Chronic Problem #5: Unclear Accountability

by Bill Poston

In most companies it is difficult to identify an executive with accountability for delivering business results from innovation. Accountability gets parsed into functional roles in a sum of the parts approach to ensuring success. Given the large sums of money we spend on R&D and product development, it is almost criminally negligent that we can’t point to someone responsible for results. What would you think of a mutual fund with lots of functional leaders that did not track or report financial results?

In functionally structured companies, the business unit president or CEO would ideally have one single person accountable for results from innovation. Typically, however, these individuals are far too busy to really manage the innovation process and make day-to-day decisions. The inherently cross-functional nature of innovation that makes execution difficult is the same problem with clarifying accountability. We are just not structured that way.

The role of the Chief Innovation Officer is to bridge the gap between the technical and commercial functions within an organization. With end-to-end responsibility from idea to commercialization we have a role with the management scope to accept accountability for results. Without this accountability, innovation, and the investment we make in it, remains largely unmeasured and under-managed.

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Chronic Problem #3: Overloaded Pipeline
Chronic Problem #4: Rampant Incrementalism
Chronic Problem #5: Unclear Accountability
Chronic Problem #6: Short-term Orientation
Chronic Problem #7: Lack of Skills

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