND HOW WE CAN BE MORE INNOVATIVE

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Abstract

The article analyzes seven distinctive traits that define local entrepreneurship of the Republic of Moldova as well as Romania. A noticeable tendency toward “bargaining” is observed, rather than win-win negotiations; entrepreneurs tend to be reactive rather than proactive, responding to challenges only as they emerge, and demonstrating a strong orientation toward immediate results. Entrepreneurship is also strongly shaped by verbal communication, which often takes precedence over planned objectives, as well as by flexibility and resilience. Hierarchical structures and centralized decision-making remain prevalent. Indirect communication is frequently used instead of active and planned communication, influencing both team dynamics and business negotiations.

The purpose of the article is to raise awareness of the specific practices and behavioral patterns of entrepreneurs in the Republic of Moldova and the region, and to identify strengths (resilience, flexibility) as well as areas for improvement (the capacity to be proactive and innovative) in order to foster better planning, communication, innovative approaches, and business competitiveness.

The research methodology includes comparative historical and cultural analysis, the author’s observations, qualitative content analysis, and case studies aimed at diagnosing processes and proposing improvements and optimizations. A transdisciplinary approach is also applied.

Moldovan entrepreneurship emerges as a distinctive blend of tradition and adaptation, where strengths—such as resilience, relationship-orientation, and flexibility—represent valuable assets for surviving in an unstable economic environment. The identified challenges, especially reactivity and excessive focus on immediate results, tend to limit the potential for sustainable growth and long-term innovation.

The study provides a comprehensive systematization of Moldovan entrepreneurship across seven specific dimensions, offering a clear and original analytical

framework. By using a nuanced approach, focusing on Moldovan particularities—distinct from broader Eastern European patterns—and providing actionable recommendations grounded in solid scientific foundations, the article makes a valuable theoretical and practical contribution.

Keywords: entrepreneurship, Republic of Moldova, win-win partnership, reactive/proactive, personal relationships/verbal communication, flexibility, resilience, hierarchy, centralized decision-making, indirect communication, innovation.

PARTICULARITĂȚILE ANTREPRENORIATULUI DIN REPUBLICA MOLDOVA ȘI CUM PUTEM DEVENI INOVATIVI

Rezumat

Articolul analizează șapte trăsături distinctive care definesc antreprenoriatul local din Republica Moldova și România. Se observă o predispoziție către „târguiață” în locul unor negocieri de tip câștig-câștig, antreprenorii tind să fie mai degrabă reactivi decât proactivi, răspunzând la provocări pe măsură ce apar, orientarea către rezultate imediate. De asemenea, antreprenoriatul este puternic orientat pe comunicarea verbală, acestea având prioritate față de obiectivele planificate, flexibilitate și reziliență, iar structurile ierarhice și luarea deciziilor centralizate rămân prevalente. Comunicarea indirectă este frecvent utilizată, în locul unei comunicări active și planificate, ceea ce influențează dinamica echipei și negocierile de afaceri.

Scopul articolului este de a conștientiza propriile practici și modele ale antreprenorilor din Republica Moldova și regiune, și de a identifica punctele forte (reziliența, flexibilitatea) și cele de îmbunătățit (capacitatea de a fi proactivi și inovativi) pentru a facilita o mai bună planificare, comunicare, abordarea inovativă și competitivitatea în afaceri.

Metodologia cercetării cuprinde analiza comparativă istorică și culturală, observația autorului, analiza de conținut calitativ, și studii de caz cu scop de diagnoză a proceselor și propuneri de îmbunătățiri și optimizări, precum și se aplică abordarea transdisciplinară.

Antreprenoriatul moldovenesc se configurează ca un amestec distinctiv de tradiție și adaptare, unde punctele forte – precum reziliența, orientarea pe relații și flexibilitatea – constituie active valoroase pentru supraviețuirea într-un mediu economic instabil. Provocările identificate, în special reactivitatea și orientarea excesivă pe rezultate imediate, tind să limiteze potențialul de creștere sustenabilă și inovare pe termen lung.

Studiul realizează o sistematizare comprehensivă a antreprenoriatului moldovenesc pe baza a șapte dimensiuni specifice, oferind un cadru analitic clar și inedit. Prin abordarea nuanțată, prin focalizarea pe specificul moldovenesc – distinct față de generalitățile est-europene – și prin oferirea unor recomandări acționabile bazate pe fundamente științifice solide, se aduce o contribuție valoroasă atât teoretică, cât și practică.

Cuvinte-cheie: antreprenoriat, Republica Moldova, parteneriat câștig-câștig, reactiv/proactiv, relații personale/comunicare verbală, flexibilitate, reziliență, ierarhie, decizii centralizate, comunicare indirectă, inovație.

Introduction

In the entrepreneurial landscape of the Republic of Moldova, as well as that of neighboring countries, leadership and collaboration styles are strongly influenced by a unique cultural, historical, and socio-economic context. Entrepreneurship in the Republic of Moldova developed under the influence of complex historical, geopolitical, and economic factors, specific to a subculture situated at the intersection of Eurasian civilizations. Over the course of the last millennium, similarly to Romania, the area between the Prut and the Dniester rivers has been consistently positioned at the confluence of multiple empires and cultures: between the invasions of nomadic peoples (such as the Pechenegs and the Tatar hordes) and the successive dominations of the Byzantine, Mongol, Polish, and Ottoman Empires (11th–16th centuries), followed by the influences of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Tsarist Russia (19th–20th centuries). In the second half of the 20th century, integration into the socialist-communist system likely had the strongest impact on the formation of the entrepreneurial mindset in the former Moldavian SSR and the Romanian People's Republic [1, pp. 18–26, 2].

One of the major consequences of the communist regime was the elimination of private property and the prohibition of independent enterprises, which led to the erosion of the entrepreneurial spirit and the limitation of innovative capacities, in contrast to the dynamics of Western economies.

At present, the Republic of Moldova is situated in a complex geopolitical and economic context, positioned between the European Union and the Eurasian Economic Union, led by the Russian Federation. Obtaining candidate status for accession to the European Union represents a major strategic challenge for the domestic entrepreneurial environment, which must strengthen its competitiveness and innovation capacities in the face of a much more innovative West. According to the Global Innovation Index 2025 [3], the Republic of Moldova ranks 74th, below the global average, indicating an acute need to stimulate innovation at the level of public policies, entrepreneurial education, and organizational culture.

In this context, the present paper aims to analyze the main characteristics of entrepreneurship in the Republic of Moldova and to highlight the ways in which small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can become more innovative—both in terms of mindset and strategic approach, as

well as in processes, management systems, leadership, and the development of new products and services.

The specific characteristics of entrepreneurship in the Republic of Moldova can be summarized as follows:

1. *Predominance of a transactional approach (“bargaining”) to the detriment of win-win negotiations* oriented toward partnership and shared value.
2. *Predominantly reactive behavior*, characterized by adaptation to external changes rather than proactive planning and strategic anticipation.
3. *Orientation toward immediate results rather than innovation processes*, which limits investment in innovation processes and long-term development.
4. *Strong emphasis on personal relationships at the expense of objective-management* based on clearly defined objectives and formal planning.
5. *High level of flexibility and resilience*, often accompanied by a positive attitude and humor even under difficult economic conditions.
6. *Hierarchical organizational structures with centralized decision-making*, which reduces employee autonomy and initiative.
7. *Prevalence of indirect and informal communication, to the detriment of active, planned communication* oriented toward clarity and results.

1. Predominance of the transactional approach (“bargaining”) to the detriment of win-win negotiations

This trait reflects the tendency of Moldovan entrepreneurs to approach economic relationships in terms of competitive negotiation, where each party seeks an immediate advantage rather than long-term cooperation. The origin of this entrepreneurial trait can be associated with the shortage economy of the Soviet period, as well as with a traditional commercial culture based on prudence and distrust toward partners and institutions. There are also deeper roots linked to the mentality of the itinerant merchant, formed during the medieval period, when numerous localities bore the designation *târg* or *market/square* in English (for example, Târgu

Mureş, Târgu Neamţ, Târgovişte, or the former names Târgu Lăpuşna and Târgu Sărăţii in the territory of today's Republic of Moldova) [4]. The term *târg* originates from the Old Slavic *trǫgŭ* (Bulgarian *търз*, Serbian *trg*) and referred to a *square* or public *commercial space*. This suggests an economic mindset centered on direct negotiation and oriented toward obtaining immediate advantage on the place we are rather than building long-lasting economic relationships. Even though many of these geographical names have been preserved only as cultural vestiges, the “marketplace mentality” continues to manifest itself in contemporary entrepreneurial behavior.

At the same time, in the Eurasian space, there is a noticeable tendency toward the individualization of space and property, visible even in the delimitation of homes, yards, and public spaces by high fences and barriers (in contrast to the West). This cultural particularity reflects an orientation toward protecting one's own “square” — a metaphor for economic thinking limited to personal interests and the preservation of existing advantages, which can restrict the exploration of new opportunities and innovative cooperation.

Although commercial activity and “bargaining” represent legitimate forms of the market economy, an approach based exclusively on short-term transactions and immediate profit can limit the creation of strategic partnerships, the development of collective innovation, and sustainable investments. Moreover, an economy predominantly oriented toward trade, especially imports, generates dependence on external partners and reduces the internal capacity to create added value, affecting the long-term competitiveness of the domestic entrepreneurial environment.

This trait reflects the tendency of Moldovan entrepreneurs to approach economic relationships in terms of competitive negotiation, where each party pursues an immediate advantage rather than long-term cooperation. The origin of this behavior can be associated with the shortage economy of the Soviet period and with a culture based on distrust toward partners and institutions. In the long term, this approach limits the creation of strategic partnerships, shared innovation, and long-term investments.

In this context, the application of modern collaboration and win-win negotiation models becomes essential, as they emphasize the identification of common interests and the creation of shared value. Among the relevant models is the Harvard Negotiation Model [5], centered on the

principles of constructive communication, separating the person from the problem, and orientation toward objective criteria.

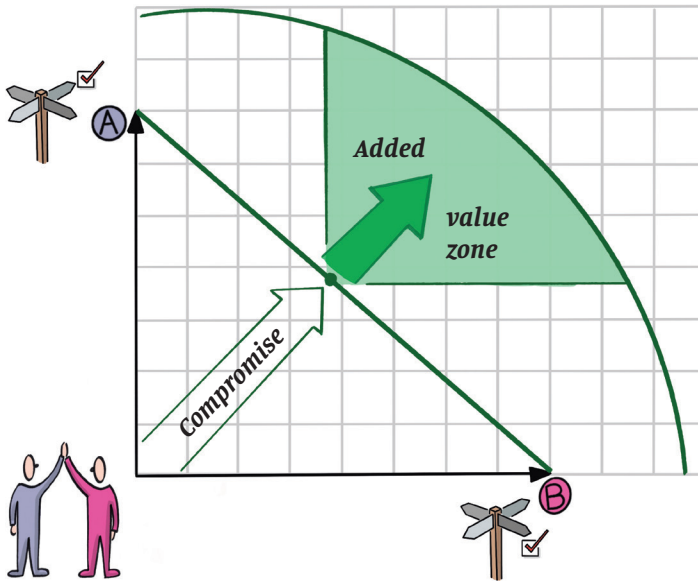


Figure 1. The bargaining line - moving out of the compromise zone into the added value zone

Source: ZWEIFEL, St. *Doppelter Sieg: Erfolgreich Verhandeln ohne Verlierer. Praxis-Handbuch für Mehrwertverhandlungen mit dem Roots-to-Fruits-Verhandlungsmodell*. Worben: Zweifel Business Empower, 2024, p. 19

A contemporary example of this paradigm is the concept “Roots-to-Fruits,” developed by the Swiss author Stefan Zweifel [6, p. 19], which proposes a systemic approach to the negotiation and conflict resolution process. The model encourages entrepreneurs to move beyond a “haggling” mindset focused exclusively on price compromise or immediate advantages and to concentrate on discovering new ideas, opportunities, and innovative solutions in collaboration with partners (Fig. 1). By adopting such win-win models, entrepreneurs can transform the negotiation process from a transactional competition into a framework for the co-creation of added value, which fosters trust, strategic partnerships, and the sustainable development of the business environment.

2. Predominantly reactive behavior

Another distinctive characteristic of entrepreneurship in the Republic of Moldova is the tendency toward reactive behavior rather than proactive behavior, manifested in a predominant focus on addressing current problems at the expense of strategic planning and action. This trait largely derives from the “haggling” mentality described earlier, which favors immediate reaction to external stimuli and uncertainties rather than proactive and anticipatory thinking.

In an unstable and competitive economic environment, many entrepreneurs are forced to engage in diverse activities, often unrelated to their core competencies, pursuing only minimal profit or even survival. This short-term orientation leads to increased trade and imports at the expense of domestic production and the creation of added value, which affects innovation capacity and reduces the competitive spirit at the national level. In this regard, it is observed that numerous local enterprises adopt a reactive pricing policy, setting rates based on market prices rather than on costs and the actual value offered. This approach reduces profit margins, makes the business vulnerable, and hinders the development of sustainable economic strategies.

According to Stephen R. Covey [7, p. 79], the difference between reactive and proactive behavior is reflected in how individuals and organizations honor commitments, manage stress, and respond to daily challenges—whether in relationships with clients, colleagues, or partners. The ability to be proactive, that is, to respond consciously and responsibly rather than react impulsively, constitutes the foundation of creativity and innovation.

In the same vein, Sebastian Văduva emphasizes that proactive individuals are future-oriented, assuming the role of problem solvers rather than seeking to assign blame or complain about circumstances [8, p. 107]. Innovative leaders are those who “roll up their sleeves” to generate solutions, continuously learn from others, and invest time, energy, and resources in their own development [8, p. 108].

Table 1. Reactive Language vs. Proactive Language

Reactive Language	Proactive Language
There is nothing I can do.	Let's look at our alternatives.
That's just the way I am.	I can choose a different approach.
He makes me so mad.	I control my own feelings.
They won't allow that.	I can create an effective presentation.
I have to do that.	I will choose an appropriate response.
I can't.	I choose.
I must.	I prefer.
If only.	I will.

Source: COVEY, R. St. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. New York: RosettaBooks, 2013. P. 81.

Therefore, the transition from reactivity to proactivity becomes an essential condition for cultivating innovative thinking and strengthening the competitiveness of the entrepreneurial environment in the Republic of Moldova. Promoting this shift in mindset can contribute to the development of an economy based on creation, initiative, and added value, rather than an economy based exclusively on trade and passive adaptation to market conditions.

3. Orientation toward immediate results rather than innovation processes

In an economic context in which efficiency, speed of delivery, and the quality of products and services become key determinants of competitiveness, numerous enterprises in the Republic of Moldova display a predominant orientation toward achieving immediate results, at the expense of investment in innovation processes. Such an approach limits the potential for sustainable development, as the emphasis on short-term gains discourages continuous improvement and the adoption of modern process management practices. In this regard, a process-oriented approach and process optimization represent a promising innovation strategy that can support domestic enterprises in reaching performance levels characteristic of countries with competitive economies. Investments in the analysis,

restructuring, and digitalization of business processes are essential for SMEs and large companies in the Republic of Moldova to compete effectively on the international market.

Thus, if enterprises aim to attract more competent employees, improve product quality, optimize costs, and build customer loyalty, it is necessary for them to focus on internal processes—from production and logistics to sales and after-sales services. The measurement and continuous improvement of these processes become the foundation of organizational performance.

With the accelerated development of digital technologies and artificial intelligence, small and medium-sized enterprises today have access to numerous tools that facilitate process optimization and operational automation, such as AirTable, Odoo, AmoCRM, ClickUp, GanttPRO, or Altego.io. These platforms enable integrated activity management, efficient team coordination, and better control over performance indicators, including remotely. At the same time, the adoption of Kaizen or Lean Production models and tools, established in Japan and later adapted in Western economies, represents an increasingly relevant direction for Moldovan entrepreneurship [9]. These methods promote continuous improvement, waste elimination, and the active involvement of employees in organizational innovation processes.

The major challenge lies in the fact that these approaches require time, patience, discipline, and teamwork, with their results manifesting gradually rather than immediately. Nevertheless, the long-term benefits are significant: reductions in time and material losses, improvements in product quality, decreases in defects, and optimization of operational costs. In a context marked by rising prices for raw materials, labor, and services, investment in efficient processes becomes not merely a strategic option but a condition for survival and competitiveness for SMEs in the Republic of Moldova.

4. Strong emphasis on personal relationships at the expense of objective-based management

One of the major impediments to the economic and entrepreneurial development of the Republic of Moldova is the excessive dependence on personal relationships, manifested through *cumătrism* (godparent-based favoritism), nepotism, and other forms of informal favoritism. These prac-

tices are not specific only to the Moldovan business environment but are also widespread across much of the Eurasian space, affecting the ability to attract foreign investment, develop innovation, and compete on international markets. In such contexts, personal relationships “resolve” a large share of the obstacles encountered in business management, both in dealings with commercial partners and in interactions with local authorities. These “shortcuts” generate tolerance toward incompetence, compromise the quality of products and services, facilitate the attainment of unethical commercial advantages, allow errors to be concealed, and stimulate illegal practices. Rather than supporting sustainable organizational development, such approaches perpetuate a vicious circle that undermines professionalism, meritocracy, and innovation.

Of course, good relationships constitute valuable organizational capital; however, they must be built on a professional foundation: clear rules, transparent norms, objective criteria, and measurable goals. Only in this way can relationships become a catalyst for performance and innovation, rather than a substitute for strategic management. At the same time, local entrepreneurial practice highlights a significant cultural difference: Moldovan society functions predominantly as a “culture of speaking and shame,” whereas Western economies are based on a “culture of writing and objectives.” In the domestic environment, action often precedes planning, and decisions are made intuitively rather than on the basis of clearly defined goals. By contrast, the fundamental function of professional management is planning, and high-performing organizations build their success on its rigor. This principle, grounded in Japanese KAIZEN practice and Western approaches (Total Productive Maintenance, Lean Production, Total Quality Management, etc.) [10, pp. 114–118], guides us toward the next stage of growth progression:

- *We plan by writing*
- *We write in order to measure*
- *We measure in order to analyze*
- *We analyze in order to improve*
- *We improve in order to achieve performance*
- *If we are performant, then we grow*
- *And growth should lead us to excellence*

In this line of reasoning, entrepreneurs who plan and analyze in writing develop the capacity to be performant, innovative, and excellence-oriented. Going through the planning process subsequently facilitates all other managerial functions — organization, leadership, and control [11, p. 26] —thereby strengthening enterprise maturity and the development of a professional management culture. Thus, promoting a culture of writing, rigorous planning, and objective-based management represents essential steps toward the emergence of an innovative organizational culture and the enhancement of the competitiveness of enterprises in the Republic of Moldova.

5. High level of flexibility and resilience, often accompanied by a positive attitude and humor

According to Daniel David's monograph *The Psychology of the Romanian People*, the psychocultural traits of Romanians—largely similar to those of the population of the Republic of Moldova—highlight a high capacity for adaptation in contexts lacking clear systems and procedures. Although strategic planning is often deficient, the level of flexibility and the ability “to manage” or “to get by” remain remarkably high [12]. In relation to the historical and geopolitical evolution of Moldova and later the Republic of Moldova, the population has frequently been exposed to situations of crisis, instability, scarcity, or sudden changes in the socio-economic context. Consequently, local society has developed robust adaptive mechanisms focused on the efficient use of available resources, the identification of rapid solutions, and constructive improvisation when conditions require it. These mechanisms have fostered the consolidation of traits such as resilience, flexibility, and adaptability—essential elements for contemporary entrepreneurship, especially in post-pandemic conditions and in the context of increasingly frequent geopolitical fluctuations.

This adaptive potential, often complemented by humor and a positive attitude toward difficulties, can become a significant catalyst for the development of an innovation-oriented culture capable of responding more effectively to customer needs, partner requirements, and transformations in the external environment.

6. Hierarchical organizational structures with centralized decision-making

Entrepreneurship in the Republic of Moldova is largely characterized by organizational structures with traditional hierarchies, in which lines of authority are clearly delineated and the decision-making process is concentrated at the top management level [2, p. 215]. In such centralized models, the “boss” assumes the primary role in defining direction, setting priorities, and approving strategic decisions. Although this approach may bring benefits such as speed in decision-making and tighter control over operations, it often generates negative side effects: excessive bureaucracy, structural rigidity, and the limitation of individual initiative [2, p. 215]. Moreover, centralized decision-making inhibits employee creativity, as employees often feel excluded from innovation processes and deprived of influence over the activities they carry out.

In many organizations, managers base their authority on experience and tenure, consulting subordinates only occasionally while retaining the final decision for themselves [2, p. 215]. In this framework, risk-taking becomes minimal: management avoids delegating responsibilities, and lower-level employees avoid initiative for fear of making mistakes or from the belief that decisions will come “from above” anyway. This vicious circle often leads to internal tensions, culminating in reproaches such as “employees do not think” or “they lack initiative,” even though the system itself limits the possibility for initiative to manifest. Maintaining a hierarchical structure is natural in many organizations; however, its effectiveness depends on leaders’ ability to delegate responsibilities, properly empower employees (through training, access to resources, autonomy, and continuous support), and recognize their own professional limitations. Mature and high-performing leaders are those who, in times of crisis, admit when they do not know a solution and choose to collaborate closely with their teams to identify appropriate responses. Creativity and innovative ideas typically emerge from collaborative processes: structured discussions in meetings, group work, active communication with stakeholders, brainstorming sessions, team-building activities, and regular meetings oriented toward learning and continuous adaptation. The development of such practices can transform organizational culture from a rigid, pyramidal one into a culture oriented toward participation, shared responsibility, and innovation.

7. Prevalence of indirect and informal communication to the detriment of active communication

The dominance of a predominantly indirect and informal communication style [2, p. 216], associated with reactive entrepreneurship and oriented toward occasional verbal interactions, significantly limits the time and attention devoted to active and high-quality organizational communication. This tendency manifests itself in the absence of regular meetings dedicated to planning processes, problem analysis, solution identification, and the clarification of priorities, both in relation to current challenges and to the long-term development of the enterprise. In such organizations, the main catalyst of company development—namely systematic feedback and continuous growth—is missing.

Within such organizational cultures, information is often transmitted in a fragmented manner—through sporadic phone calls, hallway conversations, or chance encounters. Even if certain results are achieved in terms of sales, investments, or partnerships, the cost of these achievements is often disproportionately high, reflected in relational tensions, conflicts, reproaches, and difficulties in accountability. Moreover, there is a systematic avoidance of constructive confrontation, a lack of open feedback, and direct consequences for the quality of internal coordination and innovation capacity. Any company requires a critical level of active communication to sustain organizational dynamics and anticipated growth. This necessity can be metaphorically compared to the “laser effect” (Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation), in which a minimum critical energy is indispensable to generate a coherent and amplified emission of light. Analogously, effective communication—even supported by minimal but consistent effort—can enhance internal coherence, align teams and management, improve process organization, and strengthen the unity, efficiency, and creativity required for innovation within SMEs.

Conclusions

Analyzing the seven aspects of entrepreneurship in the Republic of Moldova, as well as in Romania, we can state that we represent a Eurasian subculture oriented more toward verbal communication, focused more on people than on clearly defined objectives and processes, and acting more reactively than proactively. Thus, in order to become more innovative and to develop a culture oriented toward creative problem-solving, action is required in the following directions:

- It is necessary to adopt and develop win-win partnerships in relations with the state, customers, suppliers, and employees, in order to move out of the “market box” and into the sphere of added-value opportunities.
- The analysis highlights the imperative need for a transition from a reactive entrepreneurial model to a proactive one, oriented toward innovation and strategic development. Adopting a mindset focused on initiative, anticipation, and value creation can accelerate the shift from an economy predominantly based on trade and passive adaptation to one capable of generating products, services, and processes with high added value. In this sense, proactivity is not merely an advantage, but an indispensable strategic element for the sustainable evolution of the entrepreneurial sector and for its integration into a modern and competitive economic context.
- Orienting entrepreneurs toward innovation processes represents a major challenge, as such approaches require time, patience, discipline, and teamwork, with results manifesting gradually rather than immediately. Nevertheless, the long-term benefits are significant: reduced time and material losses, improved product quality, fewer defects, and optimized operational costs. In a context marked by rising prices for raw materials, labor, and services, investment in efficient processes becomes not only a strategic option but a condition for survival and competitiveness for SMEs in the Republic of Moldova.
- Cultivating written, verifiable, and measurable planning, as well as implementing rigorous, objective-based management, represents a central element in organizational maturation and in building an

entrepreneurial culture oriented toward excellence and innovation. Strengthening these practices can substantially contribute to increasing the performance and competitiveness of enterprises in the Republic of Moldova.

- The qualities of rapid adaptation, adaptability, and flexibility, often complemented by humor and a positive attitude toward difficulties, can become a significant catalyst for the development of an innovation-oriented culture capable of responding more effectively to customer needs, partner requirements, and transformations in the external environment.
- Promoting collaboration and active communication within enterprises acts as a catalyst for creativity and innovation, facilitating the transition of organizations from rigid structures to participatory cultures oriented toward responsibility and continuous development.
- Overcoming informal and fragmented communication and establishing active, regular, and feedback-oriented communication represent essential conditions for internal coherence, accountability, and innovation in enterprises in the Republic of Moldova. Just as the “laser effect” requires a critical energy threshold to generate coherence and amplification, organizations likewise need a minimal but constant level of structured communication to enhance their efficiency, unity, and capacity for sustainable development.

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