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CREATE A CULTURE OF INTRAPRENEURSHIP AND YOU COULD HAVE THE KEY TO INNOVATION

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Intrapreneurs behave like entrepreneurs while working within an organization — they are the dreamers armed with the necessary skills to turn their ideas into profitable business opportunities. Whether you are aware or not, you may already have several intrapreneurs in your organization, the leaders who think outside the box and know how to get things done. The question is, “How do you create the army of intrapreneurs you likely need to innovate and thrive going forward?”

The best answer is to give employees the tools and framework to successfully take their idea from a whiteboard brainstorm to implementation and create a culture of intrapreneurship.

Start by providing employees with a forum and framework for brainstorming solutions to problems. Once the problem and potential solutions have been identified, most employees will need a few skills to move their idea forward successfully: pitching their idea, assembling the right team and the fundamentals of project management.

Pitching the Idea

Many employees have great ideas but often get shut down because they don’t consider the financial impact. Gillian Muessig, CEO of Outlines Venture Group, primarily works with entrepreneurs, but she attests that the concepts for pitching your idea should be the same. Her advice is to focus on the metrics that matter and show your stakeholders they have a significant opportunity to recoup their investment in a specific amount of time. Arm employees with the metrics used to make company decisions and watch them think about their idea in a whole new way.

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Assembling the Right Team

Next, your employees will need to assemble the right team to implement their idea and budget for payroll hours. Not only that, but they may need help from leadership to identify and solicit buy-in from all the stakeholders organization-wide. It's important to ask all stakeholders, "What's the worst that could happen?" to address potential blind spots early. Often, the employee pitches their idea to a manager, who then needs to take it further up the chain. The authors who originally coined the term "intrapreneur" in a 1978 paper, Gifford and Elizabeth Pinchot, urge companies to "make sponsoring innovation a central part of the corporate culture and every manager's job."

Implementing Project Management

Train your employees on the basic principles of project management. There are countless methodologies out there (you've likely heard names like Kanban, Six Sigma, and Agile used in your industry), but it's less about which one you choose and more about using one well. At its core, project management is about three steps: set-up, execution and review. If your employees have the tools to think about their project in that context and the flexibility to pivot when things don't go as originally planned, their idea will be more likely to succeed.

Consider providing employees with a template to outline ideas, the proposed return on investment (or missed opportunity if the idea is not implemented), the needed team and resources, and planned steps for managing the project. Project managers should use a tool called a project charter to document a new project's essential information.

Knowing When to Cut Bait

Likely one of the most critical elements of creating a culture of intrapreneurship is learning from the process and "failing forward." Instruct your employees to document how and when they know it's time to cancel the project in their project charter. After the decision has been made, it's critical to debrief, discuss and document what you learned and share that information with other teams.

Not every idea will be a good fit for your business or have a reasonable return on investment in an appropriate amount of time, but if even one idea takes off, it could be a game changer for your business. I'm sure you've heard of the [Post-it® Note?](#)

References and Resources

1. Evaluating Intrapreneurs , The Pinchot Perspective. <https://www.pinchot.com/intrapreneuring/>