



Embedding Innovation



Innovation is not just a one-time event, rather it is a continuous process. An organisation that has stopped innovating will inevitably fall behind its competitors. One successful innovation or idea does not guarantee further successes in the future. There are many stories of companies that failed to embed innovation as part of their day-to-day activities and were overtaken by their rivals – Kodak and Blockbuster being famous examples. A lack of direction from the top of the organisation can stymie innovation and a lack of clarity about responsibility and ownership of innovation culture, systems and projects can make employees less motivated.

Embedding innovation so that it ‘sticks’ demands different thinking and a whole-system approach. As actors in a system, people will always have the greatest influence when it comes to innovation. Their capability to turn their ideas into value and make change is only made possible through interaction with colleagues, suppliers, customers and other actors in a complex innovation ecosystem. There are a lot of influences that affect success and whether innovation is an occasional event or embedded within as day-to-day core business.

The key is to make innovation business-as-usual by embedding it in everything that the organisation and its people do – creating the conditions where the process of continuous innovation is on a par with activities such as day-to-day management, reporting, procurement and IT support. Innovation is not a top-down activity – ideas can come from anywhere and anyone. Making innovation business-as-usual means creating a system where the mix of people, process, technology and culture systematically turn ideas into sustainable value. It also means learning from mistakes but also from successes – championing people who are willing to take a risk.

Although innovation initiatives will still fail, leaders should be advocates of innovation – championing the successes, organisational learning and taking accountability when repeated mistakes are made. This does not just mean the top executives – it also means those who have “hard” and “soft” influence when it comes to making decisions in an organisation.

Embedding 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

- **Advocating innovation**
- **Increasing value and purpose alignment**
- **Creating a business-as-usual innovation system**



Continuity of strategy does not mean innovation should stand still. As long as there is stability in the core value proposition, there can and should be enormous innovation in how it's delivered.

Joan Magretta
Understanding Michael Porter

Your first try will be wrong. Budget and design for it.

Aza Raskin, Firefox



Innovation Enablers



Advocating innovation

Many people are wary of change and can view innovation with scepticism. Embedding innovation to in an organisation needs people with real influence to act as advocate and promote its benefits for the whole organisation. This does not just mean the top executives who are often hard influencers with positions of relative power. It also means securing commitment to advocacy from soft influencers that may be anywhere in an organisation. Their influence comes from their personality, subject expertise, relevant knowledge and relationships. Soft influencers are often those that can accelerate or slow down the pace of change, irrespective of leadership intent, depending on whether they support change, are ambivalent, or resist change. Hard and soft influencers both need to advocate innovation.

Increasing value and purpose alignment

Creating an environment where there is a shared purpose and alignment with shared values will lead to more innovation. Businesses, teams and individuals can solve problems and deliver great results when they are aligned around a shared purpose. People can feel that they part of something – their efforts are making a difference. When everyone in an organisation is aligned around the same purpose and they buy in to its narrative, results begin to show. Projects succeed, deadlines are met, service improves, and customers get a great experience as part of delivering a shared purpose. This extends beyond the organisation to its customers and suppliers – few organisations can innovate entirely on their own. In a connected environment where information is formally or informally shared across a connected ecosystem of users and suppliers, a relationship built on value and purpose alignment will lower the risk of supplier switching or substitution. Shared purpose and values help embed innovation.

Creating a business-as-usual innovation system

Embedding innovation means it must become business-as-usual; so organisations must have a sustainable system in place to facilitate the constant drive to create sustainable value. The mix of people, processes, technology and culture creates an environment that can either unleash or throttle innovation. Having an innovation system in place means that organisations can constantly learn from both successes and failures. Successful organisations recognise that some of the most valuable innovations often come about due to adjacent possibilities, small steps away from existing products and services – 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. Embedding innovation and making it business-as-usual means these types of opportunities must be continually surfaced by people, with the creation of value enabled using appropriate technology and processes. This type of innovative culture creates an environment where continuous innovation, in all of its forms, becomes business-as-usual.

So What?

The most successful and innovative organisations do not see innovation as a one-time event or as an event-driven event response to a crisis. They embed it as part of their core business and put in place systems to facilitate continuous innovation. This requires a whole-system approach to innovation. Recognising that the mix of people, process, technology and culture all have an influence on innovation outcomes demands advocacy for innovation, value and purpose alignment, and creating a business-as-usual innovation system. These are essential ingredients.

But turning ideas into sustainable value as part of day-to-day business is not easy. Unintended systemic barriers to innovation can arise due to that very same complex mix and interaction of people, processes, technology and culture. Embedding innovation successfully means understanding the complex system in which innovation occurs and that innovation outcomes will always vary over time due to the varying interdependencies between the system's actors.

Ultimately, creating an innovative culture means people have the most influence when it comes to embedding innovation. What they choose to do on a day-by-day basis affects innovation outcomes, even when innovation is not the immediate priority. A business culture that empowers people to take measured risks, with guardrails to seek agreement as-and-when needed, will improve innovation outcomes and increase people's commitment to embedding innovation.