Foundation for Open Innovation, Part 1: Invention vs. Innovation

by Michael Glessner

How many times have you heard from a co-worker - “I'm not a scientist or engineer; I can't innovate.” This frame of mind frustrates many forward thinking managers and stands in the way of systematic creative work, especially in technical environments. One way to address this mindset occurred to me while reviewing work by a noted innovator, David Pensak.

Let’s start with two definitions:

- Invention - discovering something new to the world
- Innovation - using knowledge that already exists in a different way

With these in mind, the role of a scientist is often to invent. If you think about it, beyond that, few others in your organization truly invent.

Yet, everyone can innovate. These definitions provide a very powerful approach to change people’s frame of mind and enable all employees to innovate and to think about innovating. Application engineers do this every day in a very practical sense. As a manager, you win when every member of your team seeks opportunities to experiment with new approaches that have the potential to improve aspects of performance.

What’s your view? Do these definitions resonate with you? Try applying them to your business and share your feedback. Part 2 of this series will cover where breakthrough ideas come from.

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What’s your view? Add your question or comment
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