

Successfully Managing Innovation

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A popular myth is that innovation comes from the inspiration of a brilliant lone inventor. In reality, innovation must be fostered, nurtured and practiced. It requires cooperation within teams of diverse people, careful planning, and rigorous execution with iterative revision and improvement. Managers in R&D organizations facilitate innovation by providing their scientists with a creative culture, a supportive environment, and effective management tools.

Innovation starts with the recognition of a problem, which an inventor sees as an opportunity to improve something. The inventor conducts research to provide the knowledge required to turn this idea into a practical solution. The research progresses through 6 stages: concept > strategy > plan > execution > analysis > close. Each stage requires special skills and few researchers have all of the skills that are necessary to successfully innovate. They often need help in the form of training and tools.

I will outline 10 key components of a successful management system for innovation. R&D organizations can support innovation by providing their researchers with a set of innovation tools to compliment their existing skills. As an example, communication within research teams and among stakeholders is fundamental, but is facilitated by a few simple tools and processes that I will outline.