

## Collaboration, performance and managing for innovation

### What's the connection?

A new survey<sup>1</sup> highlights the importance of training staff to collaborate. Collaboration is fundamental to any organization trying to improve its innovation performance whether this is in the form of 'breakthroughs' or at the level of continuous improvement. The survey "set out to determine;

1. How successful organizations are in meeting the challenge of eliminating hierarchies, titles and silos to work collaboratively and,
2. How well organizations support project leaders and team members so they can deliver their fullest potential and improve project and organizational performance."

The conclusions, while not specifically directed at innovation management practices per se, are interesting in light of their implications for the choice of management practices which contribute to 'getting the most from their projects and resources'; i.e. encouraging innovation or change.

The major findings from the survey are that;

1. Organizations, in fact, do not work collaboratively, despite the value that they realize would come from better teamwork,
2. Rigid work structures within companies keep people from working together,
3. Organizations are not investing in the right mix of skills training.

Further conclusions are that collaborative teaming is evidently not used consistently and is hindered because of hierarchy and a work structure which focuses on a project sponsor, the project, or the team with little interaction 'between project roles'. The need for strong communication skills is 'essential to collaboration'. People working on projects need to have a combination of business and technical skills to achieve successful change but 60% of organizations do not provide the proper training. Best practices for collaboration are noted;

- 1) Model collaborative behavior, starting at the executive level.
- 2) Develop unique relationship-building practices customized to your business environment.
- 3) Ensure employees have the skills of collaboration.
- 4) Support a sense of community.
- 5) Assign leaders who are both task- and relationship-oriented.
- 6) Build on existing relationships.
- 7) Assign distinct roles to team members.
- 8) Provide individuals with autonomy over discrete pieces of the project.

Several of these practices relate to the same management practices confirm earlier findings found in highly-innovative companies which have been researched by W&P.

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<sup>1</sup> ESI International Inc., recent survey in Canada with 895 respondents (August to September 2011), entitled 'Tearing Down the Walls, Blocking Collaboration and Better Business Performance'. ESI's stated objective is 'Helping clients drive results through contract and project management learning solutions.

The ESI International Inc. survey supports the opinion that, of the 25 Factors most commonly practiced by highly-innovative companies, eight Factors are directly related to collaboration. Collaboration encourages or, if absent, discourages innovation within a corporation. These are noted in red on the following list of 25 Factors<sup>2</sup>.

Factor Number	Factor Description	Innovation management practice theme			Impact on Collaboration
		Leadership	Day-to-day management and organization	Idea Management	
	Each Factor is primarily related to one of three management themes – as earlier published by W&P. The Factors which impact collaboration as noted with an ‘x’ in the last column. Those marked in red are the Factors which are noted in the recent ISL survey.				
F#1	Emphasis on short-term versus long-term profits	x			
F#2	Extent to which management explicitly looks for innovation	x			x
F#3	Tolerance of mavericks			x	x
F#4	Degree to which planning emphasizes rationing resources or identifying opportunities	x			x
F#5	Tolerance for failure			x	x
F#6	Emphasis on management of people and their interactions		x		x
F#7	Use of career ladders and recognition of innovators				
F#8	Tolerance of variance from the corporate norm			x	x
F#9	Tolerance for risk in the planning process	x			
F#10	Degree of formal communication in the organization		x		x
F#11	Use of independent work groups		x		x
F#12	Degree to which management decisions are made with input from the rest of the organization		x		x
F#13	Formality of decision process		x		x
F#14	Availability of reward mechanisms for innovation			x	x
F#15	Planning orientation versus action orientation		x		
F#16	Attitudes towards merger, acquisitions, joint ventures, divestiture				
F#17	Management’s expectations regarding loyalty to the company versus personal development				
F#18	Decentralization versus centralized hierarchy		x		x
F#19	Availability of resources (budget, time, etc.) for new ventures			x	
F#20	Staff versus line involvement in the decision process		x		x
F#21	Ability to retain innovators	An outcome of innovation			
F#22	Extent to which management has an innovative tradition	An outcome of innovation			
F#23	R&D budget levels versus the competition			x	
F#24	Perception of innovation as increasing or decreasing	An outcome of innovation			
F#25	Degree to which employee organizations encourage innovation				

<sup>2</sup> For background information on the 25 Factors, please reference <http://www.corporateinnovationonline.com>

Our own research into the management practices of highly-innovative corporations, however, indicated that a number of other Factors – i.e. management practices – have an impact on innovation and also on collaboration.

- Tolerance for mavericks
- Degree to which planning emphasizes rationing resources or identifying opportunities
- Tolerance for failure
- Use of career ladders and recognition of innovators
- Tolerance of variance from the corporate norm
- Degree to which management decisions are made with input from the rest of the organization
- Availability of reward mechanisms for innovation

Corporate innovation is directly dependent the ability of an organization to collaborate – to generate and share innovative ideas. Trust, built on tolerance, is an essential element to collaboration and to innovation.

The connection to innovation is clear. Corporate innovation, where ideas must be shared to be nourished, is heavily dependent upon collaboration. Cutting out organizational rigidity, silos, and improving communications are all characteristics of highly-innovative corporations. Collaboration, itself, is the result of a myriad of management practices and decisions which impact short and long-term attitudes within any organization.

To test whether your own organization has the management practices which encourage collaboration, you can take the survey at;

<http://www.corporateinnovationonline.com/calibrate-your-corporate-culture/>

Thirteen of the 25 Factors – management practices – impact collaboration.

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