Foundation for Open Innovation, Part 2: Where will breakthrough ideas come from?

by Michael Glessner

For managers of R&D or engineering, generating breakthrough ideas is a critical initiative. I believe breakthroughs will come from both invention and innovation efforts (see part 1 of this series). Interestingly, with invention, the uncertainties are much higher as this work is truly new to the world.

The prudent manager will bias efforts toward innovation by borrowing ideas from other industries or seeking points of convergence where technologies are beginning to meld together to form entirely new capabilities. For example, Phillips Electronics blended insights from video animation, sound-control systems and other disciplines to dramatically improve the customer experience of its magnetic resonance imaging devices. Why deal with the uncertainties of invention when a useful, proven approach may already exist that could be leveraged? This approach results in more predictable outcomes, and generally greater value creation.

To enable these innovative possibilities, many companies are now turning to the concept of open innovation. As coined by Henry Chesbrough, open innovation is a product or technology development model that extends beyond the boundaries of a firm in a collaborative fashion with others. This concept is a great way to turbo-charge the company’s innovative engine to find breakthrough ideas. Contributors from different organizations or industries frame problems quite differently, resulting in altered approaches and outcomes which lead to breakthrough innovation.

What’s your view? Have you experimented with open innovation in your company? What were the results? Part 3 of this series will cover techniques for managing the uncertainty of invention.

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What's your view? Add your question or comment
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