Innovation Fallacy #4 - Innovation Cannot be Scheduled

by Bill Poston

While it is true that certain technological breakthroughs come with a high degree of schedule uncertainty, the vast majority of our innovation initiatives deal in the realm of known science. When I hear engineers say “we don’t know how long it’s going to take… could be a month, could be a year”…it sounds like a cop-out.

Every innovation initiative should have a well thought out plan based on assumptions and constraints. It is the job of the team to systematically eliminate the unknowns and narrow the range of uncertainty. This includes the variability in the development schedule itself.

Once upon a time I worked with a well-known consumer electronics company that everyone holds up as an exemplar of innovation. They launched products twice a year at major, company-produced events. The events established the deadlines and the development teams were always ready to launch.

There are a number of development methodologies that are designed to mitigate schedule risk including critical chain planning and agile development. These approaches can help, but will not replace a strong link between marketing requirements, technical feasibility, time-to-market goals, and a dedicated team.

Never underestimate the motivation of the time crunch. Invent to schedule; set time constraints; define success; and hold people accountable. Diamonds can be made with a little time and a lot of pressure.

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