

The rising spirit of intrapreneurship

Drawing upon the top talent in different sections, companies now create special teams for bringing innovative ideas to life

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In 2015, online furniture store Pepperfry reduced the cost of delivering huge furniture items to customers, by replacing the services of third-party logistics services providers with those of its new entity, Pepkart Logistics. To give an idea of how big and nuanced this is, Pepkart Logistics has a fleet of 350 trucks, customised to deliver large-sized and heavy furniture.

This last-mile delivery model, which is the backbone of Pepperfry's large-items distribution system, was born out of the efforts of a four-member cross-functional team.

"Tiger Team", as it is called, is five years old.

"The best part of this exercise is that we were allowed to challenge the way things were being done in the organisation," says Abhishek Das Gupta, who was just a year old in the company when he was picked to be a part of Tiger Team. Abhishek is now in his early 30s.

Until a few years ago, the spirit of innovation was viewed with admiration. And then, it became an essential aspect of product development. Teams were expected to be disruptive in their outlook and challenge the *status quo*. And, in some of these companies, these teams were "specially hand-crafted."

Specially-crafted teams

There are now organisations that empower specially-created teams to function like intrapreneurs (in-house entrepreneurs). Not only are these teams permitted sufficient time to come up with disruptive ideas, but are also provided with funding to bring the best of those ideas to life.

Some large organisations have enabled associates from various sections "to collaborate to create, fail and try again in a more experimental and creative environment," says Puja Kohli, founder, Unfold Consulting, which will be releasing a

study on intrapreneurial practices at their upcoming conclave in Bengaluru.

These corporate entrepreneurs need not always be the top talent and may not be known to all, but they have the ability to turn ideas into profitable businesses.

Start-up Lab, an initiative of Deutsche Post DHL Group, fosters "corporate entrepreneurship" by providing teams with a start-up environment, exposure to senior management, four months of funding and a provision to put ideas into practice.

FMCG company Marico Limited has so far had three "Young Boards" – cross-functional teams of eight members each that have worked on business ideas, for 12 to 18 months.

"One of our recent Young Board teams identified a delivery mechanism for dispensing oats. Even at the pilot stage, the idea attracted five corporates. We fuel the entrepreneurial spirit by attaching the team with a mentor, it's either the CEO or a top management member,

and creating new ways of doing things," says Amit Prakash, CHRO, Marico.

Prakash says the Young Board is made familiar with how the company board functions. Incentives or rewards are equally important while encouraging corporate entrepreneurs. At the end of the programme, the members are rewarded with stock options, he adds.

To create an entrepreneurial environment, companies have to take a new look at their systems, structures and process.

"Create an ideas investment pool, that will keep drawing fresh ideas from employees," says Rajat Garg, leadership coach. It must be inclusive and invite ideas from across the company, he adds.

"Empower people to take decisions and then stand by them. The leadership must be ready to accept failures," he says.

Removing the barriers

For Unfold Consulting,

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which works with companies to help them identify, develop and retain intrapreneurs, silos-style of working is the main barrier to creating an entrepreneurial and agile environment in companies.

To address this, they work with the top leadership. Citing an example, Puja says organisations that are structured around hierarchical systems rather than networks struggle to leverage their intrapreneurship potential.

Line managers also play a crucial role in this.

Adds Puja, "Intrapreneurs think outside the box, so the reporting manager should be the first role model for the individual. He should be able to break the barriers to pave way for innovation."

