

# ASSEMBLING THE RIGHT TEAM FOR INNOVATION

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The success of an innovation program often depends on how well the roles and responsibilities of team members are defined and understood. From the very beginning, members need to be clear about the team's objectives and their roles in bringing about success for the project.

Although innovation teams may emphasize creativity and novel approaches, sound project management and governance go far to enable the development of new products, processes and applications. Certain roles should be filled on nearly every innovation team. These players can remove roadblocks, ease the adoption of new processes and ensure that the team's goals are met.

## KEY ROLES TO FILL

Here are some of the key roles you will need to fill on your innovation team:<sup>1</sup>

- **Executive sponsor** — This senior-level executive is the champion of change and represents the innovation program with the leadership team and board. This individual has the power to approve funding, clear obstacles, obtain expert skills and resources, and keep the innovation team focused on the big picture.

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- **Innovation manager** — Working as the critical link between the executive sponsor and the innovation team, the innovation manager serves as the “go-to” person for all essential tasks, communications and directions.<sup>2</sup>
- **Program management team** — As the foundation of the innovation team, these players establish the structure of the program. They serve in various roles as they identify stakeholders, develop a framework for execution, define processes, set schedules, track progress and communicate results. One team member may serve as a moderator who channels ideas through evaluation for consideration and testing.
- **Experts** — These individuals provide insight and specialized knowledge for the evaluation of new ideas. They can filter ideas based on technical requirements and contribute measurement guidelines to gauge impact and success. Experts can be drawn from in-house departments or outside sources, depending on the need. To make the best use of experts' time, it's best to develop clear evaluation criteria for ideas, such as the need to work within certain budget constraints or development timeframes.
- **Contributors** — Drawn from across the organizations, contributors play a range of roles. They can offer ideas, participate in discussions, test approved concepts, provide feedback on test experiences, and help communicate team progress throughout an organization. Contributors can range from subject matter specialists such as marketing executives and communications professionals, to all interested employees who can be surveyed for input, feedback and assistance.



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### DIVERSE PERSONALITIES ENHANCE TEAMS

What often makes innovation teams successful is the mix of functions and personalities that collaborate on a project. Bell Laboratories, which has a decades-long track record for developing innovative technology, purposely designed its workspaces to ensure that applied engineering personnel interacted informally with theoretical science professionals. This blending of diverse skills and experiences has yielded many serendipitous results.<sup>3</sup>

Bell Labs exemplifies the power of cross-functional collaboration. Innovation teams in any company can replicate this by drawing multi-disciplinary teams from different departments such as finance, operations, technology, sales and marketing, and by drawing on expertise from non-traditional areas.

When designing innovation teams, it is equally important to include a range of personality types. No matter what their formal roles may be, diverse personalities can benefit the overall team and its outcomes in positive ways. Some useful personality types include:<sup>4</sup>

- The **extrovert** works to keep everyone positive and upbeat. He or she may inject humor and create fun team events to help relieve stress.

- The **visionary** is a creative individual who sees beyond what is presently possible and dreams of what could be done.
- The **analyst** considers whether a new idea is viable as a profitable business model.
- The **pragmatist** ensures that all assumptions are identified and tested before the idea goes into production.
- The **scheduler** keeps the team on track to get the idea or process into production.
- The **perfectionist** ensures that quality and value are built into the execution of the idea.
- The **collaborator** helps the team work well together and reinforces the value of diversity.
- The **supporter** provides encouragement to team members in stressful times.

To ensure the success of an innovation team, it's best to go beyond professional credentials alone and consider drawing from a wide mix of personalities, experiences and skills. With roles and responsibilities clearly defined, innovation teams can bring about changes that profit their organizations.

**To discuss these topics in more detail, please contact your PNC Relationship Manager.**

<sup>1</sup> "Building the Right Team for Your Innovation Program," blog post by Kindling.com, not dated. Available at: <https://www.kindlingapp.com/best-practices/build-the-right-team-for-your-innovation-program/>

<sup>2</sup> "Build Your Innovation Team the Right Way," by Jacqueline Zhou, *Innovation Excellence*, April 28, 2015. Available at: <http://innovationexcellence.com/blog/2015/04/28/build-your-innovation-team-the-right-way/>

<sup>3</sup> "Eight Key Personality Types for Innovation Teams," by Tendayi Viki, *Forbes*, Oct. 11, 2016. Available at: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/tendayiviki/2016/10/11/the-eight-personalities-you-need-in-your-innovation-team/#77dc44cd3331>

<sup>4</sup> "Eight Key Personality Types for Innovation Teams," by Tendayi Viki, *Forbes*, Oct. 11, 2016. Available at: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/tendayiviki/2016/10/11/the-eight-personalities-you-need-in-your-innovation-team/#77dc44cd3331>

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