Innovation Interview Questionnaire

Is your organization trying to become more innovative? This document provides the suggested architecture for your initial study of things you will need to learn from senior management interviews in order to frame and plan your effort. Since this is a proven design, it can help you get a running start. You are free to use this as long as you provide attribution.

Overview

The best place to start your effort is by collecting data on where the key players in your company think you are now and where you should be. It will be important for you to know the views and opinions of your senior management team and any other key stakeholders to innovation. What are the differing views, opinions, and where are the enablers and resistance points to innovation? You can't build an innovation program without this information. You will even find disagreement on what the definition of innovation is! This is OK, you can't build a road without looking at the landscape.

Senior managers will have a different perspective on innovation from VP's and DM's. The same is true for sales from non-customer contact managers. It is likely the closer you get to the innovative work being performed, that the perceptions will be dramatically different. The people who have to justify budgets and "pay the bills" for innovation will have very different perspectives from those who do the work and desire to be more innovative. This isn't necessarily a negative. In order to build a coalition for change, you first need to get underneath the many points of view, positive and negative, to find the connecting points toward innovation.   There will be some minefields that you need to identify in order to manage them - you need to learn where they are. The reality is that most companies are not organized for innovation. In fact, just the opposite is the case. When one looks closely at most companies, we find elaborate systems established to minimize innovation by controlling costs and managing budgets to the short term. In order to overcome this, you will need to fully understand the potential costs and benefits of innovation, including the potential risks.

> *"Innovation is like puppies, mom and apple pie. On the surface, everyone thinks this is a wonderful thing. But innovation can be disruptive, and some power bases can be threatened by the specifics of innovation."*
> - *James Haupert*

We suggest in this design, that you break your information collection into four overlapping sets. This should make it easier to organize the output of your study. Your interviews may benefit by also deploying multiple approaches through additional open ended probes, ratings, and handouts.

Interview Set A – Background

This set includes opinions, attitudes and prevailing attitudes and beliefs. You are tying to hit a moving target – how to better position the company for the near future. What are the shared views and beliefs that we can build on? Where are there prevailing attitudes and accepted "truths" that limit innovation? Where are the innovation resistant "sacred cows?" There probably is a large body of thought that already exists – what can we learn quickly from this?

Probes

1. What is their personal definition of innovation? Types of innovation? You could have them read multiple descriptions on innovation, and ask which comes closest to their view. Radical innovation? Incremental?

2. What is their response to the innovation team's proposed definition(s) of innovation and types of innovation? Can we simplify the problem and opportunity statements for the interviewees?

3. Where are the best innovation opportunities?

4. How does innovation fit into your major strategies and initiatives for the next 2, 3 and 5 years? What are your current plans? What ideas have you been pondering on this subject? Who supports these?

5. Describe existing successful innovation initiatives in their area. Why have these been successful? (This is very important – you need to find successes and best practices)

6. What role does innovation play to business (company and divisional) strategy? In what ways? How? Where?

7. What innovations of our competitors do you most admire? What could we emulate here?

Interview Set B – Where are we? where do we need to be?

Everyone will probably feel we should be more innovative – this insight by itself is not very useful. You will need to gain information to make a business case at some point - where do we need to be more innovative? What opportunities are at risk of being lost?

8. How does our corporate culture, and what specific aspects of it, promote and encourage the innovation necessary to grow the company?

9. How would you rate this statement: Our company is more innovative now than 3 years ago? Y, N, ?. (Many others can be tested)

10. Overall - What innovation rating or report card would they give to our company now? Why?

11. Specific – Collect ideas or ways to improve this report card.

12. Current situation - Their evaluation of how innovative our company is now across multiple factors and dimensions of innovation.

13. Rate a series of short statements about our company, then probe:

    Our company deploys innovative processes to perform work functions. Y, N, ?

    Our company rewards employees and team for innovative thinking.

    Trying new approaches and ways of doing things is encouraged around here.

    And so on.

14. Desired situation – Seek ratings across same dimensions (#7) as to how innovative our company needs to be to be competitive/successful.

15. Specifically, uncover the most important areas where they feel our company needs to be more innovative? (If you could from the initial interviews, develop a list – this would be helpful) Why? If they have ideas, get to what these are and how they would work.

16. What have been the costs at our company of inadequate or misapplied innovation?

17. What have been the gains and wins from our company's innovation?

18. What is the market saying to you about innovation? How well have we responded to this?

19. What do you feel your customers would say (do say) about current innovation at our company? Where are the innovative "home runs?" Where are we "missing the boat" innovation wise?

20. In the last 2-3 years, what business has the company lost or failed to gain by failure to properly or timely innovate?

21. In the last 2-3 years, what business has the company won by appropriate innovation?

Interview Set C – How Should We change? Uncovering Opportunities. Identifying problems and challenges.

This will need to be specific and get into cost-benefit analysis. Where could a relatively small investment in innovation yield big returns? Where are both the short and long term payoffs? Which types of innovation hold the greatest benefits? Risks? What lessons have been learned so far? What are the barriers? What are the enablers? What lessons have been learned by the real innovators? Where are the expert resources to drive more and better innovation? <u>Caution – people don't know what they don't know</u>.

22. Within our company, what are the specific factors, practices, or behaviors that enable, encourage, and nurture innovation? (Who, what, where)

23. Within our company, what are the specific factors, practices, and behaviors that inhibit, restrict or discourage innovation? How would you fix these?

24. Where should our company culture be changed?

25. Where can the reward system be improved? How can the negative consequences and fear of failure be ameliorated?

26. How can we better encourage and protect innovators who take risks? What can be done to manage these risks better? (How can we keep our innovative champions alive and healthy and create and encourage more of them?)

27. What innovative changes are consistent with our culture, values and beliefs?

28. Who are the biggest champions of innovation in your area? Who has been the best at introducing innovation in your area? (For follow up interviews)

29. Describe innovation successes in your area. Why were these successful?

30. Describe innovation failures in your area – where did innovation fail to deliver the promised benefits? Uncover why. How do we avoid similar mistakes?

Interview Set D – Testing the Possible

This might best be conducted in a second round of interviews after you consolidate the information from A, Your interviews may benefit by also deploying multiple approaches through additional open ended probes, ratings, and handouts *B and C*.

31. What conflicting views and beliefs about innovation need to be reconciled or corrected?

32. Test ideas and practices that other companies in multiple industries have done.

33. Test ideas and potential solutions at our company.

34. What investment is needed? (what will this cost?) What are the likely outcomes?

35. Present a list of innovation candidate ideas or solutions and gain their reaction.

36. Uncover what appears to be the low hanging fruit. Get reactions? What would the decision makers support? Not support?

37. Where do you think we should begin?