Growth • Innovation • Leadership Council

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EXECUTIVE BRIEF

Effectively Structuring Ideation Management

Moderated by Josh Shabtai, Senior Director, Lowe's Innovation Labs

In today's fast-moving business environment, every organization claims to want "more innovation" – yet few have a structured, repeatable way to identify, prioritize, and scale the best ideas. Growth council members came together for a brainstorming session to explore methods and best practices for how ideas are captured, developed, backlogged, and translated into impact. The group discussed how systems, incentives, and governance models can make idea management scalable and strategically aligned – without stifling creativity.

The session surfaced practical frameworks and real-world insights from industry leaders, as participants examined how to balance open ideation with disciplined portfolio management.

Key Brainstorm Challenges

- **Balancing freedom and focus:** How can organizations encourage open, creative ideation while ensuring alignment to strategic priorities?
- **Sustaining engagement beyond the "idea dump":** Many teams launch ideation platforms, but enthusiasm fades. What mechanisms sustain momentum and accountability?
- **From thousands of ideas to the critical few:** How do teams effectively evaluate, filter, and prioritize ideas – especially across diverse business units or functions?
- **Ownership and governance:** Who owns the ideation process? Should it be centralized under an innovation team or embedded within each business area?
- **Measuring what matters:** What metrics demonstrate the health and value of an ideation pipeline – beyond vanity metrics like number of ideas submitted?
- **AI and automation in ideation management:** What's the role of AI in enhancing discovery, clustering, and evaluation of ideas – without losing the human spark?

Moderator Josh Shabtai opened the brainstorm by asking members:

What is your top ideation challenge? Responses included:

- Balancing what I know works with what I don't know…and exploring.
- Getting consistent buy-in from executives who say, "we want to do AI" and creating a clear path for it.
- Capturing and validating ideas – need a consistent way to do it and a platform.
- Influencing other employees - that I don't manage - to get involved in new initiatives.
- We have no shortage of ideas, but don't always capture them well. It's also a challenge turning ideas into reality.

Josh Shabtai shared that his challenges included winnowing down hundreds of different concepts and technologies and noted that he was currently working on spatial computing and digital twin projects for Lowe's. Josh followed up with a series of questions about prioritizing, structuring and managing innovation efforts, with the Q&A highlighted below:

How do your teams decide what to focus on or prioritize?

- Unfortunately, it's often crisis driven. Then budgeting, decision-making and delivering new products or services on a quarterly basis.
- We identify pain points and top hurdles, then focus on what to prioritize.
- Agree, it's usually need-based. We sometimes struggle with keeping the momentum going. Mid-range innovation can be a secondary issue.
- We draft a long-term (5-10 year) strategy plan. We're getting better at it.
- I'm part of the product development group so first we validate new ideas. Then the commercialization group steps in and ties the product to a brand. We sometimes lack a robust plan.

Are they pre-defined corporate priorities?

- It's usually signals from multiple sources.

When you get external signals, how do you choose when or how to move forward?

- We keep validating and testing to be sure the idea has legs. If so, there will be a push and continual assessment, i.e., what consumer challenge is this addressing?
- We look at technical readiness and use a stage-gate process. One of the harder parts is gathering resources for the next gates.

Is your orientation mainly around technical readiness? Or is it more conceptual?

- Our engineers and builders explore emerging technologies, ranging from robotics to spatial computing to Web3 to quantum computing.

- There is “technical readiness” of frontier technologies but the driving impetus for any exploration is an understanding that there are conceivable benefits for our customers—if said tech works.
- We have a lot of digital tools and collaborate with product development teams. Need more attention to longer-term projects, i.e. 5-year versus 6 months.
- Supply chain efficiencies, for example, are needed in my business. There are a number of frontier technologies that could prove transformative, like digital twins or, down the line, quantum or quantum-like computing. It’s our job to figure out what might be viable and worth it…or not.
- Sometimes it’s a case of being better versus being different.
- Adjacent new products can work very well; you can sell new products to the same customer base.

What’s the primary value of digital twins?

- Digital twins, particularly for manufacturers, logistics companies, or retailers, pull together disparate data sources into unified spatial representations that can enable better data visibility, new spatial apps for XR headsets, or predictive/simulation capabilities for robotics.
- For example, a store digital twin could power apps that can be accessed in real-time by store associates to help them make better stocking decisions on the retail floor, for example.

How do you validate your ideas? Crowdsourcing? Rankings?

- We have an open ideation process…but still need to create a mechanism to use latent talent.
- Often the workers on the floor have the best ideas.
- We get feedback and complete the loop.
- We make it clear that new ideas are experiments and get feedback from different sources.

Patricia Jacoby
Senior Content Specialist
Frost & Sullivan