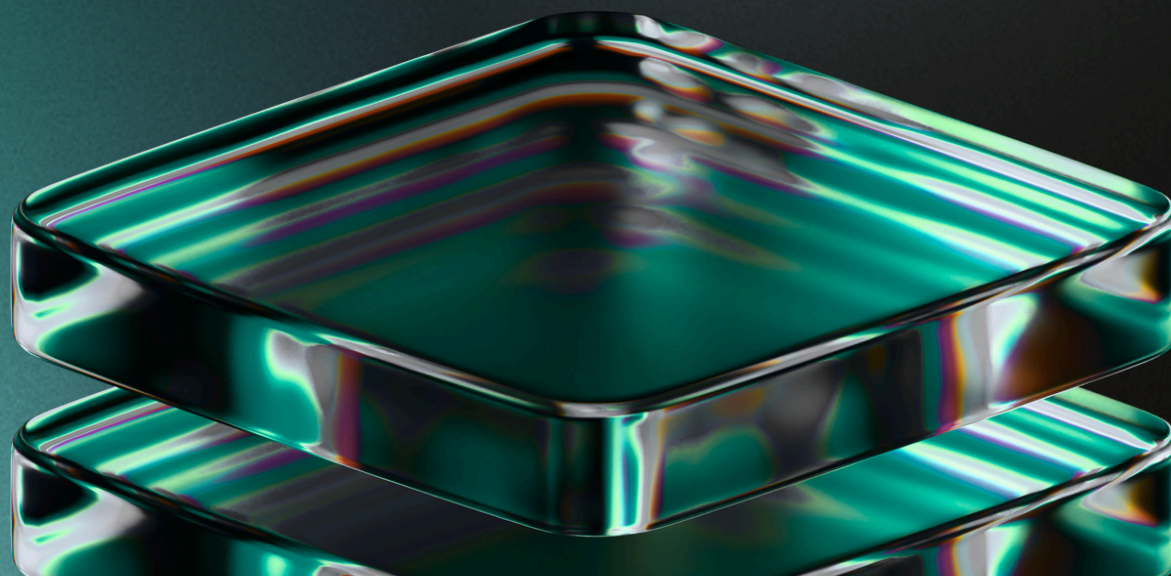


ECOSYSTEM ENGAGEMENT PLAYBOOK

*FROM IDEAS TO IMPACT: ENGAGING THE ECOSYSTEM
FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH*



ECOSYSTEM ENGAGEMENT PLAYBOOK

*FROM IDEAS TO IMPACT: ENGAGING THE ECOSYSTEM
FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH*



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FOREWORD

WHY NOW?

Innovation is no longer a department. It's a system and most corporations don't have one.

Across MENA and beyond, corporations are facing a mounting paradox: **they are under immense pressure to innovate at startup speed**, while still operating with industrial-era processes, risk thresholds, and silos. At the same time, the pace of disruption from AI to fintech to changing regulatory landscapes is outpacing even the most ambitious internal innovation efforts.

Historically, corporations tried to solve this with isolated tools: an accelerator here, a hackathon there, maybe a pilot with a promising startup.

But without an intentional system that connects these efforts to strategy, teams, customers, and capital the impact is fleeting.

That's why now, more than ever, **corporations must stop treating innovation as a side project and start building ecosystems.**

The World Has Shifted Corporates Must Follow

Startups are no longer just potential suppliers. **They're your future collaborators, acquirable IP pipelines, and gateways into new markets.** Universities aren't just talent sources but have the potential of becoming R&D partners. Governments can play a key role beyond regulation.

They are now funders and orchestrators of national innovation agendas.

What was once an open innovation buzzword is now a strategic imperative:

If you don't build your own ecosystem, you will become dependent on someone else's.



Mohammed Al Wahaibi

aljabr CEO

The New Model: Innovation Inside and Out

The most adaptive corporations today don't just build innovation teams, they build **innovation networks**.

They cultivate two distinct but deeply interconnected engines:

- **Internal Ecosystems** – unlocking the creative capacity of employees, transforming insights into MVPs, and embedding innovation into culture.
- **External Ecosystems** – engaging with startups, VCs, universities, and governments to scout, validate, and scale what works beyond their own four walls.

The convergence of these two engines is where real transformation begins.

But it doesn't happen by chance, it **requires intentional design, governance, tools, and strategy**.

Introducing the Ecosystem Engagement Playbook

This playbook was created for all corporate leaders, not just department managers, but CEOs, strategy heads, transformation teams and anyone ready to move from fragmented experiments to full-scale, systemic innovation.

Inside, we unpack:

- **A multi-phased model** for engaging the ecosystem (Awareness → Engagement → Conversion.)
- **Tactical playbooks** for working with startups, empowering employees, and building governance

- **Tools, templates, metrics, and real examples** to turn theory into action
- A blueprint for aligning internal innovation culture with external market-shaping potential

From Innovation Theater to Innovation Architecture

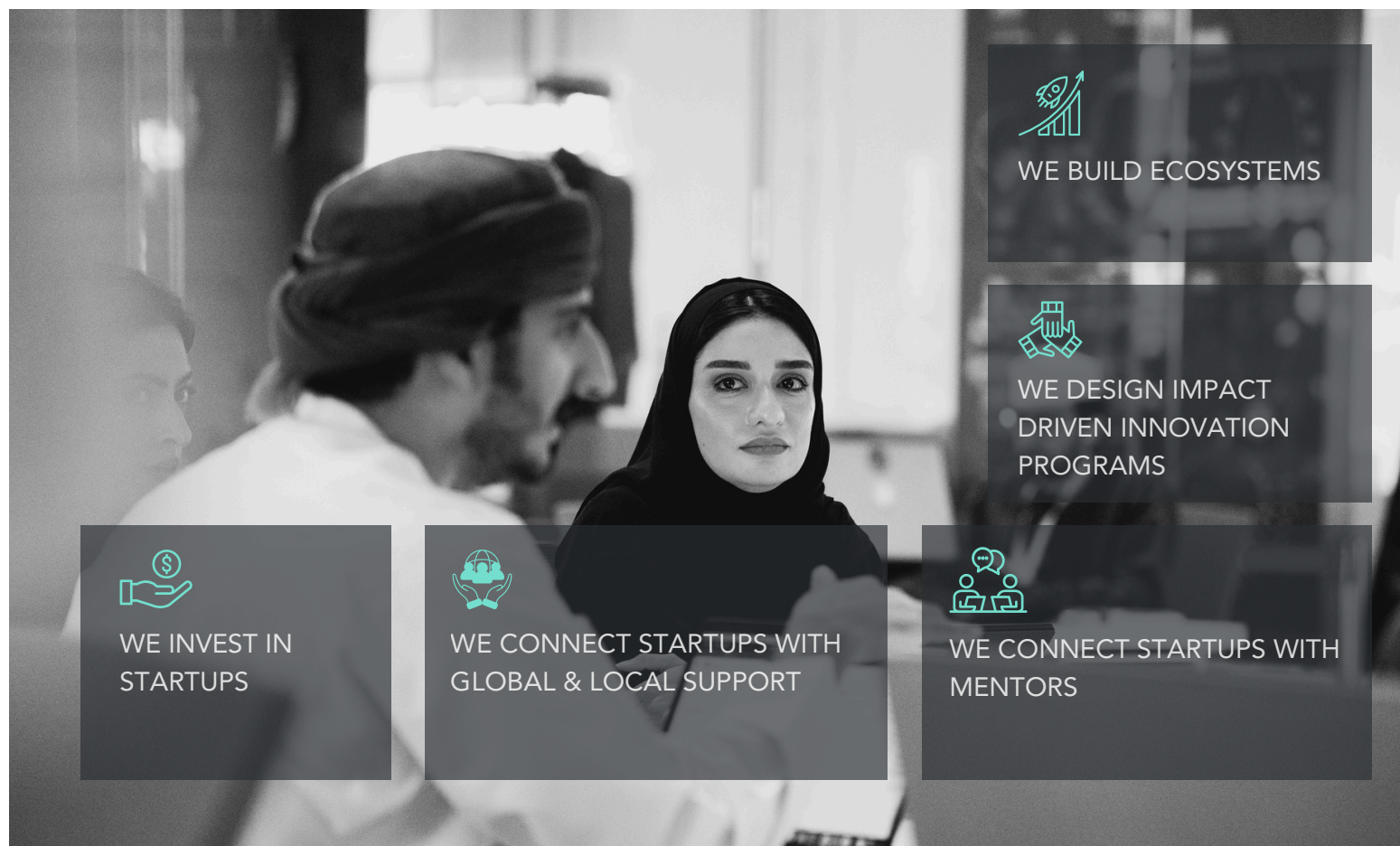
Innovation theater is over. The next decade belongs to those who build infrastructure and ecosystems that produce new value at scale, repeatedly.

This playbook is your starting point.

Read it not as a report, but as a **strategic design guide** for your company's future. Because whether you're ready or not, **the ecosystem economy is here — and the companies that thrive will be those who orchestrate it.**

ABOUT aljabr

aljabr is an **innovation** and **venture-building** company based in Oman, dedicated to shaping the future of entrepreneurship and technology in the region. As the leading builder of innovation ecosystems, we bridge **startups** with forward-thinking **corporates** through expertly designed programs such as **hackathons**, **accelerators**, and **incubation** initiatives that transform ideas into impact.



WE INVEST IN
STARTUPS



WE CONNECT STARTUPS WITH
GLOBAL & LOCAL SUPPORT



WE CONNECT STARTUPS WITH
MENTORS



WE BUILD ECOSYSTEMS

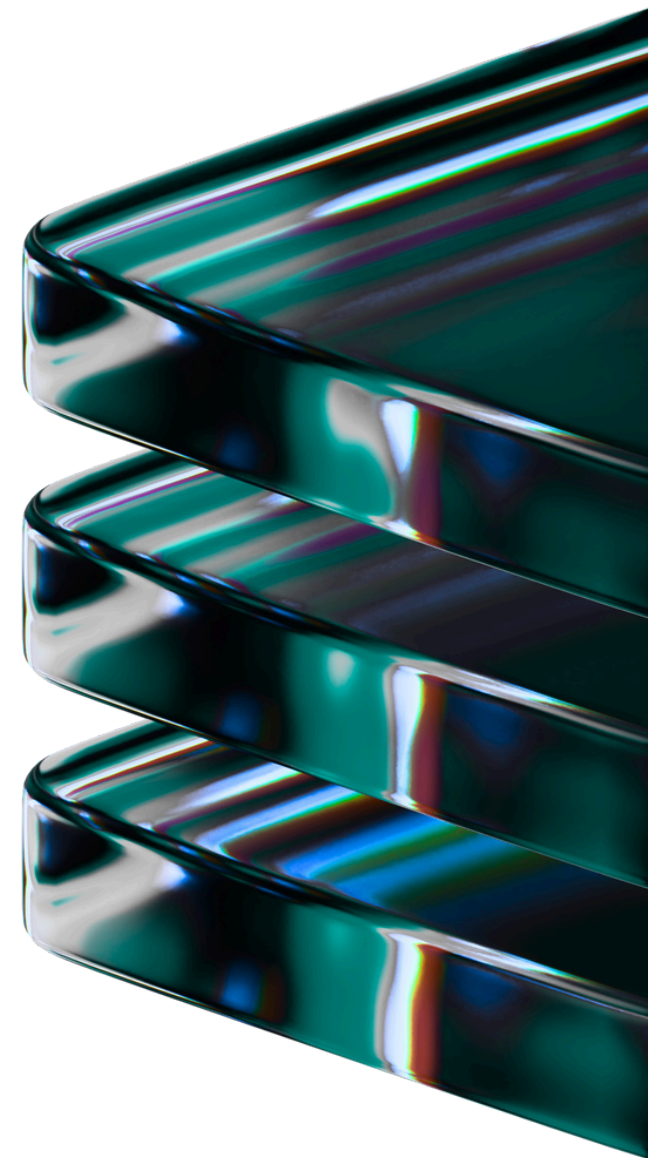


WE DESIGN IMPACT
DRIVEN INNOVATION
PROGRAMS

BUILDING THE INFRASTRUCTURE TO FUEL THE STARTUP ECOSYSTEM

RETHINKING CORPORATE INNOVATION *THROUGH THE ECOSYSTEM LENS*

01



WHAT IS CORPORATE INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM?

In today's complex and fast-changing business landscape, innovation is no longer the product of isolated R&D departments or individual teams. Instead, it **emerges from the dynamic interplay of people, systems, and partnerships, both within and beyond corporate boundaries.** To remain competitive, resilient, and future-ready, corporations must rethink how they innovate by shifting from siloed approaches to ecosystem-driven models.

A Corporate Innovation Ecosystem is a **strategic network** of internal and external actors, including employees, startups, universities, investors, government entities, and innovation enablers, working together **to identify challenges, co-create value, and accelerate innovation outcomes.**

This interconnected system enables companies **to unlock untapped potential, enhance agility, and reduce time-to-impact.**

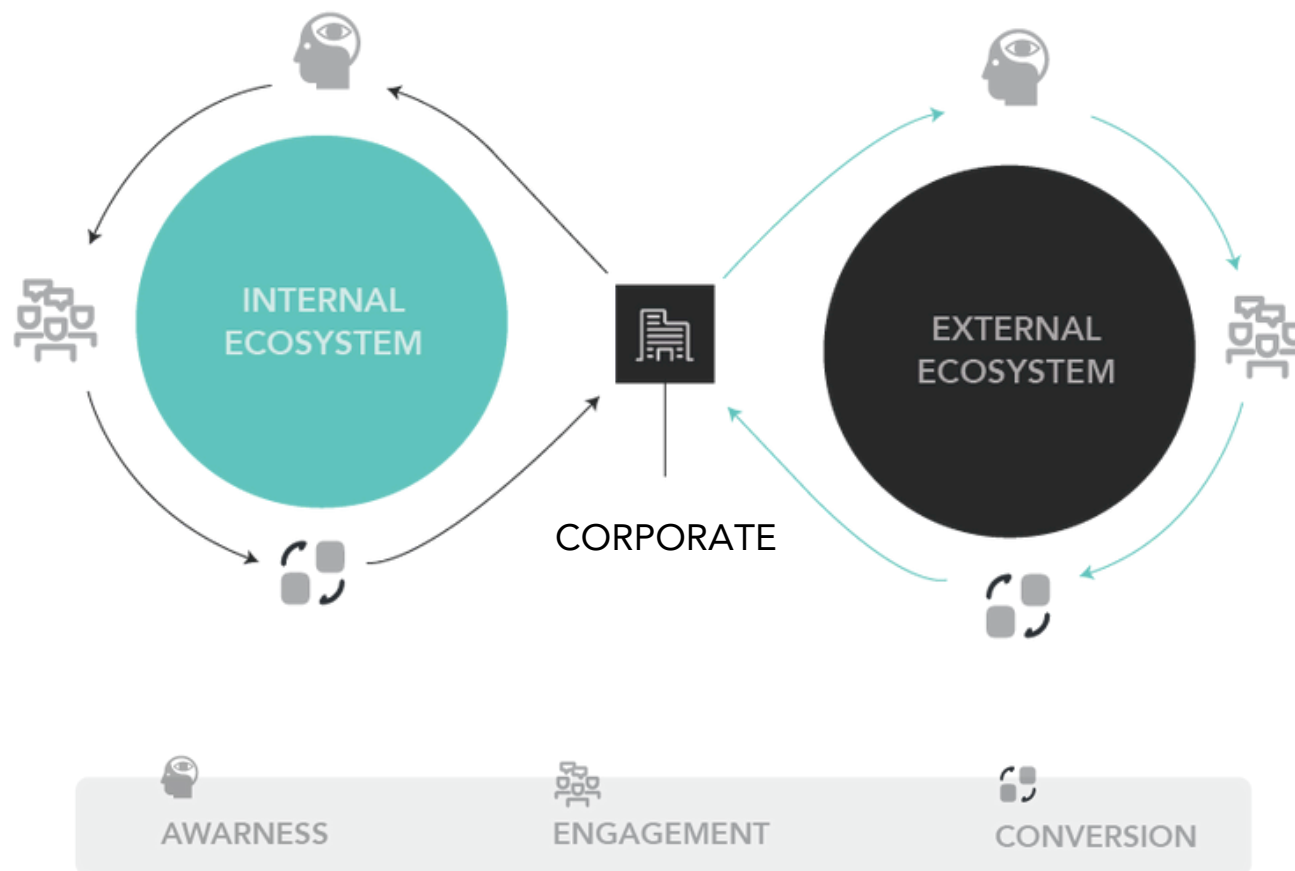
Leading organizations today are no longer focused solely on owning every idea or resource. Instead, they excel at **orchestrating innovation ecosystems,** creating the right conditions, incentives, and governance to allow innovation to thrive across multiple touchpoints. **By embracing both internal capabilities and external partnerships, these organizations move from incremental change to transformational outcomes.**



Remember, "Innovation is no longer about owning everything; it's about orchestrating the right network." A network deeply and strategically connected with internal and external stakeholders.

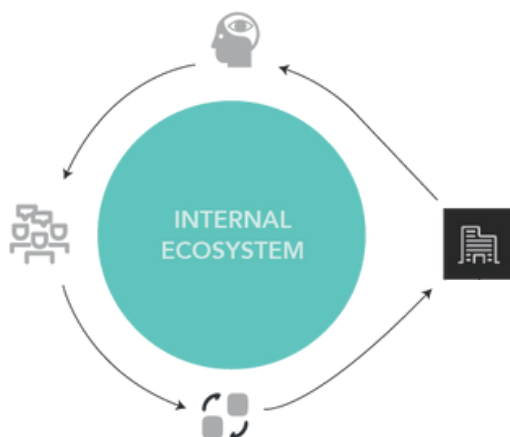
Boston Consulting Group (2019)

WHAT IS CORPORATE INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM?



INTERNAL INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM

What is "Internal Innovation Ecosystem", and how can corporates engage with it strategically and openly?



By definition, Internal innovation refers to the development of ideas, processes, and solutions generated from within an organization, leveraging its employees, infrastructure, and resources. This type of innovation often focuses on optimizing operations, enhancing internal capabilities, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement.

To examine corporate internal innovation closely, there are key characteristics that are essential to focus on:



Employee-Driven Ideas: This means sparks of ideas come from within. It's all about harnessing the creativity and insights of employees. Mainly through ideation sprints, internal bootcamps and scoping sessions.



Operational Enhancements: Which means improving workflows, reducing inefficiencies, and fostering a culture of collaboration across departments, through implementing the PoC and the solutions within the organization.



Cultural Transformation: It's where creating an innovation mindset within the organization is encouraged and celebrated through workshops and innovation activities. As well as through enabling employees to lead the innovative initiatives.

KEY INTERNAL BLOCKERS FOR CORPORATES INTERNAL INNOVATION

Internal innovation often struggles not due to lack of ideas, but because of organizational barriers. **These blockers hinder employees from engaging creatively or prevent ideas from advancing.**



Lack of
Innovation Culture



Unorganised
Leadership Support



Siloed **Departments**
and lack of **communication**



No Structured
Innovation Process



"Organizations that invest in **employee-driven innovation programs** achieve **45%** higher employee satisfaction and **30%** retention improvements."

Deloitte Human Capital Trends Report

EXTERNAL INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM

If the internal corporate innovation is all about looking within, **external innovation is all about looking outside the organisation for inspiration and innovation.**



In this context, external innovation is driven by identifying promising ideas, emerging technologies, and breakthrough solutions beyond the corporate walls. It often takes shape through startup investments, strategic alliances, participation in innovation networks, or co-developing with external partners. Corporations increasingly act as ecosystem players, using Corporate Venture Capital (CVC) and other tools to access and shape the future of innovation. By engaging with outside innovators, companies position themselves to unlock new growth paths and gain competitive advantage.

For organizations to spot external innovation, they can look at these key characteristics:



Collaboration with Startups: This means exploring innovative ideas and solutions in technology, asset management, or even customer engagement with startups in the ecosystem.



Public-Private Partnerships: Which means leveraging large-scale industry projects and infrastructure development through strategic and different types of partnerships.



Open Innovation Platforms: Which's about engaging external networks to co-create innovative and disruptive solutions.

EXTERNAL INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM

While external innovation promises access to disruptive ideas and technologies, **internal resistance** often prevents corporations from engaging meaningfully with the ecosystem.



Unclear
Corporate Fit Strategic



Lack
of Governance and
Ownership



Poor
Scouting and
Evaluation Capabilities



"Companies with strong **external collaboration networks innovate 30%** faster and see a 20–25% reduction in R&D costs."

Boston Consulting Group

WHY SHOULD CORPORATES ENGAGE OR TAKE PART IN INNOVATION ECOSYSTEMS?

In a world shaped by constant disruption, corporates can no longer rely solely on internal R&D or traditional growth methods. The speed of innovation outside company walls is accelerating and **often outpacing what happens inside**. By engaging with external and internal innovation ecosystems, **companies can tap into new sources of value, build resilience, and remain competitive in a rapidly evolving landscape.**

Four Strategic Drivers that clarify why corporates must engage with the innovation ecosystem



Revenue Growth: This is where corporations explore new business models, product lines, and markets for growth and expansion.



Talent & Culture: Engaging for innovation means attracting and retaining top talent, increasing engagement, and fostering innovative culture.



Operational Efficiency: Engaging with the ecosystem also means leveraging emerging technologies, adopting automation and agile methods.



Resilience & Adaptability: As corporations engage strategically with the ecosystem, it means staying ahead of disruptions and market shifts, and leading the change.

In its essence, **successful corporate engagement with the ecosystem** starts with the right sizing of the problem. Of **clear understanding of the challenges** and the strategic way of scoping them.

Only **30%** of corporates define clear ownership and KPIs for external innovation programs."

Deloitte Innovation Study (2021)

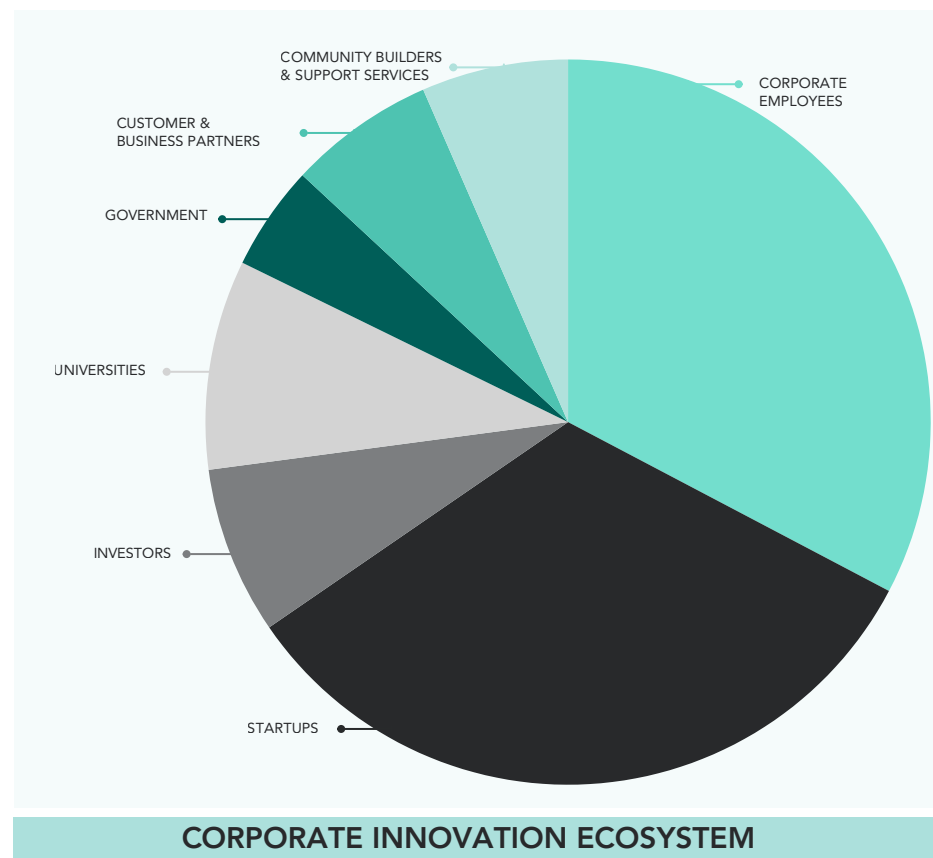
WHO ARE THE KEY PLAYERS IN THE ECOSYSTEM?

Meet The Ecosystem Players

Building on why corporates must engage with innovation ecosystems, **we now explore who makes up that ecosystem** and how each player contributes to corporate innovation success.

An innovation ecosystem is a living network of interconnected actors: **startups, corporate employees, universities, investors, government, and innovation enablers** each playing a distinct yet complementary role.

These stakeholders collectively contribute ideas, capital, infrastructure, talent, and regulation. When intentionally engaged, **they unlock value faster, reduce innovation risk, and accelerate the journey from insight to impact.** However, corporates engaging strategically with all stakeholders in the ecosystem is challenging and strategically difficult. When looking closely, we can distribute by percentages each stakeholder shares within the ecosystem. This's based on the **innovative disruption** each player can contribute to the corporate journey towards innovation.



**Please note that these percentages are approximate, and are driven by the disruptive changes they cause to corporate innovation engagement with the ecosystem.*

INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM STAKEHOLDER LANDSCAPE

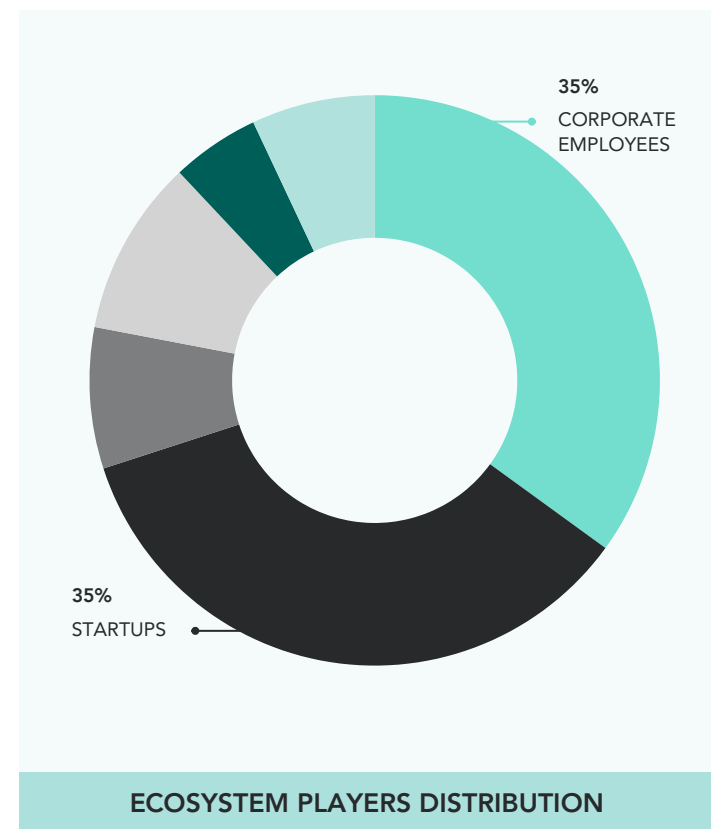
It's clear that **two main players** are contributing the most to corporate engagement with the innovation ecosystem:



Corporate Employees These are the most untapped internal source of innovative ideas and solutions, **contributing almost 35% to corporate innovation engagement**, and are holding key customer knowledge and operational insight.



Startups on the other hand, startups bring external agility and disruptive thinking. **Contributing almost the same percentage of corporate employees 35%, and helping corporates unlock new market opportunities.**



**Please note that these percentages are approximate, and are driven by the disruptive changes they cause to corporate innovation engagement with the ecosystem.*

Research by BCG (2022) shows that companies engaging with startups are 2.2× more likely to launch new products successfully. Meanwhile, employee-led innovation programs boost employee engagement by 45% and retention by 30%."

(Deloitte, 2020)

HOW SHOULD CORPORATES ENGAGE WITH INNOVATION ECOSYSTEMS?

After identifying the why and who, corporates still struggle to strategically plan and implement modes of their engagement with the innovation ecosystem.

Corporations must remember that there's no one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to corporate engagement in innovation ecosystems. The way a company engages should reflect its strategic priorities, internal readiness, risk appetite, and the maturity of the innovation it seeks to pursue.

Some organizations start with light-touch ideation challenges, while others co-build ventures or invest in startups directly. The tools whether hackathons, accelerators, corporate VC, or strategic alliances vary, but the goal remains the same: to unlock external and internal value through purposeful and strategic engagement.

To guide this process, we introduce a **Multi-Phased Corporate Engagement Model**, a strategic framework that maps innovation engagement across **four key phases**:

ENGAGEMENT

At this stage, corporates move from observation to action. They begin engaging internally and externally, generating, testing, and co-developing ideas that solve real problems and align with strategic goals.

- **Tools & Frameworks:** Hackathons, bootcamps, sprints, startup PoCs, design challenges

AWARENESS

It's where corporates open their eyes to both internal challenges and external innovation signals. This phase is about building understanding, sparking interest, and preparing the organization to innovate, from within and through external partnerships

- **Tools & Frameworks:** Awareness workshops, challenge framing, design thinking workshops, ideation sprints, ecosystem mapping

CONVERSION

It's where corporates turn ideas into impact. Corporates invest in what works, build minimum viable solutions, and scale internally or through ventures.

- **Tools & Frameworks:** MVP testing, pilot programs, CVCs, venture building, innovation hubs

TEN TYPES OF INNOVATION FRAMEWORK

As corporates transition through the phases of Awareness, Engagement, and Conversion, **it's essential to use tools that help align innovation efforts with business objectives.** One such foundational tool is Doblin's Ten Types of Innovation framework.

This model helps corporates **identify where innovation can occur, beyond just products or technology.** It provides a **systematic** way to explore different types of innovation and design initiatives that contribute to both internal and external value creation.

Profit Model

Network

Structure

Process

CONFIGURATION

Product Performance

Product System

OFFERING

Service

Channel

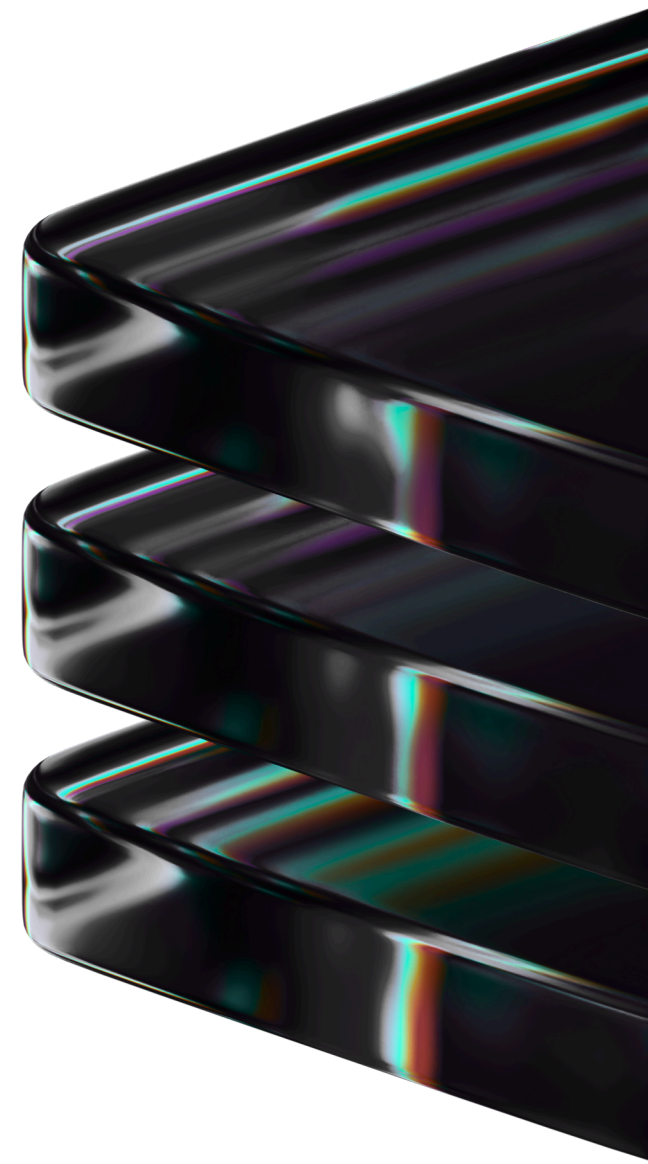
Brand

Customer Engagement

EXPERIENCE

INTERNAL INNOVATION
BUILDING FROM WITHIN

02



BUILDING THE INNOVATION MINDSET

In today's dynamic business environment, internal innovation has emerged as a strategic imperative. Organizations that fail to activate the creativity of their employees risk falling behind in **agility, efficiency, and relevance.**

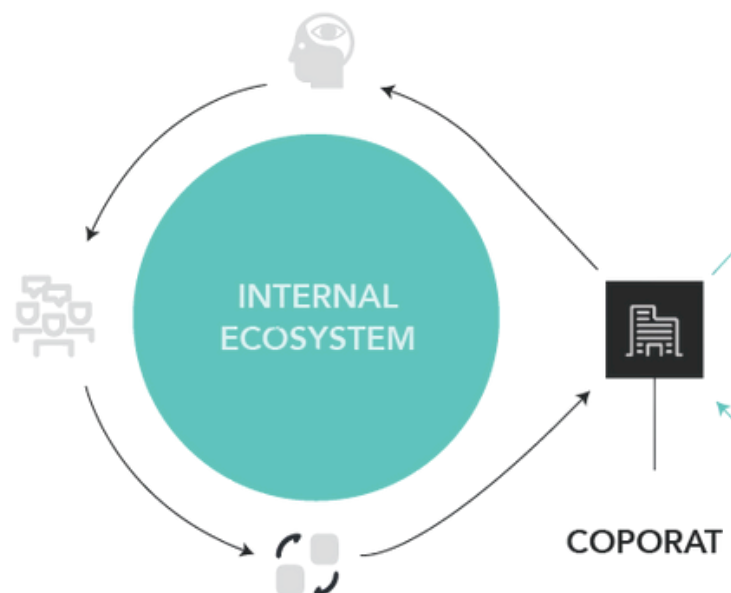
According to McKinsey (2021), **84% of executives agree that innovation is critical to growth, but only 6% are satisfied with their innovation performance.** Much of this gap stems from underleveraging internal talent and underinvesting in systemic, employee-led innovation.

Our internal corporate innovation model is built around a **structured, three-phase approach** that encourages early employee involvement and reduces disengagement as ideas advance.

The model is designed to **foster wide participation at the outset, methodically surface high-potential ideas and talent, and guide them toward either internal development pathways or entry into the accelerator program.** This process is iterative and flexible, ensuring ongoing alignment with both strategic business objectives and evolving market needs.



INTERNAL INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM JOURNEY



INTERNAL AWARENESS

This stage **engages employees** through **targeted initiatives** that showcase the value of innovation labs, fostering curiosity, creativity, and active contribution to organizational innovation goals.



INTERNAL ENGAGEMENT

This stage provides **structured opportunities** for **employees** to engage in ideation, workshops, and collaboration, fostering ownership and a community of innovators driving impact.



INTERNAL CONVERSION

This stage **turns employee ideas** into **actionable solutions** by offering resources, guidance, and support to develop prototypes and proofs of concept, bridging the gap between ideation and implementation.

WHAT MAKES THIS METHOD SUCCESSFUL?

A structured three-step innovation approach provides significant value for corporates by **enhancing return on investment and managing risk across the innovation lifecycle**. It enables organizations to achieve the following:



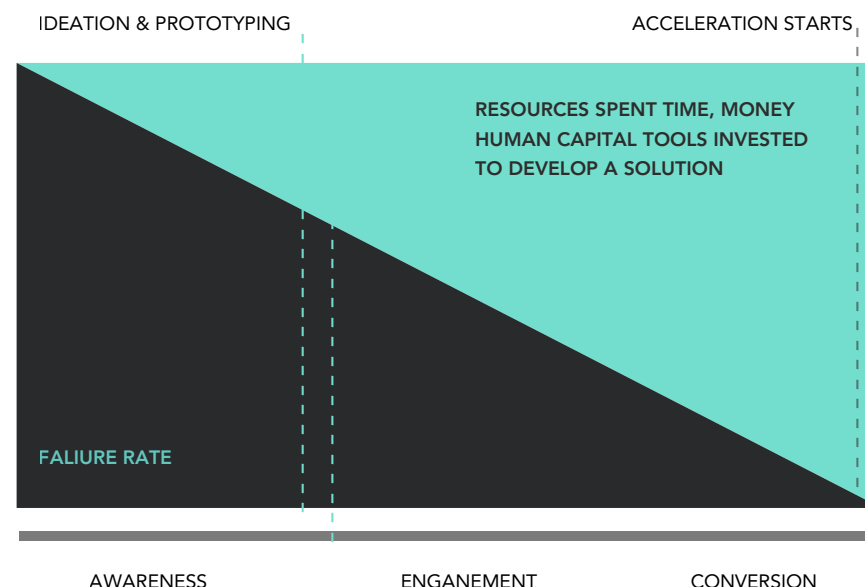
Maximizing Employee Potential - By empowering employees to act as intrapreneurs, **companies can tap into internal talent to generate innovative solutions**, reducing reliance on expensive external consultants or recruitment efforts.



Streamlining Innovation Efforts - Through a stage-gated process, **resources are focused on ideas with the highest potential**, ensuring efficient allocation of time, budget, and manpower while minimizing execution risks.



Enhancing Organizational Agility - This approach fosters a culture of innovation and responsiveness, **enabling corporates to quickly adapt to market changes, seize new opportunities, and maintain competitive advantage**.



INTERNAL AWARENESS

BUILDING CURIOSITY AND READINESS

WHAT DOES AWARENESS WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION LOOK LIKE?

To ignite a culture of innovation across the company, there are a set of targeted awareness activities that are **sparking curiosity, building foundational knowledge, and encouraging employee participation in innovation initiatives**. These activities aim to highlight key themes such as:



Solving Corporate Challenges Through Innovation

Demonstrating how real business problems can be tackled creatively through employee-led solutions.



Unleashing the Power of Ideas Showcasing how groundbreaking innovations begin and encouraging employees to recognize opportunities for improvement and transformation within their roles.



Intrapreneurship vs. Entrepreneurship

Exploring how employees can act as internal innovators, leveraging corporate resources to drive change from within.

WHY IS AWARENESS A CRUCIAL STEP FOR CORPORATE INTERNAL INNOVATION?

- ✓ Build a sustainable culture of innovation
- ✓ Align innovation activities with strategic goals
- ✓ Prepare employees for hands-on innovation engagement (internally and externally)

HOW CAN CORPORATES INCREASE AWARENESS FOR INTERNAL INNOVATION PURPOSES?

- Schedule innovation workshops
- Conduct problem-framing sessions
- Organize internal ideation campaigns
- Share industry knowledge through conducting forum discussions and innovation huddles

KPIS & OUTCOMES FOR THIS PHASE

- % of employee participation
- Number of awareness sessions conducted
- % of employees aware of innovation initiatives

TIPS FOR THIS PHASE

- Use storytelling to spark emotional buy-in
- Gamify awareness campaigns to drive participation
- Appoint innovation champions to lead the engagement phase

AWARENESS TOOL

DESIGN THINKING

WHAT'S DESIGN THINKING?

Design Thinking is a **human-centered, problem-solving approach** that helps teams **understand user needs, redefine problems, and generate innovative solutions** through **collaboration, empathy, and rapid prototyping**.

• EMPATHIZE

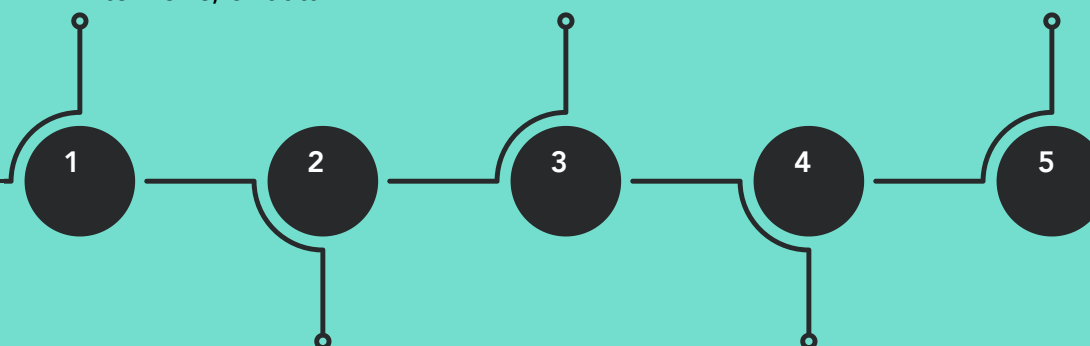
Understand the users (internal or external) and their **pain points** through observation, interviews, or data.

• IDEATE

Generate as many creative solutions as possible through **brainstorming**

• TEST

Share with users, collect feedback, and **iterate to improve**



• DEFINE

Reframe the challenge as a clear, **user-centered problem statement**

• PROTOTYPE

Create quick, low-cost versions of **potential solutions**

INTERNAL ENGAGEMENT

ACTIVATING EMPLOYEES CAPABILITIES

WHAT DOES ENGAGEMENT WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION LOOK LIKE?

Once awareness is established, the next phase is to **empower employees to actively participate in the innovation journey**. Engagement means moving from inspiration to hands-on involvement. This is where innovation becomes real. Not as a concept, **but as a team effort in action**.

Through structured opportunities such as **workshops, sprints, and internal bootcamps**, employees are supported to explore, co-create, and refine ideas aligned with business goals.

WHY IS ENGAGEMENT A CRUCIAL STEP FOR CORPORATE INTERNAL INNOVATION?

- ✓ Translates **inspiration** into action.
- ✓ Strengthens team dynamics and **ownership**.
- ✓ Builds **momentum** and excitement around innovation.
- ✓ Identifies **internal champions** and future intrapreneurs.

HOW CAN CORPORATES FOSTER ENGAGEMENT FOR INTERNAL INNOVATION?

- Design **internal ideation programs** like hackathons/bootcamps with tangible outcomes.
- Corporates can launch structured ideation sprints related to **identified business areas**.
- Design internal development programs like **accelerators** with tangible outcomes.
- Establish **departmental innovation squads** with clear goals.
- Provide **access** to coaching, mentors, and facilitation tools.

KPIS & OUTCOMES FOR THIS PHASE

- Cross-departmental team participation rate
- Challenge engagement rate (submissions & registration)
- Number of ideas and solutions created
- Number of solutions/ MVP created

TIPS FOR THIS PHASE

- Start small: pilot with one department before scaling company-wide
- Celebrate creative and bold ideas
- Sustain the feeling of initiative ownership with participants and move them to the next phase: Conversion.

ENGAGEMENT

CASE STUDY PINTEREST MAKEATHON



• THE CHALLENGE

Pinterest sought to accelerate internal innovation, especially in AI, while ensuring employees across departments were engaged and not simply passive consumers of new tools.

• TOOLS & APPROACH

Pinterest launched its **annual company-wide Makeathon**, now in its 14th year, as a robust internal innovation driver that includes:

- Cross-functional hackathons uniting all departments.
- “Hack doctors” mentoring teams from ideas to pitches.
- Workshops on AI and no-code tools for all staff.

• OBJECTIVES & OUTCOMES

- Makeathon produced practical tools, including an AI chatbot handling ~4,000 monthly queries.
- Strong adoption: 96% of one team and 78% of engineers report time savings.
- Bottom-up innovation built enthusiasm and ensured tools met real employee needs.

INTERNAL CONVERSION

SCALING INTERNAL SOLUTIONS

WHAT DOES CONVERSION MEAN FOR CORPORATES INTERNAL INNOVATION?

Conversion is the execution stage, it's where the selected ideas move into prototyping, testing, and deployment. Innovation governance ensures sustainability and accountability.

It's also the stage where employee innovation graduates from experimentation to impact, and internal innovators begin to see their efforts influencing core strategy, performance, and customer experience.

WHY IS CONVERSION A CRITICAL PHASE IN INTERNAL INNOVATION?

- ✓ Empowers employees as long-term innovation contributors
- ✓ Builds internal confidence in the innovation process
- ✓ Translates ideas into measurable business outcomes
- ✓ Aligns innovation with KPIs and operations

HOW CAN CORPORATES SCALE INTERNAL SOLUTIONS?

- Post-MVP evaluation loops
- Through MVP development
- Launching departmental pilots
- Innovation Labs or Sandboxes
- Use agile governance models to support experimentation at scale
- Support employees with resources, coaching, and executive sponsorship

KPIs & OUTCOMES FOR THIS PHASE

- Innovation ROI
- Timeline to Scale Solutions
- MVP to Implementation Rate
- Business Impact (e.g. cost saved, revenue generated)

TIPS FOR THIS PHASE

- Establish clear next steps. Every MVP should have a roadmap for scaling
- Use champions. Department heads and "innovation sponsors" can drive adoption
- Celebrate success: Share case studies of employees who drove change
- Systematize learning. Capture what worked, and what didn't in each conversion journey

CONVERSION TOOL

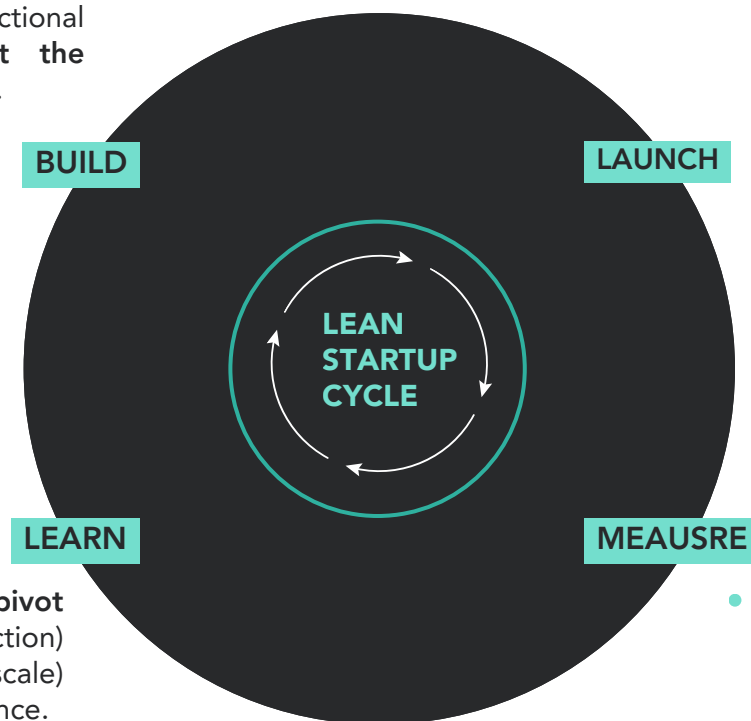
LEAN STARTUP

WHAT'S LEAN STARTUP?

The Lean Startup methodology provides a structured framework for corporates to **test, validate, and scale internal ideas**. Instead of waiting for perfect solutions, the focus is on quickly building Minimum Viable Products (MVP), collecting feedback, and improving iteratively.

- Develop a **Minimum Viable Product (MVP)** or prototype.
- Ensure it's functional enough to **test the core assumption**.

- Release the MVP to a small group of **internal users or business units**.
- Monitor real usage and collect **initial feedback**.



- Decide to **pivot** (change direction) or **persevere** (scale) based on evidence.
- Run additional experiments or **iterate the solution**.

- Use feedback tools and performance data to **assess traction and usability**.
- Track engagement, satisfaction, and outcomes.



"Organizations that provide post-MVP resources and clear pathways for scaling report a 42% higher implementation success rate."

PwC Innovation Report, 2021

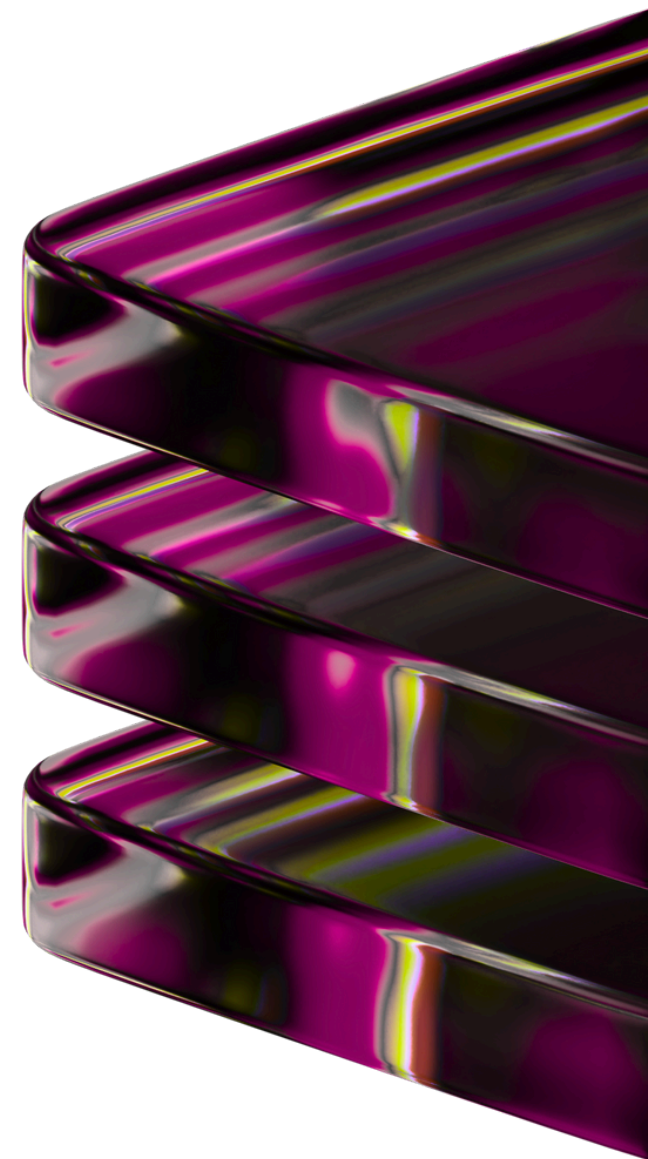
OWNERSHIP TABLE

CORPORATES INTERNAL INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM (ACROSS ALL PHASES)

ROLE	MAIN RESPONSIBILITY	RESPONSIBILITY FOR INTERNAL INNOVATION ENGAGEMENT
HR / R&D	Build corporate culture and skills development	- Organize awareness programs, bootcamps, & workshops - Integrate innovation in training pathways
DEPARTMENT HEADS	Champion innovation across units	- Identify challenge areas - Nominate teams for ideation and PoC Support MVP integration
CORPORATE COMMS	Drive internal storytelling	- Highlight innovation success stories - Promote employee contributions and Support innovation campaigns
INNOVATION TEAM	Own innovation strategy and governance	- Facilitate ideation sprints & MVP testing - Provide toolkits & templates and Track KPIs & support scaling
IT / DIGITAL TEAM	Provide digital infrastructure and tools	- Support sandbox environments for MVPs - Ensure technical feasibility & integration readiness
FINANCE TEAM	Budget allocation & value realization	- Evaluate cost-benefit of MVPs - Manage internal innovation fund disbursement
LEGAL & COMPLIANCE	Ensure governance & data compliance	- Review IP & data issues in MVPs - Approve PoC legal frameworks
EXECUTIVE SPONSORS	Set strategic direction & unblock teams	- Endorse winning ideas - Help escalate successful MVPs to business-wide initiatives

EXTERNAL INNOVATION
COLLABORATING BEYOND

03



EXTERNAL ECOSYSTEM INNOVATION JOURNEY

Corporates no longer innovate alone. The modern innovation landscape requires companies to think beyond their walls, tapping into a vibrant network of **startups, VCs, accelerators, universities, enablers, and regulators** to co-create the future.

The methodology introduced in Section Three will be replicated for the external ecosystem. In this phase, external stakeholders will be **directly engaged to co-ideate, co-develop, and implement innovative solutions.**



EXTERNAL INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM JOURNEY



EXTERNAL AWARENESS

This stage **builds organizational awareness of external innovation** by exposing teams to startups, emerging technologies, and ecosystem enablers. Through mapping, forums, and scouting, corporates identify collaboration opportunities that drive growth and complement internal strengths.



EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT

This stage **shifts from exploration to action through structured collaborations** with startups, universities, and accelerators. Via hackathons, bootcamps, and co-creation labs, corporates tackle strategic challenges and test breakthrough ideas.



EXTERNAL CONVERSION

This stage **turns experimentation into execution** by scaling validated ideas through pilots, venture building, partnerships, licensing, and CVC investments.

EXTERNAL AWARENESS

DISCOVERING THE ECOSYSTEM

WHAT DOES AWARENESS LOOK LIKE IN EXTERNAL INNOVATION?

Awareness is about exposing corporate teams to the external innovation ecosystem -startups, venture capitalists, research hubs, and tech disruptors. It builds foundational knowledge, creates buy-in, and identifies alignment between external innovations and internal business priorities.

WHY IS AWARENESS CRUCIAL FOR EXTERNAL INNOVATION?

- ☑ Positions the corporate as a **collaborative and future-ready partner**
- ☑ Builds **shared understanding** of external innovation value with the ecosystem
- ☑ **Avoids resistance** during deeper external collaborations
- ☑ Leading the industry in adopting emerging technologies and trends

HOW CAN CORPORATES BUILD AWARENESS FOR EXTERNAL INNOVATION?

- Organize Ecosystem Deep-Dive Workshops
- Host External Showcases & Startup Demos
- Create a Visual Startup Radar Dashboard

KPIS & OUTCOMES FOR THIS PHASE

- Number of departments participating in awareness activities
- Engagement rate with ecosystem briefings and latest trends
- Number of external opportunities aligns with corporate strategic goals

TIPS FOR THIS PHASE

- Always align awareness topics with known business challenges.
- When organizing awareness related activities, make sure to highlight trends and emerging technologies that are changing the industry

AWARENESS TOOL

STARTUP & VC DATABASES

WHAT ARE THEY?

Startup and VC databases like Crunchbase, Dealroom, PitchBook, and CB Insights are digital intelligence platforms that provide real-time data on:

- Startups (industry, funding, traction, location)
- Investors (VCs, angels, CVCs)
- Market trends and deal flows
- Emerging technologies and innovation clusters

WHY USE THEM IN THE AWARENESS PHASE?

- Identify emerging startups before competitors
- Track investment patterns in the industry
- Scan for disruptive technologies and business models
- Map ecosystem players for potential partnerships

PLATFORM	FOCUS	KEY FEATURES
CRUNCHBASE	Startups & Investors	Rich company profiles, funding rounds, filters by geography & tech
DEALROOM	European & MENA Startups	Ecosystem dashboards, city-level views, government-backed reports
PITCHBOOK	VC, PE, M&A	Deep financial and deal insights, valuation trends
CB INSIGHTS	Tech & Innovation	Innovation mapping, emerging tech watchlists, sector snapshots

EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT

COLLABORATING WITH THE KEY PLAYERS

WHAT DOES ENGAGEMENT LOOK LIKE IN EXTERNAL INNOVATION?

After building awareness and opening minds, it's time to actively connect with ecosystem players. Engagement moves from listening and learning to hands-on collaboration with startups, researchers, and innovation enablers.

This is where strategic tools like hackathons, bootcamps, startup scouting, PoCs, and co-creation labs come into play.

These structured initiatives help corporates test real solutions, explore new technologies, and start building trusted partnerships.

WHY IS ENGAGEMENT CRUCIAL FOR EXTERNAL INNOVATION?

- ✓ De-risks innovation through **low-commitment experiments (PoCs)**
- ✓ Builds **partnerships** with emerging technology providers
- ✓ Generates **viable solutions** tailored to corporate strategic needs
- ✓ Helps corporates learn startup speed and agility

HOW CAN CORPORATES FOSTER ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ECOSYSTEM?

- Launch startup bootcamps focused on **business-critical needs**
- Run external hackathons in collaboration with accelerators and innovation hubs
- Design and implement Proof-of-Concept (PoC) engagements with clear metrics

KPIS & OUTCOMES FOR THIS PHASE

- Number of startups engaged or shortlisted per challenge
- % of PoCs successfully completed
- Post-engagement satisfaction score (corporate & startup)

TIPS FOR THIS PHASE

- Start small, scale fast.
- Define clear problem statements.
- Co-design with partners.

Mix formats: hackathons, scouting, PoCs.

ENGAGEMENT

P&G'S "CONNECT + DEVELOP"



THE CHALLENGE

Procter & Gamble realized their internal R&D was limiting the speed and diversity of innovation. **They needed a broader flow of ideas to remain competitive globally.**

TOOLS & APPROACH

Launched *Connect + Develop*, a systematic external collaboration platform engaging:

- Startups
- Independent inventors
- Universities
- Tech partners

OBJECTIVES & OUTCOMES

- **50%** of new products now involve external innovation
- **Cut R&D costs** significantly while boosting product launch rate

Reference:

CollaborationBetterstheWorld.com

EXTERNAL CONVERSION

SCALING WHAT WORKS

WHAT DOES CONVERSION LOOK LIKE IN EXTERNAL INNOVATION?

This is the final and most critical phase, moving from successful pilots to scalable, institutionalized outcomes.

Conversion ensures external innovations don't end as experiments, but become integrated into business processes, products, or even new ventures.

Here, corporates either invest in, partner with, or acquire startups, or launch their own ventures through venture building or CVC (Corporate Venture Capital). **It's about making innovation a sustained competitive advantage.**

WHY IS CONVERSION CRUCIAL FOR EXTERNAL INNOVATION?

- ✓ Obtain **long-term ROI** from earlier innovation investments
- ✓ Embeds **startup agility** into the corporate fabric
- ✓ Builds reputation as an **innovation-forward organization**
- ✓ Creates new revenue streams and business models

HOW CAN CORPORATES ACCELERATE CONVERSION WITH THE ECOSYSTEM?

- Set up **Corporate Venture Capital arms** or participate in funds
- Partner with **venture builders** to co-create spinout solutions
- Create **internal onboarding processes** or committee for validated startup solutions

KPIS & OUTCOMES FOR THIS PHASE

- Innovation ROI
- Timeline to Scale Solutions
- MVP to Implementation Rate
- Business Impact (e.g. cost saved, revenue generated)

TIPS FOR THIS PHASE

- Establish clear next steps. Every MVP should have a roadmap for scaling
- Use champions. Department heads and "innovation sponsors" can drive adoption
- Celebrate success: Share case studies of employees who drove change
- Systematize learning. Capture what worked, and what didn't in each conversion journey

CONVERSION TOOL

METERED INITIATIVE FUNDING

WHAT IS IT?

Metered Funding is a structured approach to innovation financing where funding is **released in stages** based on **milestones, learning, and validated progress**, rather than annual static budgets.

It mirrors how **startups receive investment**, iteratively, based on results, risk, and traction.

WHY IT MATTERS IN THE CONVERSION PHASE?

When corporates begin co-developing solutions, investing in PoCs, or funding external ventures, they often **struggle with rigid funding models** that don't match the **uncertainty of innovation**.

METERED FUNDING:

- Reduces **wasted capital** on ideas that don't scale
- Aligns funding with **risk and learning**
- **Encourages agility** in decision-making
- Supports **continuous innovation** without locking full budgets up front

STAGE 1: PROJECT INITIATION

Small seed funding released to explore idea viability

→ Continue / Kill

STAGE 3: SCALING GROWTH

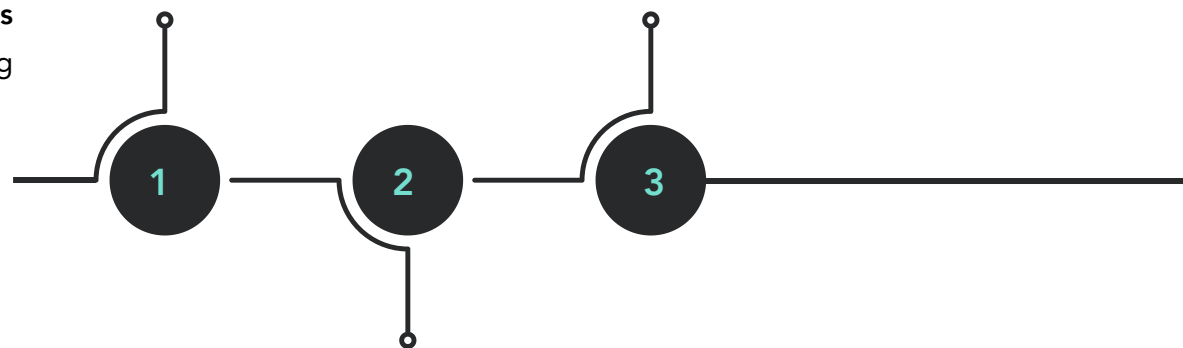
Growth-based capital released for validated, successful initiatives

→ Pivot / Persevere

STAGE 2: PROTOTYPE & LEARNING

Additional funding tied to clear learning metrics (e.g. user feedback, PoC outcomes)

→ Scale or Institutionalize



"Companies with formal scaling mechanisms convert
2.5× more PoCs into commercial impact."

Innovation Leader Corporate Benchmark Report, 2022

CONVERSION

MAJID AL FUTTAIM X RAINMAKING (UAE)

RAINMAKING



THE CHALLENGE

Majid Al Futtaim (MAF) sought to **accelerate innovation beyond its core business units and avoid the slow cycles of internal product development**. The goal was to unlock new revenue streams in areas like retail tech, mobility, and sustainability, but without creating disconnected innovation silos.

TOOLS & APPROACH

Partnered with **Rainmaking**, a global venture studio, to:

- Launch a **venture building model** that leveraged MAF's assets and market access
- Co-create with entrepreneurs and external founders
- Use lean startup methods and milestone-based PoC validation
- Align every venture to corporate strategic growth areas

OBJECTIVES & OUTCOMES

- Created **5+** validated ventures in under 2 years
- Enabled a **scalable mechanism** to test, fail fast, and double down on high-potential ideas
- Positioned MAF as a regional leader in **corporate venture building**

Reference:

[Rainmaking.io](https://rainmaking.io/); [MAF Corporate](#)

[Innovation Spotlight, 2022](#)

OWNERSHIP TABLE

ROLES IN EXTERNAL INNOVATION *(Across All Phases)*

ROLE	MAIN RESPONSIBILITY	RESPONSIBILITY FOR INTERNAL INNOVATION ENGAGEMENT
INNOVATION TEAM / L&D	Own external innovation strategy and execution	• Lead scouting and ecosystem mapping • Facilitate PoCs and external bootcamps & Oversee startup partnerships and pilots
DEPARTMENT HEADS	Define needs and lead implementation efforts	• Identify strategic challenge areas • Participate in startup selection & Champion PoC and post-pilot adoption
CORPORATE COMMS	Share innovation stories and signal innovation openness	• Highlight startup partnerships • Promote co-creation case studies & Coordinate ecosystem storytelling
STRATEGY OFFICE	Align external innovation with business priorities	• Approve innovation theses • Map strategic fit of ventures & Guide long-term integration plans
FINANCE & INVESTMENT	Fund external innovation and track returns	• Allocate innovation capital and PoC funding • Evaluate investment opportunities (CVC, JV) & Track ROI on ecosystem investments
IT / DIGITAL	Fund external innovation and track returns	• Evaluate tech stack integration • Support MVP pilots and testbeds & Review digital risks and data governance
EXECUTIVE SPONSORS	Fund external innovation and track returns	• Endorse strategic partnerships • Approve key innovation investments & Scale successful outcomes organization-wide

STRATEGIC TOOLS & FRAMEWORKS

04

STRATEGIC TOOLS & FRAMEWORKS

EMPOWERING CORPORATE INNOVATION THROUGH PRACTICAL TOOLKITS

To move from strategy to execution, organizations need more than just awareness and engagement efforts. They require strategic tools that translate innovation ambitions into structured action, enabling teams, departments, and partners to apply innovation methods in a consistent and impactful way.

While many tools are embedded across the different phases of this playbook (Awareness, Engagement, and Conversion),

this section highlights foundational enablers that support the overall innovation infrastructure. These tools help assess organizational readiness, define challenges, validate solutions, and ensure alignment between innovation initiatives and corporate goals.

By embedding these enablers into existing workflows, organizations can de-risk experimentation, accelerate learning cycles, and build a more systematic approach to innovation.



INNOVATION READINESS CHECKLIST

This checklist provides a strategic tool for organizations **to evaluate their readiness to innovate at scale.** It follows the seven building blocks identified as essential for high-performing innovators. Each block begins with a short explanation, followed by practical assessment points. Corporates can use this as a diagnostic **to highlight gaps, align stakeholders, and prioritize action areas.**

PURPOSE

Assess how prepared a team, department, or company is to engage in structured innovation activities.

HOW TO USE

- As a pre-engagement tool before launching hackathons, bootcamps, or external collaborations.
- Evaluate areas such as leadership support, cross-functional capabilities, risk culture, available resources, and process maturity.
- Can be self-assessed or facilitated by the Innovation Team or Strategy Unit.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Companies with high innovation readiness are 3x more likely to scale new solutions successfully (Source: BCG Innovation Readiness Survey, 2023).

INNOVATION READINESS CHECKLIST

Customer Centricity

Customer-centric innovation ensures solutions are **relevant and impactful**. Leading companies bring customers into the process **from ideation to validation**.

- ✓ Do we use **customer insights** and journey maps to drive innovation?
- ✓ Are customers **actively involved** in ideation, validation, or co-creation processes?
- ✓ Is there a **feedback loop** from customers to innovation teams?
- ✓ Do we **measure customer** satisfaction as part of innovation success metrics?

1

Innovation Strategy

Without a **clear innovation strategy**, efforts become fragmented and disconnected from the company's purpose. A **strong strategy** sets direction, prioritizes initiatives, and defines success.

- ✓ Do we have a **clearly defined** and documented innovation strategy?
- ✓ Is our innovation strategy aligned with the overall corporate strategy?
- ✓ Are innovation goals tied to **measurable business outcomes** (growth, efficiency, resilience)?
- ✓ Do we periodically **review and update** the innovation roadmap?

2

Organizational Agility

Agility is the **foundation** for iterative innovation. It requires decentralization, empowered teams, and flexible processes to **accelerate from idea to execution**.

- ✓ Can we **rapidly reallocate resources** (time, people, budget) to innovation initiatives?
- ✓ Do teams have **autonomy** to make quick decisions and iterate?
- ✓ Do we operate with **agile workflows** (sprints, design thinking, lean testing)?
- ✓ Can **cross-functional collaboration** happen without structural bottlenecks?

3

Innovation Portfolio Management

Innovation is not a single initiative, **it's a portfolio of ideas across different horizons**. Managing that portfolio with the right metrics and governance ensures resources go to the most promising ideas.

- ✓ Do we maintain a balanced portfolio (core, adjacent, transformational innovations)?
- ✓ Are there clear evaluation criteria for innovation projects (risk/impact)?
- ✓ Is there a stage-gate or metered funding approach in place?

Innovation Skills & Competencies

Innovation skills are no longer optional. Building internal capabilities ensures that employees can ideate, experiment, and execute using modern innovation tools.

- ✓ Do employees receive regular training in innovation tools (design thinking, lean startup)?
- ✓ Are there clear pathways for internal innovators to grow or scale their ideas?
- ✓ Do we assess and track innovation capabilities across teams?

4

5

6

7

Organization of Innovation

An effective innovation structure defines roles, aligns functions, and governs processes.

- ✓ Is there a centralized or distributed innovation function within the company?
- ✓ Are roles and responsibilities clearly defined across departments?
- ✓ Do we have governance structures for decision-making and risk management?
Are innovation champions or squads active across units?

Innovation Culture & Leadership

Culture is the invisible force behind innovation. A strong culture encourages risk-taking, celebrates experimentation, and ensures innovation is everyone's job.

- ✓ Do leaders communicate a compelling vision for innovation?
- ✓ Are we tolerant of failure and experimentation?
Is innovation embedded in performance metrics and KPIs?

CHALLENGES SCOPING

PURPOSE

Help teams clearly define business challenges before ideation or external engagement

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

The aim is to gain a deep understanding of the challenges worth solving within the corporates' focus areas and assess their potential within the selected sector. This will help us determine how participants can effectively address market needs and develop innovative, impactful and sustainable solutions.

HOW TO SCOPE THE RIGHT CHALLENGE?

THE OBJECTIVES

- ✓ Assess Market Conditions: Identify current themes, challenges, and needs within the selected sectors.
- ✓ Assess previous strategic documents
- ✓ Benchmark Globally: Learn from leading global hubs to define best practices.
- ✓ Develop Strategic Vision: Establish clear strategic directions that enhance participants adaptability and support the selected sectors market, in line with national goals

THE EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Enhance the list of challenges and detail them
- Topics and trends to be addressed through the internal workshops and sessions
- Limitations from adoption of innovations within the corporate

INNOVATION OPPORTUNITY ASSESSMENT

Not all innovation ideas are worth pursuing. To maximize ROI and resource allocation, **corporates must assess opportunities systematically.** This tool helps organizations **evaluate the attractiveness, feasibility, and strategic fit of potential innovation initiatives,** whether internal concepts or external startup solutions.

		1	2	3	4	5
MARKET ATTRACTIVENESS	• There is a substantial market					
	• The market will grow substantially					
	• We can scale across sectors					
	• Target customers are well defined					
	• Current offerings in the market are insufficient					
	• Customers are likely to buy our solution					
COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE	• We offer an innovation that is unique in the market					
	• Our competitive advantage is sustainable					
	• We have access to the target customers					
	• We have a first mover advantage (time-to-market)					
	• There is a good fit with our positioning and core business					
	• We are fully confident that we can deliver the solution					
	• We can deliver a competitive price / performance ratio					

Definition of the rating	
1	Fully disagree
2	Disagree
3	Agree nor disagree
4	Agree
5	Fully Agree

FINAL CONSEDRATION

Innovation in today's regulators, investors, and corporate landscape is not merely a function, it is a fundamental driver of sustainable growth, resilience, and strategic differentiation. The increasing complexity of markets, technologies, and consumer expectations demands that corporates move beyond isolated R&D efforts toward integrated innovation ecosystems. These ecosystems, comprising internal employees, startups, universities, regulators, investors, and other partners, offer powerful opportunities for collaborative problem-solving and market-shaping innovation.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Ecosystem-Centric Innovation Is the New Norm** - Successful organizations recognize that innovation thrives in well-orchestrated ecosystems. Internal silos must be broken, and external partnerships must be intentional and strategic.

- **Internal Innovation Starts with Culture and Capability** - Empowering employees to innovate requires more than just tools. It requires a supportive culture, leadership endorsement, safe experimentation spaces, and alignment with strategic priorities.

- **External Innovation Requires Strategic Scouting and Integration** - Effective engagement with startups, VCs, and accelerators should be based on structured scouting, validation frameworks, and clear value alignment, not opportunistic transactions.

- **Structured Engagement Models Reduce Risk and Increase Impact** - The three-phase model (Awareness, Engagement, Conversion) allows for progressive innovation maturity, ensuring that ideas are not only generated but validated, implemented, and institutionalized.

- **Tools and Frameworks Enable Execution at Scale** - From design thinking to metered funding, innovation readiness assessments to Lean Startup Framework, are all practical tools allow innovation to move from abstract strategy to measurable progress.

BEHIND THE PAGES



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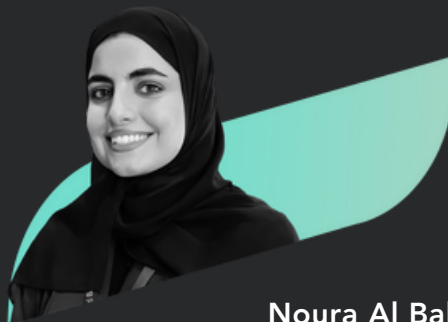
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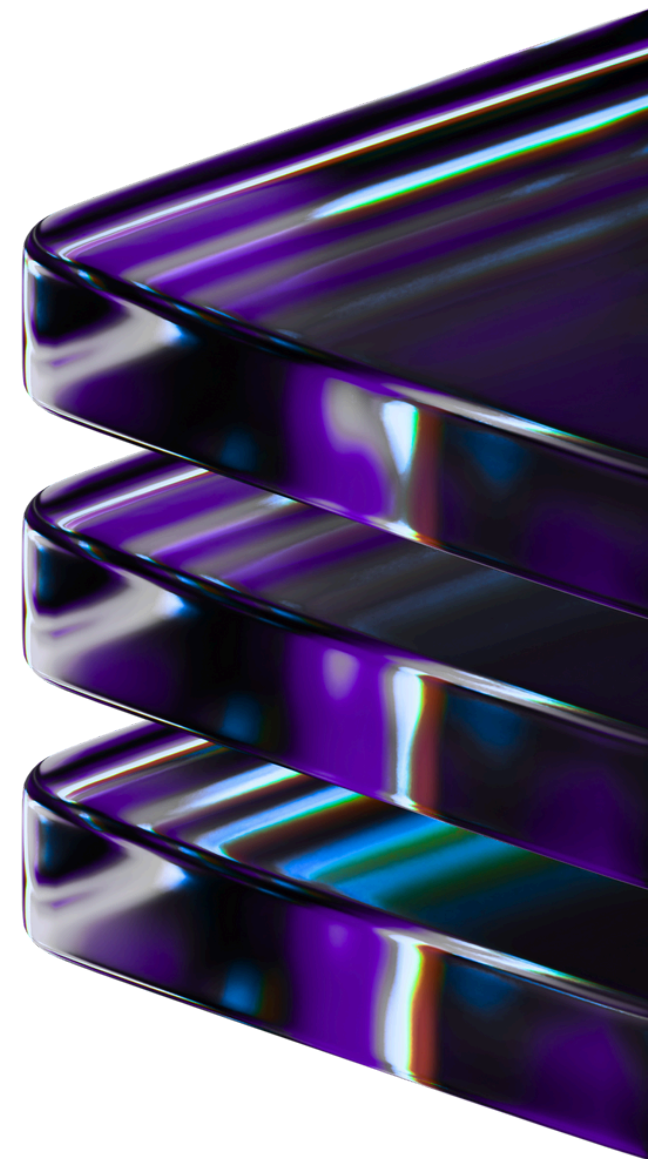
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SUPPORTING MATERIALS & REFERENCES

05



GLOSSARY OF TERMS

TERM	DEFINITION
Corporate Innovation	A structured approach that allows corporations to develop, test, and scale new ideas to remain competitive and relevant.
Internal Innovation	Innovation initiatives developed and implemented from within the organization, driven by employees or internal teams.
External Innovation	Innovation sourced from outside the organization, including partnerships with startups, academia, accelerators, or venture capital.
Intrapreneurship	Employees acting like entrepreneurs within a company, initiating and managing innovation projects internally.
Design Thinking	A user-centered methodology for solving problems creatively through empathy, ideation, prototyping, and testing.
Lean Startup	A method of innovation focused on rapid experimentation and iteration, using MVPs and customer feedback to validate assumptions.
MVP (Minimum Viable Product)	The simplest functional version of a product used to test core features and gather user feedback for iteration.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

TERM	DEFINITION
PoC (Proof of Concept)	A small-scale experiment used to determine the feasibility of an innovation before full-scale development.
CVC (Corporate Venture Capital)	Investment by corporations in startups aligned with strategic innovation goals.
Venture Building	A structured approach to creating new startups inside or in partnership with a corporate organization.
Hackathon	A time-boxed innovation event where teams rapidly prototype solutions to defined challenges.
Bootcamp	A short, intensive innovation training program that enables employees or partners to build and test ideas.
Innovation Lab	A dedicated space or function within a company for experimentation, prototyping, and scaling innovation
Startup Scouting	The process of discovering and evaluating startups for potential collaboration, investment, or acquisition

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

TERM	DEFINITION
Innovation Funnel	A stage-gate process that moves ideas from conception through validation to implementation.
Strategic Fit Assessment	The evaluation of how well an external innovation opportunity aligns with a corporation's strategic priorities.
Metered Funding	An innovation funding model where capital is released in tranches based on validation milestones and performance.
Innovation Readiness	The degree to which an organization is structurally and culturally prepared to engage in innovation systematically.



REFERENCES & SUPPORTING MATERIALS

ACADEMIC & STRATEGIC PUBLICATIONS

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BCG (2023). Innovation Benchmark Report.

McKinsey & Company (2022). The State of Corporate Innovation.

Harvard Business Review (2021). Why Corporate Innovation Fails.

Strategyzer. (2022). Testing Business Ideas.

PRACTICAL FRAMEWORKS REFERENCED

RevelX Innovation Readiness Benchmark

RevelX Metered Funding Model

Ten Types of Innovation (Doblin)

IDEO Design Thinking Toolkit

Dealroom, Crunchbase (for external awareness & startup scouting)

CB Insights, Startup Genome (for trend identification and ecosystem mapping)



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