Innovation Iconoclasts

by Bill Poston

The entrepreneurial innovator is a popular archetype in the business world. I don’t even need to name names, because it is easy for you to call to mind half a dozen legendary mavericks that have revolutionized an industry by breaking the rules and creating new services, products or solutions.

The success of these iconoclastic innovators often leads large, established organizations to the idea that they need to find a similar personality type to come in and shake things up. This is generally a prelude to a spectacular crack up that will definitely shake things up, but rarely leads to the business results the company was seeking.

Recently in Forbes, Mike Maddock wrote about five common mindsets he has seen in leaders and asks what type would make the most successful Chief Innovation Officers. He believes that mavericks and orchestrators are the most likely to succeed in an innovation leadership role. These types of people are skilled and comfortable in dealing with volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity.

I think that personality type must match the organization in order to successfully effect change. In large, established enterprises the maverick may find it impossible to get things done without alienating those that are crucial to their success. Breakthrough innovation often threatens the core business in a way that must be handled carefully, and mavericks often lack the patience to deal with these realities.

Iconoclastic innovators can change the world. The ability of mavericks to get things done is very valuable. However, driving transformational change in innovation in a large corporation generally requires a more diplomatic personality type that can work through the organization, rather than tear it down. I would go with an orchestrator and bet on their ability to navigate the political environment and effect real change.

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For the past 30 years, Bill has helped executives in technology-driven industries transform their competencies to deliver results. He is a highly regarded consultant, speaker, and writer on the topics of innovation strategy, product development, portfolio management, technology commercialization, and the software systems that enable innovation. Keep up with Bill's latest research and thoughts on innovation and the rising role of the Chief Innovation Officer at www.TheChiefInnovationOfficer.com.