Using Technology Development (TD) to Unleash Your NPD

by Michael Glessner

With contributions from Joe Dury

I recently spent the day with a company whose R&D leadership was voicing concerns about their new product development (NPD) performance. Too often, projects missed scheduled gate review dates. Project teams and their executive sponsors placed the blame on a number of factors, from poor cross-functional communication to difficulty predicting needs and requirements of later phases. This result disappointed R&D management and frustrated individual contributors involved in these NPD projects - all of whom wondered how to improve things next time.

After a probing conversation with the R&D leadership team, we uncovered a key contributor to their poor performance: misdirecting technology development (TD) projects into the NPD process.

TD is typically a new-to-the-world technical challenge with a truly unknown outcome. These TD projects are fundamentally about managing uncertainty (see "Managing Uncertainty of Technology Development") rather than risk, and when these projects enter the tightly constrained NPD process, they often fail to meet time commitments. Managing these efforts in a rapid learning environment, with principle investigators systematically learning, offers the most direct path to shareholder value creation.

If you are dissatisfied with your organization's NPD performance, I strongly recommend a series of conversations with your project managers to identify elements of NPD projects today that require TD. If you are unclear how to choose the TD path, then evaluating a roadmapping methodology may help drive this activity.

In closing, rework your NPD portfolio and migrate the appropriate projects into a TD process that is designed to foster rapid learning in an R&D environment and is guided by technology roadmapping. Doing this, your teams will focus their NPD design resources on completing the remaining product developments with available technologies, develop a much more reliable NPD process, create visibility of ongoing TD work and boost morale within R&D.

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What's your view? Add your question or comment
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