Become the Chief Innovation Officer? “Never in a Million Years”

by Bill Poston

One of the great benefits of taking time off over the holidays is that I have time to catch up on reading. In theory. In reality, the past month was spent equally divided between sand, snow and strat planning.

One thing I did read was the synopsis of an interview Clayton Christensen gave in December where he was asked if he would take the job of Chief Innovation Officer at a large, established company.

He said, “Never in a million years.”

He went on to elaborate that “almost all of them will prove to be wasting their time for the company, and they will fail.” That is a pretty bleak assessment of innovation in large organizations from the man that developed the theory of disruptive innovation.

Yes, it is difficult to do anything truly disruptive within an established organization, and, yes, common corporate performance metrics often work against breakthrough innovation proposals. Christensen further argues that most CEOs do not have the capacity to understand all of the processes, vectors, forces, and constraints in their companies.

To me, this makes the role of the Chief Innovation Officer even more important. Understanding the “corporate laws of physics” and influencing them across functions is one of the CINO’s primary responsibilities. The Chief Innovation Officer cannot possibly control all of these factors any more than the CEO, but he or she can dedicate the time and capacity to influencing innovation outcomes.

Christensen’s pronouncement that this difficult work, bordering on the hopeless, is not surprising. That makes the job of the Chief Innovation Officer an essential imperative, not a waste of effort.

Here is a link to the interview. It may require a subscription.


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What’s your view? Add your question or comment
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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.