

Innovation Bootcamp

Without a radical approach to the innovation process, will business ever achieve more than incremental change? So asks Dan Edwards, Senior Consultant in Sagentia's Innovation & Technology Management team in Boston. Dan believes that the majority of innovation still produces derivatives of existing products and services, which keep revenues steady but growth unspectacular. Real innovation can boost revenues significantly but requires a completely different mind-set, one in which risk is actively encouraged.

This approach needs the full backing and support of senior management who must also actively kick start innovation by enabling 'change agents' within an organisation – typically the middle management team – to run with the ball. While senior management has a key role in setting vision and direction for innovation, it is down to middle management to really make innovation happen, and where necessary to constructively challenge the senior level view.

Effecting this fundamental management change is the purpose of Innovation Bootcamp – an intensive three week, immersive experience during which a client team of managers is 'dragged through' the innovation process with an end point of pitching new ideas to senior management. 'This is not process-led learning where theory is explained and then

tried out,' explains Dan. 'Our aim is to enable the team to become emotionally engaged – to get the religion of innovation. We want the team to get their head around the real needs of their consumers, breaking the boundaries of the consumer proposition and in so doing, unlocking the creativity that can lead to real change.'

The real benefits of Innovation Bootcamp must be recognised by director level management within an organisation for it to work. Inevitably, it will be kick started by these individuals. But its success also depends on the make up of the team – both the status of the individual and his or her character. Dan again: 'Innovation Bootcamp is a senior management tool designed specifically for their middle managers. These are the people who get things done in an organisation,

but they are also, typically, the most risk averse. Short term performance metrics are partly to blame – real innovation is a long term process and mistakes will be made along the way. Risk avoidance, together with everyday pressures of the day job, can easily stifle innovative spirit.'

As Dan explains, the team must also comprise the right mix of personalities: 'We recently ran a Bootcamp for a leading player in the media industry with a team consisting of high fliers – experts with a deep understanding of their particular fields. They were also robust individuals, as we knew that on 're-entry' to their company they would be exposed to the same pressures as before, but this time would have to fight their corner to ensure real innovation continued. The mix of skills was also important, so before the process began we analysed the team (including the Sagentia consultants involved) to reveal strengths and weaknesses, and identified when, during the process, these would become most apparent. We then made sure we brought in external team members, from Sagentia and elsewhere, to bolster the team at crucial times and ensure the process remained on track.'

'Big Brother' style, the team was then ensconced in a specific area at Sagentia's Harston HQ – a neutral, self-contained space, away from the influence of work, and designed to meet the needs of the team as it progressed. Despite the hard work there was a real sense of fun amongst the participants. By the end of the course team members were much closer to one another and these cross-divisional working relationships have been maintained back at base.

So what does the Bootcamp entail? Week one is spent understanding the innovation task – a process which can be informed by market research undertaken ahead of the Bootcamp. At this stage, Sagentia consultants micromanage the process, ensuring the team covers set stages by set times. Outside experts are also brought in to provide insights on issues being discussed, and to evaluate the learning performance of the team members. At the end of the first week the team should understand the brief, understand the innovation toolbox they can use to respond to the brief, and should also have undertaken some analytical research to support their initial thoughts.



Week two is creative. The aim is to generate over 100 ideas which are then progressively filtered until a core list is achieved and, in week three, presented back to senior management. For Sagentia's media industry client, the team generated over 200 ideas which eventually led to five viable concepts. These were presented to the CEO who immediately green-lighted four. Overall, he was elated with the results, and Sagentia is still working with the company's senior management team to establish how to make innovation work harder and better within the organisation.

Delivering 'innovation religion' is a strong claim, but Dan feels that this is what companies really need if they are to lift innovation above the incremental. 'Innovation Bootcamp offers the opportunity to really explore the bigger picture, away from everyday work and the pressures of management targets. Crucially, it must have the buy-in and support of senior management, who must then allow their management team the space and responsibility to innovate. If this happens a Bootcamp can deliver more value in three weeks than months of part-time, piecemeal short term development.'

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