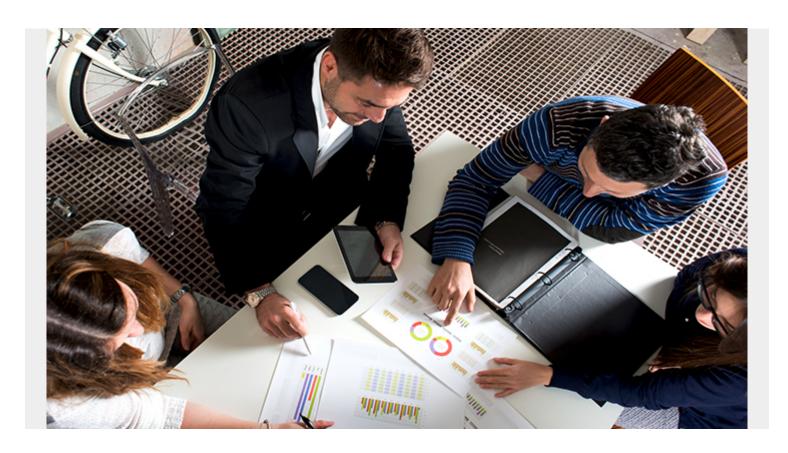# WHAT IS AN INNOVATION OUTPOST?

Technology is the driving force powering the ever-shifting nature of the modern world. But world-altering technologies like the Internet, artificial intelligence (AI), and big data come with their own unique implications, challenges, and opportunities. Understanding the implications, overcoming the challenges, and taking advantage of the opportunities presented by new technologies in a competitive manner is only possible through innovation.

What is Innovation?

Innovating is the act of creating new concepts or new approaches to existing concepts. But it's not only about coming up with new ways of overcoming new obstacles; it's also about anticipating issues that are yet to arise. With how quickly things change and how high the expectations of modern consumers are, failing to innovate can easily result in your organization crumbling into a heap of rubble.

It's safe to say innovation isn't just important in today's world—it's imperative. Without innovation, even managing to keep up with new technologies as they arise becomes virtually impossible and that's saying nothing about getting ahead of the competition. What makes things even more difficult, especially for larger organizations, is the fact that contemporary technology and business practices have drastically lowered the barrier for entry into the competitive space.

Due to modern business conditions (relatively low cost of technology and access to funds through venture capitalist investments, to name a couple), smaller and newer organizations have the tools,

resources, and agility to give even the most well-seasoned veteran companies a run for their money. The good news is that this low barrier to entry applies to organizations of all sizes that are willing to make the changes necessary to embrace innovation from within.

How Can Innovation Be Embraced?

It's true that innovation can sometimes happen by accident. In fact, there are many products famous for being [accidental inventions](#). However, innovating by accident isn't a reliable model in a competitive environment. Furthermore, most of those accidental inventions were only possible because someone was actively trying to develop something new and innovative.

Specific innovations can be accidental, but they are almost always byproducts of a very intentional process of innovating. Much like with [DevOps](#), embracing innovation requires a change in more than just policy and corporate structure. Innovation can be encouraged and empowered by establishing a culture of innovation within the organization that values creativity and encourages risk-taking.

Creating an atmosphere where innovations can be reliably manufactured is no simple task, but the rewards made possible through such an environment are vast. One way that organizations are empowering innovation is through the use of innovation outposts.

What is an Innovation Outpost?

An innovation outpost is a business location dedicated to fostering innovation where research and development (R&D) is the primary order of business. Innovation outposts are used as not only a hub for R&D, but also as a meeting place for collaboration and the sharing of new technologies and ideas. Hosting hackathon style events for collaborating with innovation teams from outside your organization is a great way to expose your team to even more ideas and methodologies.

Because of the many purposes that an innovation outpost can serve, the location of your outpost is incredibly important. Many organizations choose to [place](#) their innovation outposts in places like the Silicon Valley. This is done for numerous reasons:

- To make it easier to recruit experienced talent
- To increase the organization's exposure to innovation techniques
- To provide the organization with access to an ecosystem of innovators
- To monitor for new technologies at the bleeding edge of development

Other organizations choose to plant their innovation outposts in countries that are separate from where their headquarters are located. This is done in part to provide more access to foreign talent and ideas. They can also be used as an in-road for further development, reaching into those regions of the world where the outposts are located. Improving your relations with communities outside your primary area of operations will make penetrating those markets much easier while also providing you with insight into how to best tailor your services or products for those demographics.

Diversity is important for all aspects of an organization but ensuring your innovation outpost hosts a diverse set of minds is key to generating new ideas and preventing groupthink from dampening their creative output. Combining diversity with a culture of innovation that values transparent communication and the free flow of ideas is a recipe for successful innovation outposts.

Long gone are the days when a suggestion box stationed near the water cooler would suffice as a

means for generating innovation. An innovation outpost offers the ability for your organization to create a space dedicated to forward-thinking design where ideas can be hashed out and tested.

Innovation outposts can also serve as a testing pool for policies and procedures encouraging innovation that could later be applied to the organization at large. Innovation can come from any department or team member. This fact is why empowering innovation within the entire organization can be such a powerful engine for continued success.

Empowering the creativity within your organization won't happen overnight nor will it happen by accident. Much like with adopting DevOps and Agile practices, embracing innovation requires a sea change for the entire organization.

Opening up lines of communication and making everyone feel like their opinions are valued will help increase the rate of innovation and the quality of ideas that are generated. Furthermore, providing some degree of freedom and an allowance for failure will help to create an atmosphere that is conducive to not only ideation but also the actualization of those ideas. Providing everyone within your organization with a sense of personal ownership over their roles will improve their investment in the organization's future success.

Understanding that ideas are a business resource that can be leveraged much like any other resource is vital for finding success during these tumultuous times of rapidly evolving technologies. Making the most of your organization's potential for innovation is no small ask, but the possibility of immense rewards awaits those who accomplish it.