



SAMPLE DILEMMA

Dilemma Name: Breaking Out to do Breakthrough

A senior scientist gained approval for dedicated research to a leading edge technology that promised substantial competitive advantage. He was invited to identify the talent he wanted to work on the project from across the R&D function, globally. His team was virtually handpicked by him with senior mgt approval. They were “off-line” for 18 months without disruption. At the end of the 18 months, though the team believed they had made substantial progress and were on the verge of having a new technology for patent application, the project did not move forward.

Part I - Facts:

1. Influential senior leaders, both within R&D, as well as with the business, did not “approve continuing funding for the project.
2. The senior scientist leading the project was not recognized for his contribution during the 18 months and was subsequently assigned to a relatively obscure, low-priority project.
3. A similar and very competitive technology was submitted for patent application by a competitor approximately 3 years later (or about 1.5 years after the work was discontinued internally).
4. The lead scientist on the project has still not been granted permission to publish externally on the results of the work he and the select team completed during the 18 months.

Part II - Effects of the Situation:

1. Lead scientists feels “marginalized”
2. Internal buzz is that it was a “political” decision not based on technical merit
3. Others are reluctant to assume such a role now or in the future as a result

Part III – Current Options

1. Continue special initiatives, but put in mechanisms for minimizing risk, both individual and organizational and articulate clearly the expectations and measures of success throughout the life of the project for both the individual and the organization.
2. Eliminate special initiatives and promote breakthrough innovation as a culture norm and expectation across the entire R&D organization.
3. Eliminate special initiatives and establish a breakthrough innovation group where the expectations are clear to those in the group, as well as to the rest of the organization.