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## A Practical Guide for Embracing Innovation

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The pace of innovation is accelerating. In just the last three years we've cycled through the metaverse, been introduced to generative AI, and have now moved on to agentic AI. It can be overwhelming how fast new technologies seem to come and go and hard to determine what's hype? What's real? What should be implemented? What has staying power? What can be monetized? These are just some of the common questions telecom leaders are asking as the industry begins to buzz about the latest technology. While the goal is to embrace innovation, it can still be difficult to evaluate where and how to begin. This article can serve as a practical guide to innovation adoption, based on our decades of expertise helping service providers implement emerging technologies.



### Define success and failure criteria (chart a course before setting sail)

Before embarking on a voyage—be it by land, by sea, or IT transformation—it's critical to determine the destination and how to get there. This requires a bit of self-reflection. What is the company's vision? How might the technology either impact the ways of work or the services provided to the customers?

The answers to these questions will help determine the direction in which the ship will be steered. Once the general direction is decided, a destination can then be set. Defining an objective before adopting a new technology is akin to setting a destination in a GPS; there may be many ways to get there, but without an end point you never will.

An objective should be SMART—specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound. During this stage it is equally important to define failure criteria for a project. Having a vision of what both success and failure look like for the business will help decide when to continue and when to move on from a project.

### Start small and look for quick wins

Some service providers may feel intimidated by new technologies, perhaps because they don't have the necessary expertise in-house, or because they feel compelled to go all in on the technology. Starting small, however, can deliver a lot of value to the business by minimizing risk, validating ideas quickly, and building in-house acumen.

Begin by looking for quick wins—starting with high-impact, low-risk areas of the business as an easy way to dip into the water of an innovation. Success is one step closer to validating questions like, “Is this technology the real deal?” Regardless of the answer, knowledge will be gained on the topic to help make more informed decisions moving forward.

## **Fail fast**

It’s easy to fail, but it can be hard to fail fast. Throughout the years working with service providers, we have come across many failing projects that continued to plod along against better judgement. This is why defining SMART goals and failure criteria is such a critical step in the journey. By setting an objective that is time-bound, there is a built-in failure criterion. If a project has not met the set goal by its target date, it is time to move on. Similarly, because any objective must be measurable, if the project results fall short of this target, it is time to change course.

So, how to fail fast? Start with the quick wins. These low-risk, high-reward projects will make it all the easier to pull the plug when it is time to move on.

## **Create innovation loops**

The other value of quick wins is that they are validating; they can provide the courage to keep going. Success also informs future projects, bringing into clearer vision other applications of the technology and new challenges it can solve. At a certain point, as momentum builds and riskier, high-impact projects seem within reach, solutions may be revealed to other challenges. Innovation begets innovation.

Take 4G, for example. When this network technology was initially rolled out, it was touted for its faster mobile data speeds for a society that was plugged into the internet, but mostly via a computer. However, the perfect storm of the accessibility of smartphones that could run applications, and faster mobile connectivity spurred a whole new digital economy. Since then, we have witnessed the creation of new industries, business models, and career paths—innovation begets innovation. How to create an innovation loop?

- Identify high-impact opportunities.
- Generate and prioritize ideas.
- Establish SMART goals and failure criteria.
- Build and test.
- Evaluate lessons learned.
- Identify high-impact opportunities.

## **Breed a culture of innovation**

The biggest key to successfully adopting new innovations? Culture. Innovation is about finding creative solutions to complex problems. Without the right culture in place, creativity and innovation cannot flourish.

In order to create a culture of innovation within an organization, it’s best to start by committing to learning continuously and encouraging curiosity. Encourage employees to learn about new technologies or develop new skills. Similarly, foster a sense of curiosity within the organization. Curiosity is a powerful tool and often drives us to want to learn more about a technology, problem, or potential solution. Hand in hand with curiosity is creativity, which enables the employees to explore different and sometimes unconventional possibilities, which is essential to innovation. Prioritizing diversity—diverse perspectives and approaches—nurturing creativity, and enabling cross-functional collaboration across the business will help breed an innovative culture.

Most importantly, empower employees to act! Give employees the opportunity to investigate, build, or

use new technologies. It is easy to build in-house expertise, build momentum, and embrace a culture of innovation.

Finally, communicate. Highlight success, show progress, and share lessons learned.

## **An all-in commitment**

Innovation isn't a single initiative—it's a continuous journey. By setting clear objectives, starting with quick wins, and embracing failure as part of the process, service providers can build resilience and agility in an ever-evolving technological landscape. But perhaps the most important takeaway is that innovation thrives in the right environment. When teams are empowered to explore, encouraged to question, and supported in their efforts, real transformation begins to take root. With this practical guide, you're not just chasing the next big thing—the groundwork is being laid for a sustainable, scalable innovation strategy. Whether the company is just beginning to test the waters or ready to dive deeper into emerging technologies, the key is to stay grounded in the goals set, remain open to learning, and commit to building a culture where innovation is everyone's job. Because in a world where change is constant, the ability to adapt—and adapt quickly—will define the leaders of tomorrow.