Behaviors that Fuel Innovation #1: Make Commitments - The Cornerstone of Results

by Michael Glessner

The last post of this series introduced four critical behaviors that are fundamental to successful innovation execution. To understand these concepts better we will step through each one in more detail. Let’s first review what a commitment is and how it should be made.

Much of what is accomplished in business today propagates from trust between people. In order for you to do your work, you often rely on someone else to do their work first. I trust that you will finish your work so I can finish mine. In complex organizations this is the way of the world. So how can you be successful in such an environment? Use of commitments is a great technique to directly and clearly address challenges.

For our purposes, a commitment is defined as (1) a specific work product, (2) completed by someone specific, (3) by a specific time. In other words: what, from whom, by when. Frequently, individual contributors will communicate to you something he or she intends to do. Upon hearing this, you still don’t know when they expect to get it done, which is an important element for planning. Once you also know when it will be completed, you can consider it a commitment by the individual contributor. If you trust this person, that knowledge and their statement becomes very important information upon which you could plan other tasks or actions with a high degree of confidence.

For any complex project, upfront, cross-functional planning with critical dependencies identified is key to success. Commitments are important building blocks of the resulting plan. Seeking these commitments as part of this process is a key element.

I believe your personal word matters. If you say that you will finish something by the end of the day, do you? To what level will you work in order to fulfill that expectation? How far you’re willing to take it says a lot about you as a person. Most people want to fulfill their commitments, but sometimes they don’t realize that they’ve made a commitment or they don’t fully understand the work involved to finish the task. Good managers help this situation a great deal by helping project participants recognize the scope of commitments they are making or have already made. Calling the work a commitment draws attention to the “what and when” an individual is signing up to deliver. Once the individual contributor internalizes that information and accepts it, the work assignment becomes a commitment for the individual to fulfill so that he or she won’t let the team down. Individual contributors who are assigned to multiple projects need to be cautious of what commitments they make, ensuring they allow time for each commitment.

So making a commitment is as easy as declaring "I will do X by Y timeframe." The specific work is X, the specific someone is me, and the specific timeframe is Y. X, from me, by Y.

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Four Behaviors that Fuel Innovation

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Kalypso’s Innovation Results Transformation methodology relies on such behaviors along with the structured approach to bring about innovation results over extended periods of practice. Click here to learn more.

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