EXPLORING CONTEMPORARY MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES:
Fostering Effective Innovation

UCSD EPSE/LAMP Student
Research Assignment 2008-09;
Combined Findings
THE ASSIGNMENT

- Understand the challenge
  - practices that foster innovation for the good of the company, and expectations for everyone involved

- Literature search (EPSE only)

- Survey of individuals (EPSE only)

- Interviews with managers and professionals

- Document findings, give personal analysis
  - Specifics – behaviors, processes, tools, experiences

- Provide summative insights/recommendations
INFORMATION RECEIVED

- 67 students participating in research
- 19 companies
- Dozens of findings, difficult to synthesize into one common set; not all findings agree
- EPSE focused on organizational/managerial concerns, LAMP focused on individual/supervisory concerns
COMBINED FINDINGS

Contextual

- Not as many current companies examples of success as might be expected
- Difference of opinion regarding breadth of innovation; does continuous improvement = innovation?
- Little discussion of the impact of the innovator on their co-workers, or their role
COMBINED FINDINGS

Theme

- Innovation is perceived as the life blood of technology companies, but in general there is more talk about innovation than practice
  - Gap between management and workers regarding innovative activity taking place
  - Short-term demands overwhelm longer-term opportunities; “practical” innovation usually subsumes “transformational” innovation
  - Innovation processes and tools are necessary but not sufficient
Best Practice

- Take a personal approach to an innovator
  - Not everyone can innovate*, pay special attention and foster those who can
  - Give the innovator a path around the bureaucracy as necessary and appropriate; mentor
  - Accountability, but not traditional; passion of the innovator is critical
  - Surround, but don’t stifle, with a team
  - A person, not just a process*; “throwing money at innovation is a sure way to lose a lot of money”

* some disagreement on this
COMBINED FINDINGS

Best Practice

Build a Culture to *Appreciate* Innovation

- Reward innovative effort, and support for that culture (recognition and time, not $)
- Internal innovators as heroes and mentors
- Goals and investment (time and attention, money for testing, even in bad times)
- Recruitment of people with different perspectives and innovative track record
- Encourage sharing and development of ideas, not who came up with them
Combined Findings

Best Practice

- **Expectations of the Innovator**
  - Share your ideas, build support
  - Stay focused on company needs
  - Don’t sacrifice immediate assignments

- **Expectations of the Supervisor**
  - Encourage an innovative culture
  - Provide resources and overcome barriers for innovators
  - Expect accountability, but don’t be impatient

- **Expectations of Co-Workers**
  - Share concerns, give support, focus the innovator
  - Ensure the innovation can be executed and integrated
**COMBINED FINDINGS**

**Insights**
- Perceived difference in commitment to innovation between commercial and contract-oriented companies
- “Probe and Learn” vs. “Phase Gate” vs. “Swim Lane” approaches to innovation depending on culture of the organization
- Not all innovators can carry an idea through to full success; execution is as much a part of innovation as is the innovative idea
- Pursuing innovation can be harmful to your career (dubious productivity)
- “Buying” innovation may be as effective as attempting to grow it internally