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Executive Brief

Gore Silicon Valley Innovation Center Tour
Accelerating Innovation through Sustainable and Successful Partnerships

Hosted by

Linda Elkins, *Innovation Center Director* and Alexander Frigon, *Innovation Team Materials Engineer,* Gore Silicon Valley Innovation Center

Recently, Growth Innovation Leadership Council Members attended a virtual tour of the Gore Silicon Valley Innovation Center. They learned about Gore's unique culture and history and how the company grew a foundation for innovation on a material platform based around ePTFE. Gore's history of innovation and engineering expertise has grown it into a global leader in highly engineered advanced materials.

Hosts Linda Elkins and Alexander Frigon led the Innovation Center tour and explained how they use the physical space to accelerate the impact of innovation at Gore while leveraging internal expertise and external collaborations. They also shared updates about new areas of focus for Gore innovation and product exploration.

Key Take-Aways:

- Gore's approach to innovation, seeded both internally and externally and how that approach has been enabled by their presence in Silicon Valley
- How innovation is a culture within Gore focused on a deep understanding of the problem to be solved and the most valuable materials solution(s)
- Gore's focus on providing performance material solutions for technically demanding applications in challenging environments in both current and new markets

Located in Santa Clara California and founded in 1958, the Gore Silicon Valley Innovation Center helps startups pursue new ideas, build prototypes and test materials. According to its website, "The center also serves as a meeting space that brings together Silicon Valley's thought leaders, innovators, academics, engineers and more to discuss today's most pressing industry, product and technical challenges." The center's process is designed to help innovators accelerate the discovery of new capabilities and foster the successful commercialization of advanced material technology, medical products and other emerging technologies.

The tour hosts, Linda Elkins, Innovation Center Director, and Alexander Frigon, Innovation Team Materials Engineer, emphasized that all company employees are committed to the success of the center and are available for consultation or assistance when needed. All Gore associates take a long term view of the power of innovation and collaborate within small multi-disciplinary teams to contribute results.

Alexander Frigon noted that the center's product portfolio was at its core about manipulating materials, adding that materials science techniques were the heart of the company. Alexander briefly discussed how complex chemical refinement of the fluorspar mineral processed into a monomer gas (TFE) is subsequently polymerized to create the raw material ePTFE. This type of polymer is a high performance material unique in its breath of performance attributes that includes very strong chemical stability, inherent hydrophobicity, and tunable physical properties. He noted that he seeks to unlock material applications by fine tuning these material properties to meet commercial requirements. Alexander demonstrated how a 12 micron thin ePTFE membrane could be engineered to hold a 15 pound bowling ball, pointed out how water is naturally repelled or can be selectively absorbed with a surface treatment, and showed how control of pore size effectively creates a 0.5 micron filter.

Linda Elkins stated that the center consisted of three divisions: medical products, fabrics and performance solutions. She noted that the center explores new whitespace opportunities for Gore, specifically in sustainability and life science applications. The center is designed to foster innovation ideation and partnerships, and includes a prototyping laboratory. Work tables, easily accessible materials and other tools abound to facilitate hands on innovation thinking and thought leader exchanges. The center can host start-up roundtable discussions and other similar events.

Another center goal is to create an innovation ecosystem that includes relationships with academia, accelerators and a variety of partners. Additional capabilities include processes to develop new value propositions and new technology synergies within Gore. For example, the performance solutions division is very experienced working with start-ups.

As the virtual tour came to a close, the hosts re-emphasized the center's top priority of driving innovation. The second priority is partnering with innovation groups to accelerate the pace of external exploration. As an example, the tour included a glimpse of the engineer co-collaboration lab area, which allows external groups to work side by side experimenting with Gore materials in applications of emerging technologies.

After the Virtual tour, the hosts fielded a few questions from members. Key answers and takeaways can be found below:

Interactive Roundtable Discussion Highlights

The power of small teams

Gore has a cohort innovation practice. When someone has an idea, a small team of two to three people is formed. This cohort often consists of a technology person and perhaps a marketing person; all attend an 8-week boot camp and work with the division to discover and refine the

innovation opportunity. Gore believes in the “power of small teams” working together in a rapid fire process and environment.

A focus on materials problems

The innovation center is focused on trying to understand fundamental materials problems and solving them to yield measurable improvements and move toward commercial use. Center employees are always trying to answer questions such as: How can we integrate this material solution? Does it uniquely solve the technical problem or breakaway from a performance limiting engineering paradigm? If successful, does Gore have the capability to scale this or do we need to build that capability?

Metrics

When asked about the metrics used to measure effectiveness or value, Linda shared that the KPIs that work for the Gore Innovation Center have evolved. At different points in time, the number of startups or the number of events were measured. For Gore, innovation measurement has been a learning journey, and they remain focused on the founding mission of creating and accelerating product development and new business opportunities.