

Columbia Business
School MBA FALL 2023
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CORPORATE INNOVATOR

A Guide Through the Labyrinth

For Bidding purposes only.

Ariadne is the daughter of Minos, king of Crete. Minos defeats Athens in war. He demands thereafter that every seven years Athens deliver to him seven young men and seven young women. Minos sacrifices them to the Minotaur, a half-man half-bull monster that he keeps in a labyrinth. The Athenian hero Theseus volunteers to join the third group of victims. On Crete, Ariadne and Theseus fall in love. She gives him a sword and a ball of thread to unwind along the way through the labyrinth. Theseus slays the Minotaur, follows the thread back out, and elopes with Ariadne.

This story is a myth, of course. But most myths come from real events far back in time. Generations hand down the story and change it every telling. So there might have been someone lost in a labyrinth, who had help to find the way out. Myths endure when they strike a chord, timeless and true, about the human condition. We often feel lost in a labyrinth of some kind. We don't know which way to turn, and we long for help to find our way.

Such is the lot of the corporate innovator. You have a new idea, and you want the organization to take it up and put it into action. But there's no clear way to get there. Every new idea for corporate innovation faces a different labyrinth. It's made up of particular people who matter for that specific idea. The labyrinth extends into each person's mind, as your new idea winds along the twists and turns of their brain, to follow an unpredictable path to one of three outcomes: they like the idea, they ignore it, or they actively oppose it.

This course – Corporate Innovator – helps you carry your new idea through the labyrinth of corporate innovation.

Overview

This elective half-course offers key leadership skills and methods to help you pursue a new idea in a corporation. As the world economy changes faster and faster, internal innovation has become a core aim in more and more companies. Columbia MBAs are especially suited for this role: where you might work across the organization, with finance, marketing, operations, IT and senior management. Corporate innovator is one of the best jobs in business: the adventure of new ideas plus the stability of a steady paycheck.

Our material applies to any new idea, at any level, in any department, in any kind of organization: large and small businesses, non-profits, and government agencies. It is distinct from entrepreneurship (starting a new business) and organizational change (transforming a company). Here we take on the specific problem of how a single person – the corporate innovator – gets a single new idea through a single existing system.

Our material is distinct as well from innovation methods, such as Think Bigger, that help you get a new idea in the first place. In this course, we assume the innovator already has a new idea. We take up what happens next, to advance the idea in the organization. New ideas are different: no two people have

the same exact view of your new idea, so you need a distinct strategy for each key person you encounter. In military terms, it's hand-to-hand combat, person-by-person through the corporate labyrinth.

Class sessions consist of lecture and discussion on key aspects of the role of the corporate innovator, a review of examples that show corporate innovators in action, and in-class exercises. Requirements for the course are: do the readings, attend class, answer a Canvas survey question before each session, and send me a "Weekly Note" via Canvas. For extra credit, you can do a paper on some aspect of our course material, according to guidelines we cover in class.

Course Outline

- The Innovator as Champion (sessions 1-6)
How to identify, understand and overcome obstacles to your new idea
- The Company as Ally (sessions 7-9)
How to make best use of the organization to advance your new idea
- Personal Innovation (sessions 10-12)
How to pursue new ideas in your work and personal life

Our main course material consists of a wide array of examples of innovators in different corporate settings, including Pepsi, Starbucks, IBM, 3M, Hewlett-Packard, Apple, McDonalds, Microsoft, Google, GE, Luminary Labs, Nickelodeon, Lego, Parker-Hannifin, Manhattan Records, military campaigns, women's suffrage, civil rights, and Philippines irrigation.

For the Canvas survey before each class, you answer this question in at least 10 words:

From the readings, what strikes you most about the character's ideas, leadership, or luck?

- *Strategy: the ideas that the character put into action*
- *Leadership: the character's personality, determination, or teamwork*
- *Luck: circumstances beyond the character's control*

The Weekly Note is due midnight every week on Canvas (strict minimum 100 words), with your thoughts on some aspect of the readings or class so far.

The course ends with lessons and tools for managing new ideas in your personal life as well. In this way the course fits Columbia Business School's aim to help you: a) improve your current job skills, and b) have a successful and fulfilling lifetime career. Corporate Innovator works for both.

Assignments and Grading

- attend class, voluntary speaking (1 pt. each session, 12 pts. total)
- Canvas pre-class survey for each major example, 10+ words (1 pt. each, 15 pts. total)
- Canvas Weekly Note, 100 words strict minimum (1 pt. each, 6 pts. total)
- optional extra-credit paper, due midnight Friday night, April 28 (1 pt.)
 - strict minimum 1500 words, WORD document ONLY, post as Canvas attachment
 - possible topics will be announced and discussed in class
- points = grade: 34 = H 33 = HP 29-32 = P 24-28 = LP <24 = F
- elective curve: H ≤ 50%
- to fit the elective curve at the end of the course, we might need to adjust assignment grades:
 - reduce credit for makeups and late submissions
 - increase credit for extra effort and quality
- check Canvas to see that your submissions go through
- Gradebook closes midnight Friday night, 4/28: no submissions or makeups accepted after
- for all questions on assignments and grading, email the TA

Classroom

- workshop format: random groups each session
- no electronics in class: bring pen and paper for notes
- step out of class any time for urgent tasks

READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS DUE: CORPORATE INNOVATOR, FALL 2023

	Pre-class Readings	Online Survey 8 AM	Weekly Note min. 100 words
#1	<u>Introduction</u> No readings	None	midnight Friday night
#2	<u>The small company innovator</u> ▪ Schultz I: <i>Pour Your Heart Into It</i> (excerpts)	Schultz I	
#3	<u>Allies and obstacles</u> ▪ Dawn Hudson (video case)	Hudson	midnight Friday night
#4	<u>The growing company innovator</u> ▪ Schultz II: Schultz, <i>Pour Your Heart Into It</i> (excerpts)	Schultz II	
#5	<u>Inside and outside</u> ▪ Joan Affleck (video case) ▪ Sara Holoubek (video case)	Affleck Holoubek	midnight Friday night
#6	<u>Creative projects</u> ▪ Lloyd Trotter (video case) ▪ Brown Johnson (video case)	Trotter Johnson	
#7	<u>Up, down, across</u> ▪ Deborah Dugan (video case) ▪ General Patton (book chapter)	Dugan Patton	midnight Friday night
#8	<u>The working group</u> ▪ Fran Korten and Philippines Irrigation (video case)	Korten	
#9	<u>Innovation types</u> ▪ Brie Ferrigno (video case) ▪ Neale Godfrey (video case)	Ferrigno Godfrey	midnight Friday night
#10	<u>Insider to outsider</u> ▪ Alice Paul (book chapter)	Paul	
#11	<u>Organization innovator</u> ▪ Ella Baker (book chapter)	Baker	midnight Friday night
#12	<u>Personal innovation</u> ▪ Rita T: case	Rita T.	
Friday that week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ optional extra-credit paper due ○ gradebook closes 		midnight Friday

EMBA student comments on Corporate Innovator:

I found the focus on innovation coming from employees at large companies to be refreshing. I work at a large company, and it can sometimes feel disheartening to effect change at such an organization given the slow pace of change. However, after our class discussion around the strategies that can be used, I feel reinvigorated being at my own firm.

The idea of risk was also something that I had not thought of - we can almost take more risks at an established firm and not worry as much about when our next paycheck will arrive, vs. attempting to start your own company and putting it all on the line. We can practice innovation in this way more often and do not have to worry about the drastic consequences of failure.

Often times, we focus too much on managing up within our own department, but it's equally important to find allies in other departments who can help move the idea forward. This is more true than ever now that modern corporate typically has multi-functional decision making. Now I have a clearer roadmap to obtain the approval and mobilize resources to advance the idea.

I used to just to arrange a meeting (sometimes even just with a simple title "catchup" without any notice about the new idea) with my boss and expect what I propose will get the green light to go. I now realize that I should treat this process more seriously and really be mindful of the different steps to get the buy-in.

Too often I find myself jumping into new ideas and projects without putting in the necessary time and effort to understand how they can to succeed. Now I know better how to do that.

Thinking about a communication strategy as you look to activate your idea was another key takeaway - you don't have to share your idea right away or fully - was an aha moment for me. Often times I go in and expect to get buy-in instantly and often walk away thinking that it must have been the "wrong" thing if I don't get buy-in. When in reality, i just didn't help them see what I saw. Getting them to see vs. selling something is what is important.

I had a past experience at a nonprofit in which I came up with what I thought were great ideas, and were shut down by the founders over and over and over again. I was so frustrated but I just kept taking the same approach. Now I realize that instead of indulging in my anger and complaining about it, I should have taken the time to understand why they weren't receptive to my ideas. If I could have understood why, I believe I could have looked at other levels of the hierarchy to build alliance and support for my innovations. I needed to find my "path through the pyramid" rather than climbing straight up.

I've been thinking about the communication of ideas. Mainly, about how much I underestimated its importance and how, to me, it's almost as important as idea generation itself. I was also struck by how many executives with a lot of leadership and management experience underestimate and overlook it.

This class made me self-reflect - if they don't want to change things, is it just because of them being stuck in their ways or is it something that I am doing? Am I being a true leader: could I be communicating my thoughts and ideas better?

Another part of the discussion that resonated with me was around how to handle objections to one's idea, and ultimately make the other person feel like they've contributed to the idea depending on the situation. This is something that I need to improve upon to avoid conflict and gain more support for new ideas.

For many years, I've had many business ideas that never went anywhere due to one reason or another. This session blew me away with the realization that I had been missing a piece of the puzzle, and perhaps many pieces for some which made it impossible for me to move forward and take action about my idea. I shared this priceless learning with my son today, in hopes that it would not be too late for him to learn about it and so he could be aware of the importance of looking for that missing piece of the puzzle. It may be too early for him as he is only five years old, but I will make sure to repeat it to him again and again.