

LETTERS

TO LEAD OR TO FOLLOW?

Robert Garvey's recent cover story, "Innovation Evolves," is one of the most insightful synopses of innovation (or lack thereof) in corporate America that I have come across in a long time. The tagline suggests, "Everything you know about business innovation may be false." Perhaps the biggest fallacy is that innovation is alive and well, and is still a core driver of America's success in the marketplace.

Unfortunately, many companies are choosing the "fast follower" path to new product development, letting someone else do the innovation, be first to take products to market and take the risk. Then, when everything is proven, they swoop in to buy the company or perhaps even knock off the innovating offender—Goliath slays David. In the buyout scenario, companies often pay many multiples of sales in order to avoid managing a messy innovation process. In the Goliath/David scenario, they are willing to enter a patent infringement shoot out, because it is cheaper to overwhelm David in court than to buy out or out-innovate him.

Where are the answers to this innovation dilemma? As a participant in the "Open Innovation" movement, I agree with Garvey that the NIH (Not Invented Here) wall is beginning to crumble, and the opening up of corporate

America to outside and inside "planned innovation" is proceeding at a surprising pace.

We should also not underestimate the importance of the marriage of new technology to diverse applications as a source of innovative new products. Every day, the outflow of the technological pipeline increases from all over the world. The application of these technologies in new and unexpected ways can be the easiest, fastest and least risky path to innovation, since some out there can manage the technology-application process in a cost-effective way.

The sooner corporate America discovers how to harvest this overflow, the sooner the innovation crisis can be averted.

— Mike Rainone; Palestine, TX

DELAYS DECONSTRUCTED

Chris Cooke (From the Flight Deck) did a fine job in the December magazine explaining why so many flights get delayed. Unfortunately, most people who blame the airline and/or the flight crew will never see your article. Let's all hope the FAA's computer system is brought up to the very best level available.

— Bruce Brubaker; Owensboro, KY

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