

Internal Innovation

Look Within For The Answer



Recognise,
implement
and
maximise

The Whitespace Corporate Innovation Club is a community of over 40 international and global corporate brands with a shared passion and interest in using innovation to help create different and new experiences and revenue models. The senior representatives from the different corporates either have a direct remit around driving innovation on behalf of their company or are a key contributor to it. The purpose of the community is to learn from each other – both successes and failures – but also learn from invited subject matter experts around specific topics or themes.

The Club meets bi-monthly and is always hosted by a Club member and chaired by Whitespace. The topics to be discussed have been collectively agreed by the members to have relevance to them and ones where they can both share and learn from. Depending on the topic external experts are invited to present, engage and provoke an honest and open dialogue amongst all the members.

The November meeting looked at the movement to recognise, implement and maximise the impact of an Internal Innovation programme approach. Much was discussed, but broadly speaking the meeting focused on including internal processes and procedures in the innovation process, and engaging with employees to encourage them to be active agents in the process of innovation.



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Meeting Theme

While many distinct definitions of Internal Innovation coexist across the Corporate landscape, there is a thread and theme that generally unites those divergent framings. **Corporate Innovation** broadly takes an open-minded look both within and beyond a corporation's walls to consider ways to progress that corporation commercially and culturally – using technology, business methodologies, incubators, accelerators, corporate venturing and partnerships with external companies. **Internal Innovation** specifically covers approaches that focus on the resources, ideologies, processes and people within a company, meaning potentially harnessing and exploring HR, R&D, company policy, employee engagement, management structures, legal conventions and more.

As such, 'employee engagement' stands as a significant – if not defining – subset of Internal Innovation. Internal Innovation also considers the human element of the customer base as well as the workforce, and puts an emphasis on company dogma, and engendering flexibility in Corporate culture and transformation of impact beyond the walls of a company.

Employee engagement's ultimate goal, meanwhile, is to have employees looking forward to getting to work. The logic is a simple one; staff that are engaged with the effort and forward journey of their employer will perform at their best and help push a Corporation forward.

The November meeting saw experts in Internal Innovation share key insights into defining, implementing and benefiting from both approaches, as well as offering working case studies, and showcasing technology that can support and accelerate such initiatives.

Key Takeaways

The core tenets of productive Internal Innovation

Internal Innovation can incorporate many elements and approaches, but the following are arguably most important:

- **Top-level staff communicating a strong, clear strategic narrative** about a Corporation's past, present and future is key, as it provides a 'line of sight' for employees and a Corporation to follow together. That narrative should be provided via a present, empowering leadership team.
- **Managers and middle managers must be trained in Internal Innovation**, as they are vital to the approaches therein. They must motivate, stretch and focus their employees while treating them as the individual personalities they are.
- **Internal Innovation cannot exist without communication that is democratic, open and proactive.** That means employees and board/C-suite should be free to communicate with one another, in both directions, and within their own ranks.
- **Organisational integrity gives employees a cultural approach and moral compass** to follow, which in turn accelerates and amplifies the process of innovating internally, and the benefits therein.



Engagement and alignment deliver the most innovative, meaningful results by far when addressed in unison



Corporations must be prepared to change, and motivated to make change

Several speakers and audience members discussed the need for willingness to change to embrace true Internal Innovation. In many cases an entire shift in company dogma is required. Of course, change within large Corporations is not without challenge, meaning understanding and backing from the board/C-suite is essential. At both a Corporation-wide and individual level, it is essential to avoid seeking out only that which backs and supports existing beliefs and dogmas.

Idealism, authenticity, and Corporate benefit

As with the motivations behind the Corporate Accelerator Programs discussed in the previous Corporate Innovation Club meeting, an Internal Innovation strategy is only likely to succeed if the motivations behind it are authentic. Communicating clear and reasonable objectives and motivations throughout the Corporation's hierarchy will enable this.

Internal transparency for Internal Innovation

For the broad process of Internal Innovation to progress and make impact, transparency is essential, as it engenders the flow of ideas, the recognition of problems, changes in dogma and process, and the propagation of solutions.

Balancing engagement with targeted progress

To meet its potential at both an individual and Corporation-wide level, Internal Innovation must be tempered with alignment. Teams dedicated to fostering Internal Innovation are of little potential without direction and organisation. Engagement and alignment deliver the most innovative, meaningful results by far when addressed in unison. At the Club's meeting, the term 'headless chickens' was playfully applied to a hypothetical team of fully engaged employees who are not given focus and direction.

Using technology to harmonise employee voice

As detailed above, open, reliable and flowing communication is the catalyst of successful Internal Innovation, and is vital for transparency. Technology can play a key role in facilitating that process, particularly through bespoke apps that provide staff at every level throughout every department within a Corporation a chance to talk openly on an internal forum (anonymously or under one's name).

People before technology

In the field of Internal Innovation, it is important to remember that people come before technology, and that technology without people is rarely – if ever – a productive solution or means to foster change. This is not mutually exclusive to the previous point.



Being open-minded to external collaboration can help with the aims of Internal Innovation



Innovating internally through established office functions

While the long history of disciplines like HR, accounting, legal and compliance has seen those specialities become associated with convention and traditional thinking, they must be fully engaged and involved with Internal Innovation to meet its potential and aims. It was suggested that clearly defined strategies with regard to collaboration can do much to make office functions proactive in effective Internal Innovation.

External collaboration can be part of Internal Innovation

While Internal Innovation must always focus on a Corporation's internal functions, being open-minded to external collaboration can help with the aims of Internal Innovation. As work becomes decentralised, the freelance life increases in its appeal to talent, and the gig and platform economy grows, sometimes an external expert can be the ideal agent to accelerate Internal Innovation.

For Further Consideration

- How can a Corporation give staff agency and autonomy while regaining reasonable control?
- As with many methods of Corporate innovation, thought must be put in to how to avoid 'initiative fatigue' and keep up enthusiasm for the likes of Internal Innovation.
- How can the largest corporations scale Internal Innovation to work at a personal level for tens of thousands of staff?

If you would like to find out more about the Whitespace Corporate Innovation Club please contact Andrew Webber from Whitespace at andrew@whitespaceventures.com



Whitespace is focused on helping high growth technology startups build a strong and repeatable business as quickly as possible. We do this by learning from startups and Corporates that we closely partner with and the combined experience of our founders. We identify the common areas where startups struggle or make mistakes and we build Intelligent Cloud technology solutions to break down barriers to entry for the Founders around business planning, investment raises and professional services that are needed to help mature and scale their businesses.