

Innovation Executives: Who NOT to Put in Charge

Author : Michael Glessner

Date : August 24, 2016



I just hung up from a call with a colleague in which we were planning how to bring up a difficult topic at tomorrow's client meeting regarding **innovation**. It is surprising how often this situation occurs in consulting work. This time the root of the situation may be traced to an observation **Vijay Govindarajan** and **Chris Trimble** made in their book ***The Other Side of Innovation***, regarding the characteristics of successful innovation executives. Many executives responsible for **innovation** have worked their way through both product development and operations jobs. They were likely viewed as successful in their previous positions, often due to the results they created. Over the years this success has fed on itself and they now identify with and successfully drive toward results in all their assignments. On the surface, this sounds like a great person to lead **innovation**. But in reality, this is one of the last people you want responsible for innovation efforts within your company. Managing innovation effectively is a different game than managing typical business operations. In our client meeting tomorrow we will ask difficult questions about current **innovation** efforts and surface some key issues. What makes this conversation so difficult? I believe the root cause is that this "wrong" executive is not seeking to promote structured learning, nor is the executive concerned with seeking the truth about their current innovation efforts. Instead, they are most concerned about how their team's current innovation work will be perceived by other operational executives and whether this executive will meet previously established goals. This is a very depressing and stifling situation for those involved within the "wrong" executive's organization. Individuals working within this environment see the dynamic and understand the situation and reality quite well. They often know in their hearts the best way to create shareholder value is to surface a key issue quickly, and they also realize that such a move is a big gamble for them personally. If they are just a few years from retirement, a comfortable retirement, the option to raise the issue does not seem as attractive as just letting it go. *No one gets fired for not raising the issue.* What would you do in this situation?

This dangerous environment is the direct result of the management style of the "wrong" executive, and it is not the healthiest way to promote maximum shareholder value creation from **innovation**.

The "right" **innovation** executive is typically a humble individual who seeks the truth, advocates structured learning, and often works within a very different incentive structure from operations executives. This individual promotes rapid learning within their teams and constantly challenges

innovation professionals to refine their plans, assumptions, and causal relationships. Such an **innovation** leader wants issues raised as soon as they are discovered.

Have you expereinced similar situations? What did you do?

Originally published on November 21st, 2014

This article first appeared in www.viewpoints.io