



Accelerating Innovation



Innovation means turning ideas into sustainable value, but the innovation journey is often a near-random walk of different size steps with the occasional quantum leap through a partly unknown and shifting landscape. Many organisations have good ideas, but it takes too long for those ideas to translate into some form of sustainable value. Organisations often lack agility when faced with innovation problems and have no way of learning when mistakes are made.

Complex problems, and the legacy that remains after solving well-defined problems, means there is no single journey starting-point, path or end-point; the innovation journey is infinite in duration. The nature of the journey means that at any one point in time, there are many different factors that contribute to the pace and direction of the journey.

Accelerating innovation means increasing the pace of the journey by correcting the path as you progress, learning from mistakes and building a map of the landscape and how it might change along the way. In effect, making the innovation activities of pathfinding, navigation and exploration business as usual.

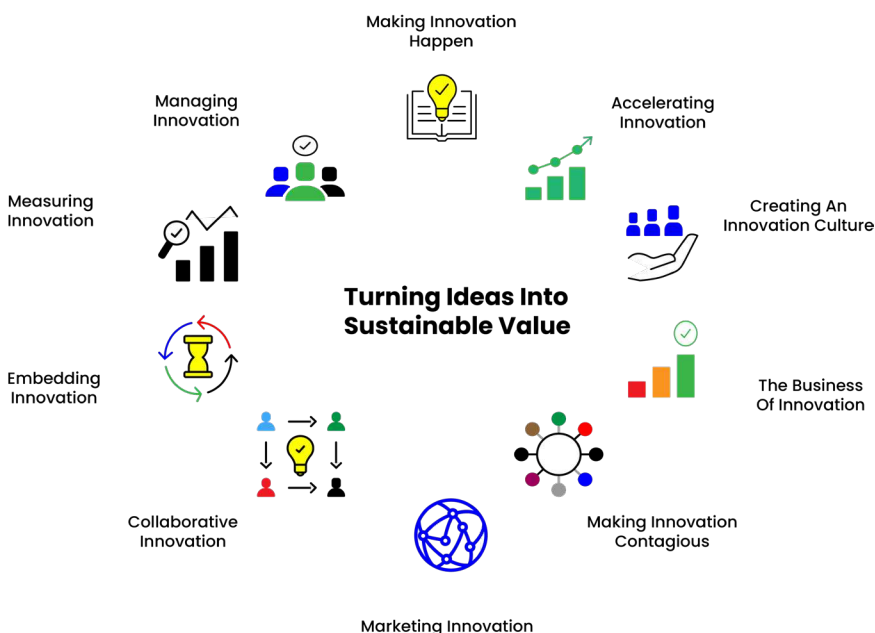
Nonetheless, making innovation happen at pace can be complex due to the mix of people, process, technology and culture. People have different perspectives and different levels of insight at any one time along their innovation journey. This diversity adds value by increasing creativity and problem solving, but makes the task of systematically accelerating innovation harder – behaviour is not always rational and nor need it be when creativity is scarce. Disruptive thinking can add immense value.

The opportunity to accelerate innovation means examining the interaction of the current mix of processes you follow, the tools used, the people involved, and organisational culture. This mix determines whether the ingredients of failing fast, organisational learning, and making innovation happen become business as usual, will accelerate or slow down the pace of innovation.

Accelerating Innovation is one of the 10 themes in the Making Innovation Happen (MIH) Framework. The MIH Framework provides a means of changing the way that people, teams and organisations look at innovation, innovation journeys, and how to systemically turn ideas into sustainable value.

The 3 Innovation Enablers

- Failing fast
- Developing an organisation learning capability
- Creating a business-as-usual innovation system



"It's important to learn from your mistakes, but it is better to learn from other people's mistakes, and it is best to learn from other people's successes. It accelerates your own success."

Jim Rohn

"An organisation's ability to learn, and translate that learning into action rapidly, is the ultimate competitive advantage."

Jack Welch



Innovation Enablers



Failing fast

Failing fast means recognising at the outset that the first iteration of developing and implementing a new product, service or process may fail. Recognising this early and taking the decision to change course is often difficult. There is an aversion to recognising the loss incurred that is based on a mindset that misses the opportunity to look at failure as a learning opportunity by stepping back, restarting at an earlier or different point and taking a different course, having learned the lessons of the failure. By failing fast and recognising early in the process where mistakes have been made, time and capital are not invested in chasing losses and not creating value from innovation outcomes. This needs openness, trust and an acceptance from the outset there will be failures along the way, thereby avoiding a blame culture.

Developing an organisational learning capability

Innovative businesses recognise that mistakes happen and there will be failures along the innovation journey – every action involves risk and failures on the journey are not just possible, but often inevitable. What matters is that organisations have a mechanism in place to learn from these mistakes. Organisations that are systematically learning and creating a culture for their employees to continually learn increase the likelihood of successful innovation. Becoming a learning organisation means encouraging people to recognise, share and own their mistakes so that the whole organisation can learn and avoid making the same mistakes again. With learning comes accountability, if mistakes are repeated and learning opportunities lost, this means that people should still be held accountable.

Creating a business-as-usual innovation system

Accelerating innovation means it must become business-as-usual; so organisations should have a robust system in place to facilitate the constant drive to create sustainable value. The mix of people, processes, technology and culture creates the environment that can unleash or throttle innovation. Some of the most valuable innovations often come about due to 'adjacent possibilities' – small steps on from the current position – a phenomenon that explains why so many similar or near-identical ideas and innovations come about from wholly independent sources at around the same time. Making innovation business-as-usual means these types of opportunities must be continually surfaced by people, and enabled using appropriate technology and processes. An innovative culture creates an environment where continuous innovation, in many more forms, becomes business-as-usual.

So What?

Many people talk about innovation as a series of "eureka moments" that lead to rapid change. But most innovation stories are just that, stories about those people who are remembered for what appeared to be creating a single spark with instantaneous ignition – but which was more often than not a series of small and unremarkable steps on a long journey of trial and error.

In reality, those credited with ground-breaking innovations were rarely the first nor were they acting in isolation. Similar or even the same ideas, tests, trials, adjustments and failures will have often already been encountered by other people, teams and organisations around the same time.

Accelerating innovation is important – as a rare capability it creates competitive advantage. Failing fast avoids chasing losses and reduces opportunity costs since changing course as you learn more saves time and money, which in turn creates new opportunities. The ability to learn fast, not just as individuals but across whole teams and organisations, also means that mistakes are not repeated – avoiding one of the most common sources of frustration for people at all levels in an organisation.

This type of journey is a reality. So recognising and accepting failure as inevitable, taking corrective action along the way and learning lessons for the future as you go, are the precursors to creating sustainable value at pace – accelerating innovation means these activities must be embedded to become business-as-usual. Fail fast, learn fast, all the time.