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Innovation Dream Team



Innovating takes teamwork. Properly selected teams using a facilitated systematic method will outperform ad hoc teams using divergent, less structured methods such as brainstorming. How do you create the "dream team" for an innovation project? There are three key factors: team roles, diversity, and processes.

Roles

A carefully selected team for innovation will have specific roles that can make or break it, not just during the innovation sessions, but afterward too. The most essential role, not surprising, is the leader. The team "captain" is the one who gives momentum and direction to a team in terms of *where* it will innovate. Here is the catch. The team leader must be a full participant in the innovation workshops. The leader cannot be an occasional, part time member who surfs in and out while attending other business. That shows a lack of commitment. The leader misses opportunities to reward team members and misses the sense of team direction and excitement around new ideas. The leader also plays an essential role of being the "brakes" of the group - stopping ideas that he or she knows do not fit the vision of the franchise or company. This prevents teams from wasting time on weak ideas so they can channel their ideation in more productive areas.

Another essential role is that of "innovation subversive." These people have an immense passion for the business and know how to work behind the scenes to get things done. They are champions, rule breakers, operatives - they subvert the formal organizational hierarchy to get ideas approved and adopted. They have a good eye for ideas that excite and energize senior management. While leaders are the "brakes," subversives are the "accelerators."

Diversity

Diversity is a driver of innovation. The unique backgrounds of individuals help teams be more productive and innovative. Diversity helps people see more possibilities. My observation is that it creates a different and stronger sense of group accountability. Divergent groups cause people to bring their best thinking, to behave properly, and to maintain their status in the group in a positive light. Three types of diversity are essential for dream teams: **functional, gender, and cultural (geographic)**.

Functional diversity demands that the team have representation from three parts of the business: commercial (marketing), technical (R&D), and operations (customer-centered). These three perspectives address the key questions: "Will customers want it?" "How do we make it?" and "How do we commercialize it?" Having all three groups yields better ideas, and it creates an immediate sense of alignment about which ideas are the best.

Gender diversity is essential element of Dream Teams. The ideal split is 50-50. Men and women process ideation differently, and they hold each other accountable in a different way. Without gender diversity, teams produce a larger share of uninteresting or unsupportable innovations.

Finally is cultural diversity. The best teams have representatives from different parts of the world. They bring the nuances and insights about local market preferences and norms. They broaden the team's perspective on how best to

commercialize new inventions on a global scale. Without this, teams produce a larger share of parochial, niche ideas that satisfy only one regional market.

Processes

Dream Teams use a facilitated, systematic innovation process. Team members need to train and "build muscle" to stay in shape. Teams use a combination of ideation processes as well a group management processes such as the DeBono Six Thinking Hats.

The Dream Team

For major projects, the preferred team size is 12 to 16. Here is my *ideal pick* for just about any innovation project, with equal mix of men and women from different geographies. The first four are "**advocates for the business**," the second four are "**advocates for the product**," and the last four are "**advocates for the customer**."

1. Marketing Director (franchise leader)
2. Marketing manager (planner)
3. Marketing manager (executor, "subversive")
4. Marketing manager (customer insights)
5. R&D Director (design)
6. R&D manager (functionality)
7. R&D manager (manufacturing)
8. Industrial Designer (graphic artist)
9. Sales Representative
10. Customer Service Representative
11. Customer Training Representative
12. Packaging Manager