Innovation Officer Responsibility #9: Develop Career Paths

by Bill Poston

The people element of innovation extends beyond nurturing culture. The Chief Innovation Officer must also take responsibility for developing innovation roles, talents, and career paths. The people that work in innovation functions should be able to define a clear path for their career that allows them to grow and continue to do the work that they love.

One of the big issues we face in innovation is that long product development cycles often mirror the average tenure of an individual’s role. That means they may serve in the same role for only one cycle before moving on to another job and leaving someone else to learn the same lessons over and over again. This job-hopping is viewed as necessary for career progression because we often cannot articulate a clear path for individuals that work in innovation.

The second challenge is that many people assigned to work in innovation are still firmly committed to their home function. The innovation project is viewed as temporary or part-time. Performance reviews and career progression are managed within the department, not the innovation function.

The Chief Innovation Officer should define roles and paths with the objective of keeping people in positions where they can be of most value while developing their talents and ensuring that there is a clear pathway for them to follow over a long-term career. The model of the brilliant engineer moved into a management role is one that has too much of a basis in reality. It is the same with the assistant brand manager that successfully coordinates a launch and is then moved into a role that has nothing to do with product development.

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