Case: How we identified & selected the right intrapreneur for one of our latest corporate startup projects

- By Arne Van Balen

For one of the projects we’ve been involved in lately, one of our challenges was to find the right intrapreneur to take the lead in an ongoing innovation project. When I say that finding a qualified intrapreneur with the right fit for a corporate innovation project is very hard, that’s an understatement. There are so many criteria you have to keep in mind when making your selection. Check our previous blogpost for the skills of the perfect intrapreneur. At the latest edition of Intrapreneurship Conference (in New York), we noticed that many corporates struggle with finding the right intrapreneurs to pursue their innovation trajectories. Therefore we want to share one of our latest experiences in challenging the way to find a proper intrapreneur.

Allow me to get you on the same page about this project by explaining it shortly. In the beginning of 2015, our client (SD Worx) asked us to help them reinvent one of their existing products during a one-week Hackathon. Research and customer interviews showed us that this product was outdated, so we advised our client to think further than their competitors and to rebuild it completely. Together, we created a whole new service, which was identified as a game changer in the industry by the management.

Because of the strategic angle, there is a huge overlap between this new product and existing business units & ongoing projects. Therefore, we advised our client to treat this product as a corporate startup. Since a corporate startup is a startup like any other, we needed to find a dedicated lead for this project = an intrapreneur.
THIS IS WHAT WE DID

First of all, we chose not to use the existing internal HR/Recruitment channels. Why?

- We needed involvement at the C-level to motivate the intrapreneurs.
- The existing (project based) corporate startup team had to be involved in the selection of their ‘dedicated lead’.
- The fast evolution of the corporate startup would change the selection criteria during the recruitment.

We launched an internal recruitment campaign with a flow of 6 steps. Each step can be seen as a challenge with its own approach. The goal: find the right person by the end of step 6.

**CHALLENGE 1**

Reach all +1,000 employees, also those who are not searching for a new job.
**What we did:** We put up ‘mysterious posters’ throughout the SD-building with a message that would mostly attract people with an intrapreneurial mind/skill-set. (credits to Sir Ernest Shackleton to inspire us with his successful Antarctica campaign).
**Outcome:** Hard to say exactly how many people saw the poster, but the desired buzz was created. People contacted Leen to ask what this was all about, to mention the creative angle of the campaign.

**CHALLENGE 2**

Capture those who are triggered by the campaign (= intrapreneur potentials) before they lost interest due to information overload or time concerns at the moment of viewing.
**What we did:** The link on the poster took curious employees to a landing page on which they could leave their email address to receive more information.
**Outcome:** 120 people gave their email address. More than 10% of the entire workforce.

**CHALLENGE 3**

Provide more info about the intrapreneurial role & give interested people the ability to apply for the role.
**What we did:** The people who showed interest and wanted more information received a description of the role and the skillset via a landing page with an application form.
**Outcome:** The conversion rate of the ‘more info’ page to this one was barely 20%. The reason, we believed, was that this page did not open automatically. Employees received a link and the hassle to copy the link and paste it in a new tab stopped most
smartphone users. Therefore we sent the link to all 120 interested people via email. This solved the issue.

**CHALLENGE 4**

Make a selection on relevance between the interested candidates. 

**What we did:** We selected the potential intrapreneurs based on a mix of motivation, qualities and their answers to the 3 questions on the online (Typeform) application:

- Which improvement are you most proud of at SD Worx that you brought out? Please give the situation, what you did, and the result. (demonstrates entrepreneurial attitude)
- Give us a suggestion to make sure SD Worx will still be a pioneer 10 years from now. (shows vision)
- What do we have to arrange or take care of with your manager if we ask you to be 100% available from November on? (shows readiness to jump and availability)

**Outcome:** 14 people applied for the role and we selected 8 of them for the next phase.

**CHALLENGE 5**

Verify skills and intrapreneurial potential of the selected employees.

**What we did:** The selected people were invited for a 2-hour evening session with two activities. First, everyone was asked to pitch themselves, mentioning why they are the ideal candidate for the job and how they see their involvement if they do not get the role. Secondly, we organised a speed dating interview session to verify the ‘intrapreneurial skills’ such as stakeholder management and vision in 5-minute cycles. Interviewers were the topic experts in our team and management of SD Worx. Topics: startup mentality, business maturity, stakeholder management and network, technical understanding, vision, content (related to startup), availability and handover (this one was by someone of HR).

**Outcome:** In two hours (and a brief discussion in our team afterwards), we managed to select the intrapreneur we needed and as an extra we got 5 ambassadors that would stay involved in this project out of personal interest.

**CHALLENGE 6**

Clear schedule of chosen intrapreneur and get them out their current role.

**Outcome:** the first 5 steps took about 6 weeks. This last step a mere 2 months.

**WHAT DID WE LEARN?**

To conclude, there are three types of intrapreneurs and what we proved with this successful campaign is that it is possible to find new intrapreneurs within the organisation (Type 2 and 3).
1. **Established intrapreneur**: Easy to find, but hard to steer away from their current responsibilities.

2. **Potential intrapreneur**: Have the skills and mindset, but not yet applied in professional context. Hard to find and will need extra support for internal credibility.

3. **White raven intrapreneur**: Right profile, first intrapreneurial results but not identified as intrapreneur yet. This type you need to find before they are either shouldered under by a bunch of projects or leave the company because they don’t receive the responsibility they require to be motivated.

Have you ever tried to find a new dedicated lead for a corporate startup in your organisation? Have you heard about other ways to find intrapreneurs? Let us know!

Thanks!

I’m Arne Van Balen, Innovation Consultant @ Board of Innovation. Spreading innovation culture is in our DNA – if you liked the read, contribute to our mission by sharing this article.

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