

# Encourage informal experimentation

### The stakes

The need for rigorous tracking and measurement, such as budgetary supervision and measuring the time allocated to projects, considerably restricts opportunities for informal experimentation. Yet, informal tests are an important source of innovation. For instance, Greg Linden, an Amazon employee, was able to go outside the official project structure to test an idea for a personalized purchasing recommendation application that has since become one of the most effective drivers of on-line sales. Managers must ask themselves: How do we reconcile the need to manage the work of employees with the freedom required for informal experimentation? What is the right balance between refusing and giving in when an employee has an exciting idea that doesn't fit into the approved project portfolio?

## Manage with discernment

#### Find the right balance between two risks Leaving too much space for Leaving too little informal experimentation room for autonomy • Lose sight of priorities. Leaving too • Sap motivation. If employees are too much time for experimentation outside constrained, they may lose their intrinsic the regular project structure creates the risk that people will stray from operational Incite people to develop their ideas objectives and the company strategy. elsewhere. If insufficient latitude is • Encourage undesired behavior. The granted, people may be tempted to leave broad latitude given to one individual and develop their ideas for competitors or may encourage the other members on their own behalf, costing the company of the team to demand the same potentially good ideas and innovative privileges.

### Behaviors to encourage

- Clarify the limits.
   Clarify the share of time or budget which may be devoted to informal experimentation; validate understanding of priorities and delivery dates of assigned projects and ensure that people do not lose sight of their operational objectives.
- Require a minimum amount of reporting.
   Even if only informally, tracking the progress of experiments is important to ensure they do not get off track or distract people unduly from their other projects.
- official character of these experiments. So long as they do not show tangible results, these experiments must remain discrete. Giving them too much visibility may destroy the motivation of the intraprenor who prefers to keep a low profile until the results are conclusive.

· Maintain the semi-

 Explain the degree of tolerance for informal experiments.
 This can vary widely

This can vary widely depending on the corporate culture and the sector of activity. Understanding the level of tolerance and making it explicit to people helps to calibrate the time they can devote to such experiments.