

Innovation teams for sustainable business growth

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This article reviews innovation teams that lead to achieving sustainable business growth.

Continuous Innovation Teams

According to Palmer and Kaplan (2017), when teams work well together they generate results that are superior to individuals working alone as there is an opportunity to bring together a variety of different skills and experiences. The researchers highlighted that management could bring together people with complementary skills. It was also management's responsibility to provide training and development to help people work in teams with managers acting as coaches to create winning teams (Harvey, Millett and Smith, 1998). The literature by these scholars indicates that there should be a system that provides equitable rewards to each member of the team as they value their membership and will be motivated to work hard to maintain it (Palmer and Kaplan, 2017). Management may encourage competition between teams and sometimes even assign the same project to two different teams to fast track the innovation process (Fischer and Montalbano, 2014).

Skunkworks

According to Quinn (1996); Tushman and O'Reilly (1999) skunkworks have emerged from time to time to create successful innovations. These scholars assert that the skunkworks approach eliminates bureaucracy, instils high group identity, permits unfettered communication, creates high motivation, and has a loose structure. The team usually has control over the resources and decisions needed to accomplish the mission. The team does have some overall budget and performance expectations but has minimal interference from upper management. In research by Clark and Wheelwright (1993) the team can determine its course and not be bound by existing procedures and practice as it runs its budget and resources and control over its procedures and process. The evidence (Foth *et al.*, 2017) is very strong that large, mainstream organizations can be extremely creative in developing and implementing sustaining innovations (Foth *et al.*, 2017). In other words, the degree of disruptiveness inherent in innovation provides a fairly clear indication of when a mainstream organization might be capable of succeeding with it and when it might be expected to fail (Foth *et al.*, 2017).

Cross-Functional Teams

The importance of cross-functional teams was seen as crucial in innovation and continuous improvement. According to Blomgpppppp7y82rqvist and Stahle (2012), teams may facilitate knowledge integration and information exchange, the development of trust and mutual learning, and this may be a way of overcoming hierarchical and spatial barriers to project success. Most research on cross-functional teams has, however, focused on the effectiveness of individual project teams, and the role of either

compositional, leadership or environmental factors (e.g. Von Stamm, 2003). Less attention has been paid to the strategic role of such cross-functional teams and, in particular, the potential for generating complementarities between cross-functional teams undertaking different activities. Some researchers argue that two activities are complementary if doing more of one activity increases the returns from doing the other (Love, Roper and Mangiarotti, 2017).

Hackathons

According to Pa *et al.*, hackathons are small teams that work together over a specified period to complete a project of interest. In their research, the scholars observed that Hackathons have become increasingly popular as a means to surface and prototype innovative and creative ideas for products, but their impact often goes beyond product innovation. Wagner (2017) says, hackathons are time-bounded events, typically of 2- 5 days, during which people gather together and form teams, each of which attempts to complete a project of interest to them. The teams are usually collocated, and often composed of people with diverse backgrounds, experience, and expertise. Employees are said to generally form teams of three to five people and work intensively, primarily to produce working prototypes of ideas that could be integrated into existing products or services as a basis for new products or services (Wagner, 2017).

Lean Innovation Management

According to Dennis Hobbs, author of *Applied Lean Business Transformation* (El-Namrouty and Abushaaban, 2013) applied lean methods are a series of scientific, objective techniques that cause work tasks in a process to be performed with a minimum of non-value-adding activities, resulting in greatly reduced wait time, queue time, move time, administrative time and other delays. Lean innovation is a powerful set of tools and techniques that many companies choose to implement and sustain as a way of increasing the efficiency of production and the overall customer value while at the same time eliminating waste. Waste is anything that does not add value but adds costs to a company. Typically, seven wastes have been identified in Lean management and these include waiting, transportation, overproduction, inventory, movement, over-processing, and rework (El-Namrouty and Abushaaban, 2013). Lean operating systems seek to identify and eliminate all non-value adding activities in design, production, supply chain management, and other activities used to satisfy customer requirements. Other scholars have indicated that lean principles should not be limited to product development, but should concern all aspects of a company's innovation efforts relevant to offering a pleasurable customer experience (Gudem, Steinert and Welo, 2014).

Effective Brainstorming

According to research by Besant (2016), brainstorming was developed by Alex Osborn to produce ideas without inhibition. Brainstorming is said to combine a relaxed, informal approach to problem-solving with lateral thinking. The scholar states that it encourages people to come up with thoughts and ideas that can, at first, seem a bit crazy. Some of these ideas can be crafted into original, creative solutions to a problem, while others can spark even more ideas. According to literature, during brainstorming sessions, people should avoid criticizing or rewarding ideas as the effort is to try to open up possibilities and

break down incorrect assumptions about the problem's limits. Judgment and analysis at this stage stunts idea generation and limit creativity. Evaluation of ideas is done at the end of the session as this is the time to explore solutions further, using conventional approaches. The major purpose of brainstorming is a solution finding a strategy to foster and enhance communication skill, help to promote thinking and decision-making skill as well as foster different viewpoints and opinions (Naser and Almutairi (2015).

Crowdsourcing

According to Zhao and Zhu (2014) crowdsourcing refers to outsourcing tasks traditionally performed within an organization to an undefined crowd, usually through an open call posted to the Internet. According to literature, crowdsourcing is similar to outsourcing, but instead of using a selected and predefined provider, the task in hand is outsourced to undefined crowds (Howe, 2006). The emergence of crowdsourcing is largely attributed to technological advances, especially in the digital domain, which has made advanced tools. Crowdsourcing applications are found in very different fields, ranging from small routine tasks to design services, science, public policymaking, and mining equipment innovations (Howe, 2006).

My Research findings

In a recent 2020 research, I found the following as highlighted in the table below. The sample size was 300 with a 90% response rate.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness
Effective Brainstorming	271	4.0849	1.03109	-1.274
Cross Functional Teams	271	4.0590	.89247	-.872
Continuous Teams	271	4.0480	.87003	-1.215
Lean Innovation Management	271	3.9225	.80593	-.714
Hackathons	271	3.7343	.93268	-.633
Crowdsourcing	271	3.5387	.99134	-.556
Skunkworks	271	3.5203	.90603	-.046
Valid N (listwise)	271			

Findings

All forms of innovation teams researched had mean scores of above 3.5 which is far greater than 3, negatively skewed and significantly differ with 3 ($p < 0.05$).

Discussion

From the findings above it was agreed that continuous teams, effective brainstorming, lean innovation management Continuous Innovation Teams were important in achieving sustainable growth. This is supported by Palmer and Kaplan (2017) who says that when teams work well together they generate results that are superior to individuals working alone. Blomqvist and Stahle (2012) confirmed that cross-

functional teams facilitate knowledge integration and information exchange, the development of trust and mutual learning, and maybe a way of overcoming hierarchical and spatial barriers to project success. El Namrouy and Abushaaban (2013) agreed that lean innovation was a powerful set of tools and techniques that organisations can choose to implement and sustain as a way of increasing the efficiency of production and the overall customer value while at the same time eliminating waste. Besant (2016) also agreed that effective brainstorming encourages people to come up with thoughts and ideas that can be useful to the success of the organization.

The table below shows a Conceptual Framework of Various Innovation Teams for Sustainable Business Growth

Independent variable	Mediating variable	Dependent
Continuous teams →	Management commitment Flexible budget	Sustainable business growth
Skunkworks →	Digital platforms Skilled personnel	
Cross-functional teams →	Teamwork Open leadership	
Hackathons →	Committed leadership Deliberate Budget	
Lean innovation management →	Cost structure Committed team	
Effective brainstorm →	Top management support Open communication	
Crowdsourcing →	Internet Connectivity Digital language literacy	

Source: Morgan Gorerino (2020)

My Research Conclusions

The researcher makes several conclusions concerning this research question as stated below.

1. The research concluded that effective brainstorming was essential in achieving sustainable business growth. This would allow ideas to be generated by the employees themselves rather than management only and in the process motivating them. This innovation taps into vast knowledge and experience of the workforce to come up with solutions to given challenges or develop functional prototypes in terms of products. Brainstorming will allow for effective communication and promote thinking as well as decision-making capabilities. Such an approach brings out the best options that add to the customer

value proposition.

2. The research concluded that cross-functional teams were essential in achieving sustainable business growth. The various departments in the organisation need to function as one unit and do away with the silo mentality. There will be better integration of knowledge and expertise, as well as information exchange as these teams value trust and mutual learning. Functional challenges or constraints are managed at the point they are generated unleashing precious time to focus on initiatives that add to the customer value proposition.

3. The research concluded that continuous teams were important for achieving sustainable growth for the business. In this case Employees with various skill sets and experience are assembled to work together. This brings out the best of the teams as the work becomes meaningful and a high sense of responsibility is instilled among the team members. More and better results will be achieved due to the commitment to the common goal shared by each of the team members’.

4. The research concluded that Hackathons were important in achieving sustainable business growth. This was due to the small size of the teams that work together over a specified period to complete a project of interest. Valuable resources are unlocked by these teams as they come together for short periods. However, they achieve success as they are composed of people with diverse backgrounds, experience, and expertise. These teams produce working prototypes of ideas that influence existing products or become the basis for new products.

5. The research concluded that lean management was essential in achieving sustainable business growth. This innovation allows organisations to manage and eliminate waste such as waiting, transportation, overproduction, inventory, movement, over-processing, and rework to achieve a cost-effective operation. Due to the scientific nature of work design and process flow, activities that do not add value are done away with ensuring the company optimises its operations. This improves the competitiveness of the organisation in terms of price-quality as well as volumes demanded by the customer.

6. The research concluded that crowdsourcing was important in achieving sustainable business growth. This brings in different specialists that are not part of the organisation who have a third eye view as it were and are not factory blind. This allows value addition propositions to be generated with the focus being on the value the customer will derive from the innovations. The problems or challenges could be categorised in the thematic form to ensure the real issues were tackled and addressed. The products and systems would greatly improve from such interaction enhancing sustainable growth for the organisation.

7. The research concluded that Skunkworks approach was essential for achieving sustainable business growth. This innovation removes or eliminates bureaucracy, with high group identity being instilled. The loose structure makes team members commit to the set objectives as there is a high level of responsibility as well. As the team has control over its resources they can achieve better results in product design, process improvement that customers value and are willing to buy the brand.

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