



Intel® IT Innovation Center: Where Failure Is an Option

It was less than two years ago when Vishwa Hassan, Director of Intel IT Labs, was told he could be helping with more urgent needs, and not spending precious time and resources on a futuristic concept. He had just presented a new research project, built on the belief that tremendous value could be extracted when large quantities of data from multiple sources are combined and analyzed. This new-fangled “big data” concept, others insisted, was unrealistic.

“We respectfully ignored the feedback and moved forward,” reveals Hassan. “By the time we developed a proof-of-concept instance in our lab, the entire industry was buzzing about big data. And our engineering teams couldn’t wait to learn from our findings, get their hands on the cluster

we had built, and collaborate further.”

Such is life for those entrenched in the trailblazing IT Labs within Intel IT.

The group is tasked with investigating new technologies and capabilities that could potentially benefit Intel IT and business organizations. While some of the group’s research and pathfinding efforts are aimed at specific business problems, many involve unconstrained exploration and discovery.

“We interview leaders and managers to get input on their biggest pain points and priorities. As you might expect, they typically want help with their current problems,” Hassan explains.

“...we learn along the way, and we inevitably uncover the opportunities that deliver the greatest impact and value.”

*Vishwa Hassan
Director of Intel IT Labs*

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"We need to support them, of course, but we also need to anticipate the problems and opportunities of tomorrow."

This means going against the grain at times. In straddling the line between reactive problem solving and proactive innovation, those within IT Labs must stay true to their instincts, their process, and their mission.

They must also be willing to fail.

The precursor to success

Failure is an uncomfortable topic. Nobody wants to admit their setbacks, let alone call attention to them. For Intel IT Labs, however, failure is an acknowledged and expected aspect of the job.

"We have scars from failure," Hassan admits. "But it's a necessary ingredient of the innovation process, and a precursor to success. Our research activities may not yield the anticipated results, they may take longer than expected, and they may never reach production. But we learn along the way, and we inevitably uncover the opportunities that deliver the greatest impact and value."

Success or failure, IT Labs must eventually let go of the ideas it invents, investigates, and nurtures. According to Hassan, this is one of the most challenging aspects of working for a probing, pacesetter organization.

"We need to abandon and quickly move on from the concepts that don't measure up," Hassan says. "And we need to hand over successful projects to IT groups that will further develop and implement them. Letting go is hard."

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