



Accelerate Innovation? Change Your Velocity

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When velocity is constant - acceleration equals zero

Acceleration is one of those terms that is often taken for granted in today's business environment. As a gentle reminder, the definition of acceleration is a change in velocity over time. A major disconnect in corporate external innovation groups (that is, groups responsible for identifying innovations to solve their unmet needs that lie outside their corporate walls) is that they typically - and mistakenly - expect to accelerate innovation while maintaining constant internal organizational velocity in the form of resources, infrastructure, organizational support, budget, etc.

Groups seeking to rapidly change their external innovation velocities can do so through honest self-assessment of their internal capabilities, and subsequent selection of the proper resources, information management tools and collaboration models to build the sustainable external innovation organization that works best for them.



External innovation groups seldom receive adequate internal resourcing to effectively drive enough innovation initiatives to be sustainable



Ask yourself if the current-state of your external innovation organization possesses the following characteristics:

- Managerial support for external innovation is variable;
- Resourcing is often allocated on a “percent of time” basis - not fully dedicated or supported in external innovation as a sole business function;
- Ownership of external innovation processes is often informal and *ad hoc*;
- Budgets for external innovation are divided across several cost centers;
- The informational infrastructure that external innovation organizations rely upon is fragmented, outdated and generally inaccessible to search/analysis (MS Office documentation, Sharepoint archival, etc.).

Honest self-assessment is the required first step in growing a world-class internal innovation organization

Once you have addressed the preliminary questions defining the current-state of your external innovation organization, turn your attention to the aspects of your innovation velocity which may require some catalysis in order to *change* and ask:

- Do we have the commitment across the highest levels of the organization to establish and maintain a world-class innovation organization?
- Do we have the people we need with the skills and support to make an innovation organization flourish?
 - Are they knowledgeable about both our technical and business requirements to be able to properly define and address our unmet needs in the marketplace?
 - Are they willing to proudly adopt a "not-invented-here" mentality in order to champion external solutions through an organization?
 - Are they accountable for identifying, championing and developing external innovations through the organization as their primary business role?
- Do we have the required information management infrastructure in place to make complex external innovation processes more transparent, reproducible, and sustainable?
 - Ideation (Internal and/or External)
 - Identification (Scouting Technologies and Developing Ecosystems)
 - Outreach (Campaigning)
 - Management (Project Progression - phase-gate or waterfall)
 - Communication (Dashboards, Relationship Mappings, etc.)

Take the next - BIG - step: commit the resources



So you've considered the current-state of your external innovation organization and you've identified opportunity areas for the agents to change your external innovation velocity. Now commit to laying the foundation that will empower your external innovation organization.

- Identify the right people:
 - Whether they are internal or external to your current organization, go get the people with the right technical expertise, soft-skill sets and desire, and know-how to get these jobs done;
 - Problem Definition
 - Solution Identification
 - Proposal Management
 - Collaboration Agreement
 - Project Management and Handoff
- Fully enable those people to succeed in their roles:
 - Make them accountable - work together on setting appropriate and clear organizational goals;
 - Evaluate and reward them accordingly - keeping in mind that external innovation initiatives are not for the risk-averse, and there will likely be a lot of frog-kissing to get to the right collaboration partners;
 - Let them drive the process of building the right information management infrastructure and collaboration models required by your organization to achieve critical mass and sustainability for the long haul.

Build the information management infrastructure

Information management is at the heart of unlocking external innovation: from defining the unmet need to be solved for, through identifying the underlying technologies that represent potential solution pathways and evaluating that ecosystem of potential solvers, to establishing and maintaining your key collaborations as part of an overall innovation portfolio; with appropriate communication and reporting capability to keep the upper-levels of your organization apprised and in agreement. Here's what your external innovation organization will want to consider in the development of those platform(s):

- Choose the innovation platform(s) that will best align with your current- and future-state information infrastructural requirements;
- If choosing multiple platforms - make sure they are integrated to seamlessly communicate with each other:
 - Ideation flows smoothly into identification;
 - Identification generates appropriate outreach targets;
 - Successful outreach creates a pipeline of collaborations to manage;
 - Communication toolkits tie the whole package together for seamlessly reporting laterally and upwardly through an organization.
- Ensure that all value-added data (IP and peer-reviewed literature, internal technical and marketing documentation, financial data, business profiling, networking databases, etc.) required by the innovation organization is accessible by the platform(s) of choice; and that it is both searchable and visually analyzable;
- Seek platforms that are actively incorporating artificial intelligence and machine learning to assist in identifying non-obvious and/or adjacent solutions to unmet needs.



Build the collaboration models that are appropriate for your organizational innovation maturity



Whether you are committed to a fully self-sufficient innovation organization, exclusively managing an outsourced innovation organization, or some blended model of the two, be sure to consider the collaboration models that will best fit your external innovation organization's current- and future-states. You can think of these collaboration models in the following ways:

- DIFM - Do It For Me
 - For areas completely outside our internal areas of expertise or for sensitive areas which require anonymity, identify the appropriate innovation partners to progress your initiatives outside your organizational constraints
- DIWM - Do It With Me
 - Identify innovation partners who share your organizational competencies and can complement/augment your internal resources. Seek synergies to not only increase your organizational innovation bandwidth, but to also broaden your internal innovation resource capabilities through acquired knowledge
- DIY - Do It Yourself
 - Full-blown internal capability - from capturing organizational needs, to preparing technical briefs, identifying appropriate innovation partners, establishing working partnerships to bring solutions to unmet needs to the marketplace.

Conclusion

Rapid changes in external innovation velocities can be achieved through honest self-assessment of current-state internal capabilities, and subsequent selection of the proper information management platforms and collaboration models. Look for information management platforms and collaboration innovation partners who demonstrate knowledge and capability in all aspects of external innovation - agnostic of business vertical, who are at the cutting edges of informational, technological and collaboration marketplaces.

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