



The main barriers to innovation

Several reasons can explain why some companies are innovative and others are not. And why even the innovative ones stop being innovative at a certain point. Three of the most common reasons are as follows.

1. Looking for models that are the antithesis of innovation

A winning idea on the market is something that must be tested, tried, corrected and perfected. Most ideas that seem interesting don't pass the test of experimentation. Even with the right approach, things can fail. And they often fail. Innovation involves error. A lot of errors. You need to create a culture and a process that promotes many ideas and their rapid experimentation, while maintaining constant investment.

However, many decision-makers are looking for a business innovation model that does exactly the opposite – they want something that guarantees that the best idea is thought of, built and implemented on the first try and in one go, reducing errors and experimentation, within the natural stability of the company. They don't allow room for divergent thinking and the possibility of questioning the way things are done. They don't allow room for error and experimentation.

By analogy, in science, progress is made by testing all hypotheses and eliminating variables. In sport, a top athlete develops by testing, experimenting, training and perfecting. In the same way, a business innovation system is a process of perfecting ideas that requires acceptance of error and experimentation. Counterintuitively, it can be said that a good innovation system is one that speeds up the process of failing and evolving towards a better solution.

2. Betting on fashions and simple formulas

Most companies rely on simplistic formulas instead of thinking about and developing an innovation process that suits their reality.

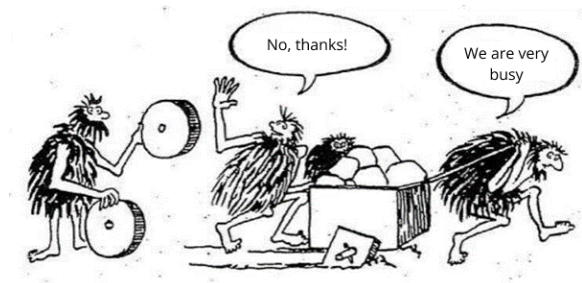
One simplistic formula is the "static" model. Set up an innovation department and wait for that team to produce an innovation strategy and plan, which is mapped out, published and announced internally when there is room for communication. Often, the defined strategy faces many challenges in terms of understanding and implementation because it was developed in isolation, without the involvement of potential innovation champions and because it comes up against the various organizational silos. In most cases, this model has limited, but nonetheless important, success in managing formal innovation projects with European Union funding.

Another simplistic formula is the "fountain" model. Identifying a few modernization actions, such as the introduction of new information systems or new technology, which anchor an image of innovation that is only superficial and associated with one or two specific projects.

Another simplistic formula is the "games" model, i.e., involving the company in mobilization actions associated with trendy tools. In the past, it was the introduction of platforms for registering ideas, in most cases without a strategic, organizational or operational framework. In the present, it's the introduction of internal pitches and design thinking sessions, but which have no continuity or insertion in the day-to-day running of organizations. These are more awareness-raising and training actions than real and sustainable innovation. As part of a formal innovation process, they would be developed in a different way and with different results.

3. Operational pressure

The pressure for operational performance and immediate results is one of the factors that most affects the development of innovation in a company. Practice shows that ambitious innovation plans come up against the realities of everyday life. Few companies have ways of addressing this dilemma. They define the strategy, but then have no mechanisms for managing innovation.



The most common operational limitations are: dysfunctional hierarchical reporting, lack of time allocated to innovation, lack of resources and autonomy, incentives and metrics focused only on operational results, introduction of ways of working foreign to the organization without the proper framework.

Tomorrow's day

The internet is full of case studies and specialized websites that can and should serve as a reference point for anyone who wants to develop or strengthen their innovation model. In the digital age, there's nothing like adapting to new opportunities and taking advantage of the world's largest information and knowledge base.

Innovation at Brisa is an excellent example of rapid adaptation to new ways of approaching innovation. A-to-Be, a Brisa group company dedicated to innovation in mobility management, is one of the best developed cases of open innovation in Portugal.

A-to-Be, Brisa's open innovation mindset

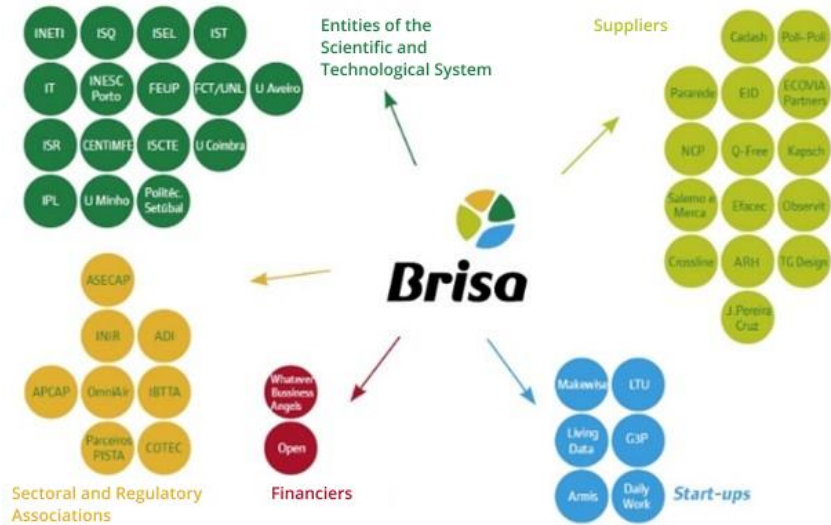
Author: Jorge Sales Gomes, chief technology officer at A-to-Be



Brisa has noticed a greater openness on the part of society to collaborate in a network, reflecting two complementary phenomena: the growing disruption brought about by new business models and new solutions devised by start-ups; and the recognition by established companies that in order to innovate efficiently, rather than using in-house resources, they must create an interactive and collaborative structure that generates synergies, reduces costs and can be implemented more quickly.

A-to-Be has been applying the open innovation model since 2010, and knows from experience the real gains this model brings – an example of which is the electronic tolls. It all started with an initial challenge: to improve toll collection and security. Instead of trying to solve the problem internally, Brisa decided to open its doors to universities and, working together, they found the toll solutions that allowed the company to become a pioneer in electronic tolls.

A-to-Be's open innovation model puts the organization at the center, liaising with its partners – universities, institutions that support innovation and funders. With this open sharing relationship, A-to-Be reduces fixed costs while making a positive contribution to society and, because of this synergistic and open relationship, has created seven start-ups to date.



In addition, A-to-Be responds to the need to innovate and increases profitability through an idea-sharing network established with universities, bringing students to work directly in the company. In this way, the company doesn't need to grow vertically and becomes more agile and competitive, allowing students to gain expertise and know-how in a real work context and with concrete challenges to solve.

A-to-Bee is continuously managed with a collaborative and interactive mindset, aiming to "break the limits of mobility".

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