Once the innovation engine is firing on all cylinders and we have the ability to efficiently turn an idea into profits, we can open up the aperture of the front-end of the process. That means going in search of new technologies and big ideas to fuel the growth engine. This does not just happen. A disciplined capability that identifies, evaluates and incubates promising concepts requires people that have vision.

The majority of the work on the front-end of innovation should be performed within the business units. The people working in this area will be following the disciplines developed by the front-end capability leader and his team. It makes sense that those that are closest to the business would be in the best position to know what their customers want and judge what is likely to work in the future.

But housing this capability exclusively in the business units can also constrain the ambition and flexibility of these individuals. That is why it may be beneficial to supplement their efforts with a set of people that work on the front-end at the corporate level.

A small team of technology scouts and people tasked with developing and incubating concepts can lead to breakthrough innovation that may not have a home in the current structure. The scope of this team stops short of development, but they can get a concept to the stage where the corporation can decide if and how to extract value. If you are counting on real breakthroughs, this might be the right way to go.
About the Author

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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.