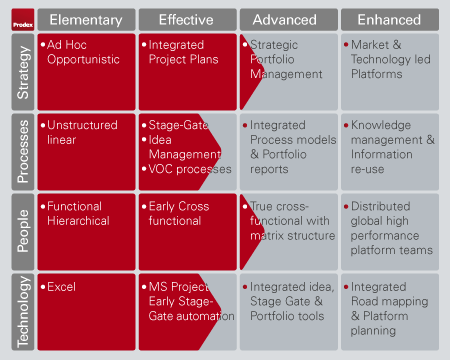
**Innovation Maturity: A Framework for Increasing Innovation Productivity**  
  
*Gerard Ryan, featured inKNOWvations guest writer, discusses how to build innovation maturity to better leverage the investments made in new product and business innovation.*The  term “innovation maturity” implies not only that some companies may have higher levels of innovation maturity than others but also that they may be enjoying benefits from their innovation investments that others are yet to realize.  
  
The identification and implementation of innovation “best practices” has been the focus of new product development management research for decades. Leading this field of research for many years has been Dr. Robert Cooper, perhaps the most prolific author globally on the determinants of success and failure in new product development. Cooper identified three key drivers of innovation success: strategy, process and resources. Companies who focus on these three dimensions of innovation best practice realise a 30% to 70% increase in the productivity of their innovation investments.   
  
In the parallel world of implementing effective organizational change the mantra to focus on people, process and technology has prevailed. Technology is recognized as a key enabler of increased productivity and when implemented with due consideration of processes and resources can deliver significant payback.  
  
There are many best practice tools which companies use to increase their innovation effectiveness and there are several definable phases of maturity through which companies pass as they progress towards best practice.



Early in the innovation maturity cycle, companies have a reactive rather than pro-active approach to innovation management. All projects are accepted and every opportunity looks good. An unsuccessful product launch or the overloading of resources often leads to the first step towards innovation maturity: The search for an effective innovation process. Recognizing that “not all projects are equal” and that “not every idea is a winner” leads eventually to the identification and adoption of processes such as Stage-Gatetm. In this phase of innovation maturity, the most significant business benefit of the Stage-Gate methodology is the filtering process which comes with effective gate keeping and the creation of a funnel (rather than a tunnel) full of innovation opportunities.  
  
Early adopters of the Stage-Gate process often implement a five stage process model, based upon Cooper’s best-selling book. While this process is required for high risk projects, in most companies, at least two thirds of projects are line extensions and cost reduction projects. Inherently these projects have lower risk levels and require a simpler “fast track” Stage-Gate process.  
  
With the core processes in place to manage both high and low risk projects; executive attention turns to the challenge of portfolio balance. Identifying the right mix of projects by brand, by category, by market and by risk level requires the implementation of an effective product portfolio management system.  
  
As companies define their strategic objectives and in turn the portfolio of innovation projects required to deliver on those objectives, the need for innovation automation technologies increases. Given that all new product ideas are initiated, approved and advanced through the process we know that at any point in the time the portfolio of actual projects will vary from the planned strategy. Companies with advanced levels of innovation maturity deploy software solutions to assist in the complex task of real time portfolio management.   
  
There are other best practice methodologies along the pathway towards innovation maturity including idea management, voice of the customer methods and strategic road mapping.  
  
To optimize their investments in innovation companies would be well advised to:

* Recognize that the pathway towards innovation maturity is a journey.
* Consider the use of the innovation maturity model to define your current and planned positions.
* Accept that where you are now along that pathway is appropriate for you today.
* Plan a progression towards advanced levels of innovation maturity.
* Address the dimensions of strategy, process, resource and technology.

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