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## True Corporate Innovators Aren't Who You Would Expect

by Michelle Tabart



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Corporate innovation managers have one of the most difficult but necessary challenges in any organisation: trying to disrupt the organisation from the inside. An entrepreneur's natural style of working is nimble. They take risks and swerve bureaucracy. They have decision making rights about where to spend time, money and resources.

So, when entrepreneurial employees or ex-entrepreneurs are hired into corporate innovation roles, people expect them to thrive. But they don't. Because, the ways in which entrepreneurs and ex-startup alumni work jars with corporate culture.



Innovating in the corporate environment requires someone who knows how to play the corporate game. Corporate innovators leverage their networks to corral support for innovation initiatives (which are often unpopular with BAU), they know how to communicate and will use this skill to drive the innovation message up and down the ladder and they are great at developing capability in their teams.

If you want a successful innovation program that will deliver new business models or products and services inside a mature company, you need a corporate innovator not an entrepreneur. Here are five key ways of working to look for when trying to identify that person:

### 1. They want to work in a corporate environment

A corporate innovator lives and works in the belly of the corporate beast. They are passionate about the organisation and its purpose rather than hopped up on innovation methodologies. Corporate innovators don't want to take the risk of exiting corporate life to run their own startup. In fact, they thrive on the corporate grind.

### 2. They see the problems and want to spark change

Corporate innovators aren't blind. They know and deeply understand the constraints that the structure of a mature organisation creates for innovation. They struggle against the entrenched bureaucracy, the unconstructive processes and management by ego rather than empathy.

But despite the difficulties, a corporate innovator is someone who wants to spark and create change to usher in the skills and capabilities needed to make the organisation resilient for the future. The corporate innovator knows that change is coming. They want to set themselves up to be the C-suite of the future.

### 3. They know how to corral internal support from above and below

Corporate innovators are connected. They have networks across the business and can encourage change in both junior and senior resources. They know how to work the corporate politics to get the right stakeholders in the room to make things happen.

### 4. They are resilient

The corporate innovator must be aware that not everyone in the corporate environment will be supportive of their efforts. In fact, they're likely to receive criticism from a wide variety of people who see their efforts as a distraction from the core. They can even be shunned for their innovation efforts – especially if they fail.

Unlike being an entrepreneur there is no start-up community and there are few meetups or peer groups for corporate innovators. This lack of network can be frustrating and make it difficult to find peers to bounce ideas off.

### 5. They want impact through innovation

Innovation programs are often seen as a "fun" initiative or a "side project" in many organisations. A chance for high achievers to show their ability to go above and beyond their day to day and do something different. And when it is seen in this way, the focus falls on how the innovation program looks to leadership, the press and the shareholders.

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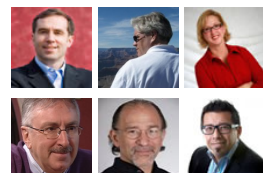
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What corporate innovators want to do is scrap "innovation theatre" and deliver real outcomes through innovation initiatives. True corporate innovators don't measure their value to the organisation on accolades – they measure their value on impact for the customer and the business.

Contrary to popular belief, entrepreneurs and ex-startup alumni won't naturally be able to drive innovation in a corporate environment. If you'd like to discuss your innovation program and who is the right fit to lead and deliver innovation in your organisation please get in touch via LinkedIn

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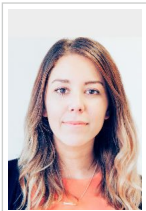
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