

Chronic Problem #2: Lack of Alignment

by Bill Poston

Just because you know exactly what the company should be doing in innovation, doesn't mean anyone agrees with you. The Chief Innovation Officer must ensure that everyone is rowing the boat in the same direction. A lack of alignment, particularly across business units and functions, is a chronic problem in innovation.

During a recent workshop, I asked a group of executives in a large pharmaceutical company to individually write down their opinion of the appropriate allocation of R&D investment across their five business units. Not only were all of the answers different, the deviation in opinion was enormous. They had organic growth goals, but they lacked agreement on the right way to achieve those goals.

A lack of alignment across the technical and commercial functions of the organization is the most obvious example of this issue. Marketing and R&D speak different languages and tend to undervalue the contributions of each other. Getting cross-functional alignment and collaboration is the goal. Cool technology that no one wants to buy is not innovation. Neither is an unrealistic wish list of product features dreamed up by product management. These groups must work together to deliver real innovation.

A documented strategy and a clearly communicated portfolio of innovation initiatives is a good way to start the conversation and build alignment to a roadmap. Too often, a lack of alignment is a failure to understand the plan. Better communication of intent will increase the odds of driving agreement.

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[Chronic Problem #1: Lack of a Strategy](#)

[Chronic Problem #2: Lack of Alignment](#)

[Chronic Problem #3: Overloaded Pipeline](#)

[Chronic Problem #4: Rampant Incrementalism](#)

[Chronic Problem #5: Unclear Accountability](#)

[Chronic Problem #6: Short-term Orientation](#)

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