

AVOID THE VOID

INNOVATION IN ACTION 2016

This briefing paper includes key takeaways from the Innovation in Action 2016 workshop, facilitated by Sven Andrén and Shirine Bauer from Googol. The workshop included presentations and group discussions. The aim of the workshop was to examine why good ideas fail to reach the solution phase and what had been the success factor for successfully implemented innovations.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the workshop was to identify why valuable ideas often fail to develop into solutions and projects. Discussions helped identify blockers and methods to prevent good ideas from dying and help good ideas flourish.

METHOD

This workshop was based around presentations explaining the innovation process, including its preferred development and barriers. Group discussions took place in-between the presentations. The participants discussed and shared their experiences of idea “death” and survival, as well as their view on the concept development process. The outcomes were summarised and presented to the large group after each group session.

DESCRIPTION

Following the introduction of the workshop purpose was a group exercise to use lines to connect dots to get the participants creativity induced. A short movie was shown demonstrating the problem of decision makers often seeing risks over benefits when a new idea is brought to the table. The Innovation Process was presented, including the idea management steps that bring an idea from imagination to reality: idea development, concept development and product development. This was followed by three group discussions and presentations. Personal experiences were shared and discussed and consolidations of these were presented to the whole group. In the first discussion the participants had to think about why and where ideas were killed and how to stop that from happening. The workshop argued that humans were the most common idea-killers so the participants were asked to identify by whom the ideas were killed. The second discussion revolved around ideas successfully brought to the product development phase, requiring the participants to identify their common success factors.

8 Takeaways

- ◆ Changing the idea in the product development phases is costly and should be avoided
- ◆ The barrier between idea and implementation is often an individual in the organisation
- ◆ Humans are naturally afraid of risks and a new idea always involve some degree of risk-taking
- ◆ Innovators need to work closely with the teams involved with the production of the new idea
- ◆ Ideas need to be communicated carefully to decision makers, preferably using prototypes, sketches, data and a passionate presenter
- ◆ It's important to store abandoned ideas and revisit them on a regular basis
- ◆ A company should never stop innovating, regardless of size or profitability!
- ◆ Innovation processes are more successful if innovation is a natural part of the corporate culture and its reward systems

The Concept Development process (analysis, text/experimentation, proposal) was the topic of the third discussion. The participants were asked to analyse and suggest improvements to the process.

LEARNINGS AND RESULTS

The workshop demonstrated that the main blockers for innovations are conservative organisational structures and the employees with the authority to approve or disapprove the idea. They tend to be both physically and mentally separated from the idea development process and the innovation team and therefore struggle with understanding the ideas presented. In addition, humans instinctively fear risks and any innovation always involve some degree of risk-taking.

Communication is key to bringing the decision makers closer to the ideas. The people producing the end product are often reluctant to change and new ideas as it could increase their workload or put their job at risk. It is therefore important to ask for and consider their perspective early in the process. This will make them feel like their opinions are valued and it is more likely that the idea developed will be suitable and agreed on in the end. It is also important to show that the risks are being taken into consideration but that they are outweighed by the benefits. Not all ideas are good, or simply thought of at a good time, but those need to be stored and revisited on a regular basis, as they might be valuable at a different time or in a different context.

Good communication and visualisation is also important in the presentation of the idea proposal. The workshop showed that the accepted concept development proposals tended to have a well-developed proposal/business case and include something more tangible such as a prototype or sketches and data. Additionally, the person communicating the idea must be someone trustworthy and passionate. This makes it easier for the decision makers to imagine the finished product and they are more likely to accept it. Furthermore, the decision-makers need to be handpicked at best to ensure that they have authority to make that decision.

Small start-ups innovate and develop constantly as it is necessary for their survival. Large profitable corporations tend to do the opposite simply because they are not as desperate, but this eventually leads to them losing their market dominance to small, new, skyrocketing companies who focuses on the consumers needs over remaining the dominant producer of a certain product. Large organisations therefore need to remember to constantly innovate and look beyond their product and service offerings to sustain in the long run.

Innovation processes would be more successful if innovation was a natural part of corporate cultures and incitement systems in large organisations. That would prevent common problems such as the decision makers refusing to accept the idea because another team developed it, the death of an idea when handed over from one department to another, and the reluctance by employees to claim ownership of idea development. An organisation where innovation is valued tends to be more successful.