Preparing for a New Product Development (NPD) gate meeting is usually the last thing on an innovation team leader’s list of things to do, especially when typical meetings entail lengthy slide decks on the merits of projects and research studies on the risks of new products. Gate meetings often require stacks of administrative paperwork and template after template of fact and figure tracking. Most people would probably rather spend their time creating than justifying.

Gate meetings can be faster, easier and more effective. Improve the “what”, “who” and “how” of your meetings to make them less of a drain and more valuable for the organization.

What?
The time spent preparing lengthy presentations places unnecessary administrative burdens on already constrained resources. Many templates often represent the same data communicated in different ways. This redundancy of information wastes time and opens the door for error, misrepresented data, flawed decision making and eventually mistrust in the process itself.

Address the “what” by standardizing the gate review template into a simple and effective document. Limit the presentation to a subset of data to focus the meeting on key project information and critical success factors such as strategic fit, size of prize, business unit impact, technical risk and likelihood of commercial success.

Who?
Most organizations already have a governance team in place to review projects and make decisions. But just having that team in place does not result in an effective gate meeting. Successful organizations also establish an Innovation Process Manager (IPM). The IPM works with functional groups such as marketing, legal and finance to establish the deliverables due at each gate in the development process. Using this checklist, project leaders can be sure that their team has completed all necessary activities prior to the gate review with the governance team.

By working with the executive sponsor of the governance team, the IPM can ensure that all critical success factors and project details are presented in the best way, so that projects aren’t killed due to lack of information or confusion. With the IPM and executive sponsor aligned, presentation to the governance team will be more effective, transforming a long, drawn out discussion of merits to an overview of the project’s current status and needs.
How?

Once the bureaucracy and data overload are removed, teams can address how decisions are made and communicated. It is extremely difficult to accurately determine if a project merits a “go” decision when there are thirty-five metrics to discuss. To streamline decision making, keep the metrics light, using three to five critical project success measures to accurately depict:

- Strategic Alignment
- Business Unit/Platform Impact
- Size of Prize (Value)
- Key Issues – Technical, IP, Quality, etc.
- Likelihood of Commercial Success

With common attributes established, the governance team will be better equipped to understand what the project will bring to the organization in terms of revenue, market footprint, strategic gain, and likelihood of success. These measures will then be used throughout the gated decision-making process to make certain the project is delivering what was expected. When deviations from the approved plan occur, the governance team can then determine if further investment in the project is warranted. With this ability to make better decisions, the governance team can ensure the projects they approve are better positioned to have an impact on the organization by bringing new ideas to market, meeting strategic goals and achieving quick wins.

Another important factor to “how” decisions are made is pre-defined thresholds for “go”, “no-go”, and “re-scope” decisions. Leading companies eliminate the traditional option to hold a project, removing this often-used option (“cop out”). If a project is given a re-scope directive, decision makers must include specific action items required, including additional product testing, consumer insights studies, etc.

Once a decision has been made, the project leader should communicate it and any action items directly to the project team to ensure the new direction for the project is carried out.

Getting Started

With a light and nimble framework in place, gate review meetings are more effective and scalable. It then becomes easier to address the “what”, “who” and “how” across your innovation portfolio management process, creating more flexible success criteria and gate structures that grow and mature with the organization.

It is best to start small – by improving your gate meetings, for example – providing value early and incrementally improving capabilities as the organization matures. Kalypso’s quick start model called Nova for PPM uses a pre-defined, flexible phase gate model, complete with supporting templates and deliverables that are simple enough to provide immediate value to any organization. In a constrained environment, this “get started and get better” approach supports the end goal of moving projects through the pipeline efficiently and creating value more rapidly.