

# **Managing Innovation for Sustainable Growth: Create and sustain a culture of innovation and manage innovation at enterprise level<sup>1, 2</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

Most of the organizations strive to innovate. Innovation is needed at all levels and of different types. We see new products and innovation in existing products every day. Virtually all organizations try to innovate their processes for simplicity, speed, and efficiency. Systematic innovation and a culture of innovation can create a sustainable advantage for the organization and create a position of industry leadership. The organizations world over follow time tested strategies for capital management, strategic planning, human resource management, employee development, and leadership. Building innovation in organizations DNA sets the organization apart. Rather than waiting on the competitor come up with next big idea, organizations need to innovate and remain ahead of the curve.

This paper will cover the ways to create and sustain a culture of innovation and manage innovation at enterprise level. We will discuss how the project managers and program managers can lead the innovation at team and organization level. Why do we need to worry about innovation? How do successful organizations such as GE, DuPont, Visa, P&G, Google, etc. manage innovation? What is the responsibility of leadership in managing innovation?

All views are that of the author and does not represent the views of the organizations he works for, is associated with, or has worked in the past.

## **Introduction**

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<sup>1</sup> *Editor's note: Second Editions are previously published papers that have continued relevance in today's project management world, or which were originally published in conference proceedings or in a language other than English. Original publication acknowledged; authors retain copyright. This paper was originally presented at the [15<sup>th</sup> UT Dallas PM Symposium in May 2023](#). It is republished here with the permission of the author and conference organizers.*

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Innovation is a critical factor in the success of any organization in the rapidly changing business environment. With the ever-increasing pace of technological advancements and the need to remain competitive in the global marketplace, organizations must innovate to survive and thrive. Innovation is the key to creating new products, services, processes, and business models that can help companies stay ahead of the competition. However, innovation is not just about coming up with new ideas; it is also about managing these ideas effectively. Managing innovation is not an easy task, especially when it comes to scaling innovation across the organization. Organizations must have the right processes, people, and tools to manage innovation effectively. This white paper will discuss how successful organizations manage innovation within their teams and at scale. We will also examine case studies of companies that have successfully managed innovation.

## **1 Why focus on innovation?**

It helps companies to differentiate themselves from their competitors, increase market share, and improve profitability. Innovation can take many forms, including new products, services, business models, and processes. However, innovation is not a one-time event. It requires a sustained effort over time to stay ahead of the competition.

### **1.1 The Importance of Innovation Mindset**

Innovation mindset is not just about developing new products or services; it is about embracing change, adapting to new circumstances, and identifying opportunities for growth. A strong innovation mindset enables organizations to stay ahead of the curve, anticipate market trends, and create value for customers. Here are some of the benefits of cultivating an innovation mindset:

- 1) **Increased Competitiveness:** In today's fast-paced business environment, organizations must be agile and adaptable to remain competitive. An innovation mindset allows organizations to stay on top of emerging trends and to quickly pivot their strategies to meet evolving customer needs.
- 2) **Improved Productivity:** An innovation mindset encourages employees to think outside the box and develop creative solutions to complex problems. This approach can lead to increased productivity and efficiency, as employees are empowered to streamline processes and find new ways to improve operations.
- 3) **Enhanced Customer Experience:** An innovation mindset encourages organizations to prioritize the customer experience, leading to the development of products and services

that meet and exceed customer expectations. This approach can result in increased customer loyalty and positive brand reputation.

- 4) **Increased Revenue:** An innovation mindset can lead to the development of new products and services that open up new revenue streams for organizations. By continually innovating and staying ahead of the curve, organizations can maintain a competitive edge and generate additional revenue.

## **2 Managing Innovation within the Team:**

Managing innovation within a team requires careful planning and execution. Innovation can come from anywhere within the organization, and it is essential to create a culture of innovation where everyone is encouraged to contribute ideas. This can be achieved by providing training and development opportunities, creating a safe environment where failure is not punished, and recognizing and rewarding innovation.

One of the most important aspects of managing innovation within a team is to ensure that the team is diverse. Diverse teams bring different perspectives and experiences, which can lead to more creative and innovative solutions. Organizations should, therefore, strive to create diverse teams that are inclusive and encourage different perspectives.

Effective communication is also crucial in managing innovation within a team. Team members should be encouraged to share their ideas and thoughts openly, and the organization should provide channels for this communication to take place. This can be achieved through regular team meetings, brainstorming sessions, and open-door policies.

- 1) **Encourage Collaboration:** Collaboration is a critical factor in managing innovation within teams. Encouraging collaboration can help teams come up with new ideas and solutions that they may not have thought of on their own. Successful organizations create opportunities for collaboration by setting up cross-functional teams, organizing brainstorming sessions, and creating online collaboration platforms. For example, Procter & Gamble has a program called Connect and Develop that encourages collaboration with external partners to drive innovation. The program has resulted in the development of several successful products, including the Swiffer mop and Crest Whitestrips.
- 2) **Provide Resources:** Providing resources is essential for managing innovation within teams. Teams need access to tools, equipment, and funding to turn their ideas into reality. Successful organizations invest in resources that support innovation, including research and development labs, prototyping tools, and innovation funds. For example, Google has a program called 20% Time that allows employees to spend 20% of their time working on

personal projects that may lead to innovation. This program has resulted in several successful products, including Gmail, Google Maps, and AdSense.

- 3) **Embrace Failure:** Embracing failure is critical for managing innovation within teams. Innovation involves taking risks, and not all risks will pay off. Successful organizations understand that failure is a part of the innovation process and encourage teams to learn from their failures and move on.

### 3 Challenges of Managing Innovation at Scale

Managing innovation can be challenging, especially in larger organizations. The following are some of the challenges that organizations face when managing innovation:

- 1) **Alignment with Business Strategy:** One of the biggest challenges of managing innovation at scale is ensuring that innovation efforts align with the organization's business strategy. When innovation is not aligned with the organization's strategic goals, it can lead to wasted resources and missed opportunities.
- 2) **Resistance to change:** Innovation often requires a change in the way things are done. This can be met with resistance from employees who are comfortable with the status quo.
- 3) **Silos:** In large organizations, innovation can be hindered by silos, where different departments work in isolation and do not share ideas.
- 4) **Communication and Collaboration:** Effective communication and collaboration are essential for managing innovation at scale. As companies grow, communication and collaboration become more challenging, and it can be difficult to maintain a cohesive innovation strategy across the organization.
- 5) **Resource Allocation:** Managing innovation at scale requires significant resources, including funding, personnel, and technology. Organizations must balance their innovation investments with other priorities and ensure that they allocate resources effectively to maximize their return on investment. Organizations that do not allocate sufficient resources to innovation may struggle to keep up with their competitors.
- 6) **Risk Management:** Innovation involves taking risks, which can be difficult for risk-averse organizations. Managing those risks is critical to success. As organizations scale their innovation efforts, risk management becomes more complex, and it can be challenging to balance risk and reward. **Speed and Agility:** In today's fast-paced business environment, speed and agility are essential for innovation success. Organizations must be able to move quickly and adapt to changing market conditions, customer needs, and technology trends.

## 4 Managing Innovation at Scale

Managing innovation at scale involves creating an environment that supports innovation across the entire organization. The following are some strategies that successful organizations use to manage innovation at scale.

- 1) **Establish a Clear Innovation Strategy:** Establishing a clear innovation strategy is essential for managing innovation at scale. The innovation strategy should align with the company's overall goals and objectives and should include a roadmap for achieving those goals. Successful organizations communicate the innovation strategy throughout the organization and ensure that everyone understands their role in achieving the strategy. For example, Apple has a clear innovation strategy that focuses on creating products that are simple, elegant, and easy to use. The company communicates this strategy throughout the organization and ensures that all employees understand their role in achieving this strategy.
- 2) **Create an Innovation Culture:** Creating an innovation culture is critical for managing innovation at scale. An innovation culture involves creating an environment that encourages experimentation, risk-taking, and collaboration. Successful organizations create an innovation culture by providing resources, encouraging collaboration, and embracing failure. Leaders should promote a culture of innovation that values creativity, encourages diverse perspectives, and rewards innovation successes. For example, 3M has a culture of innovation that encourages employees to spend 15% of their time working on personal projects. This culture has resulted in several successful products, including Post-it notes and Scotch tape.
- 3) **Build an Innovation Ecosystem:** Building an innovation ecosystem is critical for managing innovation at scale. An innovation ecosystem involves creating partnerships with external organizations, including suppliers, customers, and research institutions. Managing innovation at scale requires investment in infrastructure, including technology, processes, and systems. Organizations should invest in innovation tools and technologies that enable faster, more efficient innovation, and implement innovation processes that ensure innovation is integrated into the organization's overall operations.
- 4) **Establish Cross-Functional Teams:** Effective communication and collaboration are critical to managing innovation at scale. Organizations should establish cross-functional innovation teams that bring together employees from different departments and functions to share ideas, knowledge, and expertise.
- 5) **Measure and Evaluate Innovation Performance:** To ensure that innovation efforts are effective, organizations should establish metrics for measuring innovation performance.

These metrics should be aligned with the organization's innovation strategy and should include both qualitative and quantitative measures of innovation success.

- 6) **Celebrate fail fast culture:** Companies should encourage risk-taking and create an environment where failure is seen as a learning opportunity. To ensure that companies ingrain this culture, use opportunities to celebrate fail fast culture. For example, in a town-hall meeting, identify a few projects that failed and organizations decided to discontinue the projects. Celebrate the effort. We need to recognize that all innovation projects may not be successful either because it didn't address the right problem, the timing was not right, could be merged with another initiative, couldn't be prioritized for implementation, or does not align with business strategy.
- 7) **Foster open communication:** Open communication is critical to the success of innovation. Companies should encourage open communication and create channels for employees to share ideas. Create opportunities such as hackathon/innovation days to brainstorm. This is also very refreshing for employees and will help with talent retention and motivation.
- 8) **Measure and Evaluate Innovation Performance:** To ensure that innovation efforts are effective, organizations should establish metrics for measuring innovation performance. These metrics should be aligned with the organization's innovation strategy and should include both qualitative and quantitative measures of innovation success. Defining the key metrics which are relevant to the company but are customized further for teams is the key. This will also help set the direction.
- 9) **Encourage Creativity:** Encourage employees to think creatively and develop new ideas. This can be achieved through brainstorming sessions, hackathons, or other forms of collaborative ideation.
- 10) **Embrace Diversity:** Embrace diversity and encourage a range of perspectives and experiences. This approach can lead to the development of innovative solutions that meet the needs of a diverse customer base.
- 11) **Empower Employees:** Empower employees to take ownership of their work and develop new ideas. This approach can lead to increased engagement and motivation, as employees feel valued and supported.
- 12) **Reward Innovation:** Recognize and reward employees who demonstrate an innovation mindset. This approach reinforces the importance of innovation and encourages others to adopt a similar approach.

## 5 Reasons for innovation failures:

Innovation is often touted as the lifeblood of corporate success in today's business world. However, despite the billions of dollars invested in innovation each year, many firms still struggle to achieve their desired outcomes. In fact, studies suggest that up to 90% of innovation initiatives

fail to deliver the desired results, highlighting the need for a better understanding of the causes and consequences of innovation failures.

## 5.1 Types of Innovation Failures

Innovation failures can be categorized into two broad categories: process failures and outcome failures. Process failures refer to errors made in the execution of the innovation process, while outcome failures refer to unsuccessful outcomes despite successful execution of the process.

### 5.1.1 Process Failures

Process failures occur due to the inadequacy of the innovation process. Some of the common process failures include:

- 1) **Lack of clarity in objectives:** Innovation initiatives that lack clear objectives are bound to fail. Without clear objectives, there is no way to measure the success of the initiative or to make necessary adjustments to ensure success.
- 2) **Poor communication:** Innovation initiatives require cross-functional collaboration, and poor communication can cause confusion and delays in decision-making, leading to the failure of the project.
- 3) **Inadequate resources:** Innovation requires resources, both financial and human, and inadequate allocation of these resources can lead to insufficient progress or an inability to complete the initiative.
- 4) **Resistance to change:** Innovation often requires a change in organizational culture, and resistance to change from employees or management can result in an initiative's failure.

### 5.1.2 Outcome Failures

Outcome failures occur when the innovation process is correctly executed, but the results are not in line with the expected outcomes. Some of the common outcome failures include:

- 1) **Failure to meet customer needs:** Innovation initiatives that fail to meet customer needs will inevitably fail. Firms must ensure that the innovation initiative addresses a significant pain point for the customer.
- 2) **Failure to anticipate market changes:** Innovation initiatives must consider the market's dynamics and anticipate potential changes in the competitive landscape. Firms that fail to anticipate these changes risk developing a product that becomes obsolete before it is launched.
- 3) **Poor timing:** Innovation initiatives that are launched at the wrong time can result in failure. Firms must consider factors such as market readiness, competition, and economic conditions when launching a new innovation initiative.

- 4) **Inadequate market testing:** Innovation initiatives that are not adequately tested in the market may not receive the necessary feedback to improve and iterate the product.
- 5) **Failure to execute:** Even when the innovation initiative is correctly executed, failure to execute the commercialization of the product can lead to failure. For example, a lack of effective marketing, pricing strategy, or distribution can hinder the product's success.

## 5.2 Factors Contributing to Innovation Failures

Innovation failures are not always straightforward and can often be traced back to a combination of factors. Some of the common factors contributing to innovation failures include:

- 1) **Insufficient resources:** Innovation initiatives require resources, and insufficient resources can lead to inadequate progress or an inability to complete the project.
- 2) **Lack of strategic alignment:** Innovation initiatives must be aligned with the firm's strategic objectives. Lack of alignment can lead to the development of a product that is irrelevant to the firm's strategy.
- 3) **Inadequate market research:** Innovation initiatives must be informed by market research, and inadequate market research can result in a product that does not meet customer needs.
- 4) **Poor leadership:** Innovation requires strong leadership, and poor leadership can hinder the initiative's success.
- 5) **Organizational culture:** Innovation initiatives require a culture that fosters creativity, experimentation, and risk-taking. Firms that do not have such a culture may struggle to achieve successful innovation outcomes.
- 6) **Lack of focus:** Innovation initiatives require attention and prioritization within the company.
- 7) **Resistance to change:** Innovation requires change, and change is often met with resistance. Employees may be resistant to new ideas, technologies, or processes because they are comfortable with the status quo or fear that innovation may threaten their job security. Additionally, senior leaders may be resistant to change because they fear that innovation may disrupt existing revenue streams or require significant investment without a guaranteed return on investment.
- 8) **Poor Execution:** Innovation is not just about generating new ideas; it also requires execution. Many companies have excellent ideas, but they fail to execute them properly. Poor execution can result from a lack of resources, a lack of expertise, or a lack of commitment from senior leadership. Without proper execution, even the best ideas will fail to produce results.
- 9) **Siloed Thinking:** Innovation requires collaboration across departments and teams. However, many companies suffer from siloed thinking, where departments and teams are



focused on their own goals and objectives, rather than working together to achieve the company's overall goals. This siloed thinking can lead to missed opportunities for innovation and duplication of effort.

- 10) **Lack of customer centricity:** Innovation must be customer-focused. Companies that fail to understand the needs of their customers or fail to develop products and services that meet those needs are destined to fail. Without a clear understanding of customer needs, companies may invest in innovation projects that do not address customer pain points or that do not provide sufficient value to customers.

## 6 Innovative Companies

There are many companies that are considered innovative in their respective fields. Here are some of the most innovative companies in the world, based on their contributions to their industries and overall impact on society:

- 1) **Tesla** - for its electric cars and renewable energy products
- 2) **Apple** - for its iconic products such as iPhone, iPad, Mac, and Apple Watch, as well as its software and services
- 3) **Alphabet (Google)** - for its search engine, online advertising, and investments in emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, autonomous vehicles, and healthcare
- 4) **Microsoft** - for its Windows operating system, Office productivity suite, and cloud computing services
- 5) **Facebook** - for its social networking platform and innovations in virtual and augmented reality
- 6) **Alibaba** - for its e-commerce platform, digital payment system, and cloud computing services
- 7) **Tencent** - for its social media and gaming platforms, as well as its investments in artificial intelligence and cloud computing
- 8) **Samsung** - for its smartphones, televisions, home appliances, and semiconductor technology
- 9) **IBM** - for its innovations in computing, including artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and quantum computing.
- 10) **Netflix** - Netflix has disrupted the entertainment industry by introducing a new business model of streaming content directly to consumers. They have also revolutionized the way content is produced and distributed, giving rise to the era of binge-watching.
- 11) **Airbnb** - Airbnb is another disruptor that has changed the way people travel and find accommodation. By offering unique and affordable accommodation options, they have challenged traditional hotel chains and have changed the way people travel.

- 12) **Procter & Gamble** - Procter & Gamble is an example of a company that has been successful at fostering innovation through their "Connect + Develop" program. This program encourages collaboration with external partners to bring new ideas and technologies to market.

It's important to note that there are many other innovative companies out there as well, and this list is by no means exhaustive. We see an increasing number of startups that disrupt existing industries and change the customer expectations. The change the customer behavior pushes other companies to innovate on behalf of customers.

## 7 Innovation at Universities:

Universities can manage innovation in various ways, including:

- 1) **Establishing innovation centers or incubators:** Many universities have innovation centers or incubators to support innovative ideas and startups. These centers offer resources, mentorship, and funding to students, faculty, and alumni with innovative ideas.
- 2) **Promoting interdisciplinary research:** Innovation often occurs at the intersection of different fields. Universities can encourage interdisciplinary research by fostering collaborations among departments and providing resources to support cross-disciplinary projects.
- 3) **Offering entrepreneurship programs:** Many universities offer entrepreneurship programs that teach students how to develop and launch their own businesses. These programs often provide mentorship, networking opportunities, and access to funding.
- 4) **Patenting and licensing technology:** Universities can protect and commercialize their innovative research by patenting new technology and licensing it to companies for commercial use.
- 5) **Collaborating with industry:** Collaborating with industry partners can help universities bring innovative research to market more quickly. Industry partnerships can also provide funding and resources for research and development.
- 6) **Supporting open innovation:** Universities can encourage open innovation by sharing their research and data with the broader community. Open innovation can accelerate the development of new ideas and technologies by allowing multiple stakeholders to collaborate and build on each other's work.

Overall, universities can manage innovation by fostering a culture of creativity, collaboration, and entrepreneurship, while also providing the necessary resources and support to bring innovative ideas to fruition.

## 8 Case Studies

### 8.1 Google

Google manages innovation through a number of approaches, which include:

- 1) **Encouraging a culture of innovation:** Google encourages a culture of innovation by giving its employees the freedom to experiment with new ideas and take risks. It also provides its employees with the tools, resources, and time to work on their own projects and ideas.
- 2) **Allowing for failure:** Google understands that not all innovative ideas will be successful, and it encourages its employees to learn from their failures and move on to new ideas.
- 3) **Collaborating with others:** Google collaborates with outside researchers, startups, and other companies to share ideas and technologies. It also encourages collaboration among its own employees by creating a culture of openness and transparency.
- 4) **Fostering a diverse workforce:** Google values diversity in its workforce, recognizing that diverse perspectives lead to more innovative ideas.
- 5) **Investing in research and development:** Google invests heavily in research and development, constantly seeking new technologies and approaches to improve its products and services.
- 6) **Listening to customers:** Google listens to customer feedback and uses it to improve its products and services.
- 7) **Creating a supportive environment:** Google provides a supportive environment for its employees, including perks such as free food, on-site gyms, and flexible work hours. This helps to create a positive and innovative work culture.

Overall, Google's management of innovation involves fostering a culture of creativity, collaboration, and experimentation, while also investing in research and development and creating a supportive work environment for its employees.

### 8.2 3M

3M is a company that has a long-standing reputation for innovation. Its success in managing innovation can be attributed to a combination of factors, including its culture, organizational structure, and processes.

- 1) **Culture:** Innovation is deeply ingrained in 3M's culture. The company encourages its employees to take risks, experiment, and pursue new ideas. This culture of innovation is supported by the company's leadership, who promote the importance of creativity and exploration.

- 2) **Organizational structure:** 3M has a decentralized organizational structure, which means that decision-making is distributed throughout the organization. This allows for greater autonomy and flexibility, enabling employees to pursue new ideas and initiatives without being constrained by a rigid hierarchy.
- 3) **Processes:** 3M has a well-defined innovation process that includes idea generation, concept development, and commercialization. The company uses a variety of tools and techniques to generate new ideas, including brainstorming sessions, customer feedback, and market research. Once an idea has been developed, it is rigorously tested and refined before being launched into the market.

Overall, 3M's success in managing innovation can be attributed to its focus on creating a culture of innovation, its decentralized organizational structure, and its well-defined innovation processes.

### **8.3 DuPont**

DuPont is a multinational company that has been in operation for over 200 years. Over the years, DuPont has become known for its innovative products and technologies, and the company has a robust innovation management process in place to ensure that it stays at the forefront of its industry.

Here are some ways that DuPont manages innovation:

- 1) **Open Innovation:** DuPont has a long history of working with external partners to bring innovative ideas to market. The company actively seeks out partnerships with startups, academic institutions, and other companies to collaborate on new ideas and technologies.
- 2) **R&D Investment:** DuPont invests heavily in research and development to drive innovation. The company spends over \$1 billion annually on R&D, and has a dedicated team of scientists and engineers focused on developing new products and technologies.
- 3) **Innovation Centers:** DuPont has established innovation centers around the world, which serve as hubs for collaboration and experimentation. These centers bring together experts from various disciplines to work on new ideas and products.
- 4) **Customer Focus:** DuPont is committed to understanding the needs of its customers and developing products and technologies that meet those needs. The company conducts extensive market research and solicits feedback from customers to inform its innovation process.
- 5) **Culture of Innovation:** DuPont has a culture that encourages innovation and risk-taking. The company fosters an entrepreneurial spirit among its employees and provides opportunities for them to develop and implement new ideas.

Overall, DuPont's approach to innovation is driven by collaboration, investment in R&D, customer focus, and a culture that values creativity and risk-taking.

#### **8.4 Adobe**

Adobe's "Kickbox" program is another example of managing innovation within a team. Under this program, Adobe employees are provided with a "Kickbox" kit, which contains tools and resources for developing and testing new ideas. Employees are also given a budget of \$1,000 to develop their ideas further.

This program has been successful in promoting innovation within Adobe's teams. By providing employees with the resources and support they need to develop their ideas, Adobe fosters a culture of innovation and creativity.

### **9 Conclusion**

Innovation is a crucial component of business success, and managing innovation requires effective communication, collaboration, and leadership. The case studies of Google and Apple illustrate how successful organizations manage innovation within their teams and at scale. Both companies have a culture that supports innovation, a clear and focused strategy, and a commitment to continuous improvement. By following these principles, organizations can foster innovation and develop products that are both technically sound and commercially viable. To remain competitive, organizations must be able to manage innovation effectively, both within their teams and at scale. It requires a structured approach and a sustained effort over time. Companies that manage innovation well can differentiate themselves from their competitors and increase profitability. By fostering a culture of innovation, creating cross-functional teams, allocating sufficient resources, encouraging risk-taking, and fostering open communication, organizations can successfully manage innovation.

Innovation mindset is essential for organizations to stay ahead of the curve. Cultivating an innovation mindset requires a culture of experimentation, risk-taking, and creativity. By encouraging employees to think outside the box, providing resources and support, and embracing diversity, organizations can foster an innovation mindset and develop new products and services that meet and exceed customer expectations. In today's rapidly changing business landscape, an innovation mindset is no longer a nice-to-have but a must-have for organizations looking to thrive and grow.

## About the Author



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**Nikunj Nirmal** is a business and technology executive, and an accomplished leader with an extensive experience in digital strategy, brand and customer experiences, intellectual property acquisition, product management, enterprise architecture, and technology roadmap for Fortune 100 organizations. Nikunj is the Head of Engineering for Amazon International Expansions to launch ecommerce business in new countries.

Nikunj has worked in several leadership roles such as Chief Technology Officer, Head of Digital Transformation, Head of Innovation Labs (USA), IT Delivery Head, and Shadow Board Member. With strong focus on customer experience and innovation, Nikunj has extensive experience in leading large-scale digital transformation programs and delivering CX centric solutions to drive sustainable growth. Nikunj serves on Forbes Technology Council and is Mentor for WingsForGrowth. He has been on the Technical Advisory Council for Linux Foundation for Artificial Intelligence, serves on two Advisory Boards at The University of Texas at Dallas (UTD) – Global Business and Retail Innovation and Strategic Excellence (RISE), Advisory Board for the University of Houston’s Customer Experience Program, Texas A&M Digital Marketing Advisory board and has worked as Adjunct Faculty at UTD. Nikunj is passionate about mentoring and building high performance teams.

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