

Dispelling the innovator's dilemma: Easing the execution challenges of innovating at Peak Scientific



The pursuit of innovations has lost none of its allure. A recent survey by The Boston Consulting Group (2015) ranked innovation as being either the top or among the top three strategic priorities of senior executives representing leading global corporations. However, these executives also believe that innovation is not getting any easier and they feel less confident about their firm's innovation capabilities.

Innovating is often likened to a double-edged sword. Getting it right leads to increase in a firm's revenue, market share and competitive advantage. Getting it wrong, by contrast, leads to a struggle for survival in the face of obsolescence. In order to thrive in the age of disruption, firms require tools for successfully navigating the innovation journey.

Research by Dr Anup Karath Nair, has unearthed the organisational mechanisms that impact how innovations actually unfold within organisations. The resulting insights, which are summarised within an "innovation compass", offers guidance to managers entrusted with innovating. The "innovation compass", thus, eases the innovation challenge by equipping innovators with the practical means for navigating the innovation journey.

What's new?

Traditionally, innovation research has focussed on the 'ideational' or 'planning' aspects of innovating. This had led to a benign neglect of the 'execution' challenge that confront practitioners. The result has been a surplus of insight into how an innovation ought to happen rather than insights into the messy and dynamic processes through which innovations actually happen.

This research ignores the traditional distinction that separates the 'plan' from its 'execution' to track how innovating, in real time, unfolded. This novel approach illuminated the complex and messy processes through which innovations are brought into being along with the pattern of managerial actions that either facilitate or hinder these processes. What emerged is an "innovation compass" that allows future innovators to navigate their innovation journeys.

Why it works

The innovation compass highlights the key dynamics that confront innovation managers as they grapple with their respective innovation journeys. It does so by not only identifying the key organisational processes that drive innovation but also the overarching mechanism through which these processes are configured while innovating. The compass not only alerts managers to impending project breakdowns but also suggests options for restoring the innovation process after such breakdowns have occurred.

How are we applying it?

This research was carried out from 2013 to 2014, in collaboration with Peak Scientific Instruments, a leading provider of gas solutions for scientific applications. The resulting insights were disseminated through a series of workshops where top and middle managers at Peak were trained on how the innovation compass can be deployed to guide innovating. Between 2013 and 2016 revenue at Peak has grown by 50%. In 2016, Peak became the only Scottish-based company to win the prestigious Queen's Award for Enterprise in both the International Trade and Innovation categories.

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