I presented on an Innovation Leader webinar a couple of weeks ago. The title was Seven Chronic Problems for Innovation Leaders to Address. Regular readers of these posts will remember that series from earlier this year. The format of the event is designed for busy executives. Fifteen minutes of presentation followed by fifteen minutes of Q&A. All done in half an hour. There were great questions, but we were not able to get to them all in the time allotted. So I’ll do my best to answer some of them here over the next few days.

The first unanswered question asked me to clarify the seemingly contradictory positions that business units should be accountable for delivering results from innovation and that companies should name a Chief Innovation Officer at the corporate level.

If you review my original series on the responsibilities of the Chief Innovation Officer you will find that there is a heavy dose of orchestration, capability building, culture nurturing and championing of innovation. In some organizations the head of innovation at the corporate level can even drive strategic innovation initiatives that may involve more than one business unit or that don’t fit neatly into an existing business. That does not mean that they are accountable for individual initiatives within business units.

I see no contradiction in having a corporate Chief Innovation Officer with accountability for improving business results from innovation and business units maintaining accountability for execution of innovation initiatives. The Chief Innovation Officer leads by influence. In most cases they lack the positional authority to dictate the shape of a business’s portfolio or to kill individual projects. What they can do is put the mechanisms in place to highlight gaps and barriers to success.

It is not an easy job, but the right person in the role can substantially increase the return on investment in innovation.

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What's your view? Add your question or comment
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