The Innovation Game

Can You Conquer the Corporate Pyramid, and Make Innovation an Enduring Capability?

Corporate innovation is the toughest adventure in the business world. And often, innovation leaders set out on this journey solo — with a mandate from the C-suite, but no team or resources.

Success requires relationship-building, resource-gathering, and constant learning to make it past the traps and pitfalls you'll inevitably encounter.

This discussion guide is informed by conversations with corporate innovators and recent InnoLead survey data. Use it with your team and senior leaders to discuss what it will take to get to the top of the pyramid — and ensure that innovation becomes an enduring part of the corporate culture.

START ↓

The Summit

Kudos to you: you got the resources, built the capability, delivered the results, and earned the respect of colleagues up and down the org chart. No one thinks innovation is a passing fad. It's part of the company's culture and DNA.

A consistent process, methodology — and potentially standards like ISO 56001 — that make innovation perform like other parts of the company.

Report on metrics and communicate success. This is where innovation truly transforms into business impact.

Restart?
Bask in your success... until there's a revamped strategy rolled out, a merger announced, or a new CEO named. (In our survey, respondents said that the most common cause of a setback was a lack of leadership commitment or change in leadership.) Those can send you back to the start — or on to your next career adventure.

PLAY AGAIN?

The Innovation Game isn't easy, but those who master it can leave a lasting legacy.

Corporate re-orgs; resource constraints; high-profile project failures.

Level 4: Scale-up and Survival
This is often where a hand-off happens — which can be tricky! How can your team support the new offering and ensure that it has got the right resources?

If you're working on internal initiatives, focus on driving even broader engagement.

The ability to move quickly from concepts and slide decks to prototypes — and iterating to improve them. This may require new tools or outside help.

"Auxiliary Resource" Vortex
You get typecast as a team that can help others with projects they don't have time for. That scores you points, but also pulls your focus away from higher-impact projects in your own portfolio.

Delivering results on a near-term project — and communicating the impact — helps you build credibility and move faster.

Level 3: Prototyping and Piloting
Test and refine your ideas — whether for internal programs or new offerings.

Design MVPs (minimum viable products, in "lean startup" lingo) to help you validate a concept and get real feedback about whether people will buy it or engage with it.

Lack of direct access to customers and their feedback; weak pilot execution — especially around sales and marketing support.

Business Unit Amnesia
A business unit helps bring your project to market — but forgets about its origins.

Creating "lightweight" partnership agreements; building networks of colleagues who can help you identify and vet potential partners — and act as champions for getting to the next level.

Level 2: Scouting and Partnerships
Identify internal and external partners who can provide input and support.

Bureaucracy Trap
Red tape (often from Legal or Compliance) delays progress. Can you get them working with you, and brainstorming possible solutions?

Find the most relevant outside startups, consultancies, software suppliers, and academic labs who align with your objectives and can accelerate your work.

Embarking on too much scouting or partnership work, without a clear path laid out for how pilots and eventual scale-up will work.

Level 1: Laying the Foundation
Start by understanding your company's capabilities. What are the strengths and gaps in innovation?

How do colleagues describe the culture's response to new ideas?

Get aligned with the overall corporate strategy. 52% of leaders we surveyed described that as essential to long-term success.

Corporate "immune response"; leaders protecting their turf or feeling that they're already doing enough innovation.

Getting everyone to use the same language, and agree on the right metrics for tracking progress.

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Legend

Hidden Gems
As you navigate the pyramid, you may meet key allies and gather ideas for new initiatives. Tuck them in your backpack for later.

External Partners
Jump to the next level with solutions delivered via open innovation, startup collaboration, or a venture studio partnership.

Key Pitfalls

Hidden Perils

Power-Ups

Quick Wins