

THE HIRING KIT

Chief Innovation Officer job description and hiring kit

The job description in three versions by innovation maturity, a ten-competency scorecard, fourteen interview questions and a plan for the first 90 days.

1 The job description: build, scale and lead

2 The scorecard

3 The interview

4 The first 90 days

How to use this kit

A Chief Innovation Officer job description should describe the system the leader will build, not the ideas they will have. The job is to make the whole company innovate: to architect, run and measure the innovation function so that every team can discover, validate and launch new opportunities.

Five questions for the hiring team

Many of the reasons the role fails are settled before the first interview. *Innovation Mode* names unrealistic expectations, conflicts over who owns what, scepticism from other leaders and the wrong metrics (p. 45); a missing team or budget completes the list. Answer these five questions before the search starts. The answers are the first half of the job description.

1. **Which job are you hiring for?** Someone to innovate in a domain, such as a new product line or an R&D programme, or someone to make the whole company innovate. They are different jobs and need different people.
2. **Where is the company on the Innovation Maturity Index?** The level decides which of the three versions below you need.
3. **Who will the leader report to?** A direct line to the CEO gives the role the reach to change how the company works. Below the C-suite, the leader needs a named sponsor in it.
4. **Is there a team and a budget, or only a title?** Without a team, Tom Goodwin warns in *60 Leaders on Innovation* (p. 24), the leader either leaves or learns to stop pushing.
5. **Where are the boundaries with the other executives?** Agree them with the CTO, the Chief Product Officer, the Chief Strategy Officer and, if you have one, the Chief AI Officer, before the role is announced.

Choose the version

Build

Levels 1 to 3: No innovation function yet

Head of Innovation. Also titled Innovation Programme Director.

Scale

Levels 4 and 5: Innovation runs, but not as one system

Chief Innovation Officer. Also titled VP of Innovation.

Lead

Levels 6 and 7: Innovation shapes the strategy

Chief Innovation Officer. A member of the executive committee.

The responsibilities are the same in every version. What changes is the first-year mandate, the title, the starting team and the experience that matters most. Replace the parts in brackets, and keep the last section, What we commit to: it tells a strong candidate whether the role can succeed.

Head of Innovation

Also titled Innovation Programme Director

Reports to	The CEO, or a member of the C-suite who sponsors the programme
Team	The budget for your first two hires, an innovation architect and a programme manager, and for the rest of the core team in the first year
Location	[Location and working pattern]

ABOUT THE ROLE

[Company] wants innovation to be something every team does, not something a few people are known for. As Head of Innovation, you are accountable for the company's ability to innovate: how well it spots, validates and brings new opportunities to market. You are not hired to be our chief inventor. You are hired to build and run the innovation function that lets everyone else invent: the agenda, the process, the tools, the culture and the measures.

YOUR MISSION

To empower [Company] to thrive through the discovery and pursuit of new business opportunities. That means improving how we spot and frame opportunities, strengthening how we identify and validate the ones with high potential, and aligning the leadership team to invest in validated opportunities and bring them to market.

WHAT YOU WILL DO

1. Architect our innovation function: the platforms, processes, programmes and tools we need, and the order in which to introduce them.
2. Turn our strategy into an innovation agenda of focus areas and problems worth solving, and keep it current with the leadership team.
3. Build an end-to-end process for capturing, assessing and validating ideas, and manage a balanced portfolio of opportunities.
4. Make sure validated opportunities reach the market: the teams, systems and handovers that take them to launch and adoption.
5. Grow a genuine innovation culture and a community of innovators, address resistance to change, and lead by example.
6. Measure innovation performance, and report the state of innovation to the leadership team and the board.
7. Connect our teams and divisions through one innovation language, method and set of tools.
8. Build relationships with start-ups, universities, industry bodies and partners.
9. Develop innovation talent: roles, career paths, training, and innovation champions in every function.

L0. Secure funding in the budget cycle, set clear criteria for allocating it, and create flexible funding for promising initiatives.

IN YOUR FIRST YEAR

Assess the state of innovation, win approval for the Innovation Masterplan, form the core team and launch the Power-Up phase.

WHAT YOU BRING

- Has set up an innovation programme from nothing; strongest in communication, influence and hands-on leadership.
- Mastery of the innovation process; strategic thinking; a deep understanding of technology, including what AI can and cannot do; product sense and prioritisation; the ability to speak the corporate, product and technical languages; relationship building and influence; customer and market understanding; financial acumen; a hands-on leadership style; and an appetite for calculated risk.
- Readiness to change the innovation function itself as the company changes.

Not required: deep expertise in our industry. We will put domain experts on your team. What we need from you is the ability to make the whole company innovate.

HOW WE WILL MEASURE SUCCESS

- **Output:** how ideas convert into validated opportunities and launched products, and how fast.
- **Impact:** the business results of what reaches the market, against targets set before launch.
- **Culture:** the size and activity of the innovation community, and the attitude to experimentation.
- **Image:** how innovative customers, partners and candidates see us.

In the first year: The masterplan approved, the core team in place, the first innovation capabilities in use, and a baseline from the first innovation survey.

We will not judge the role on activity counts such as ideas submitted or workshops held.

WHAT WE COMMIT TO

- A direct reporting line to the CEO, or a named sponsor in the C-suite.
- A team and a budget of your own from the first day.
- Clear boundaries with the other executives, agreed before you start.
- Measures that fit a programme designed to deliver over years.

Chief Innovation Officer

Also titled VP of Innovation

Reports to	Chief Executive Officer, with a quarterly update to the board
Team	The core innovation team reporting directly to you (innovation architects, innovation orchestrators, programme managers, innovation advocates and workshop facilitators), and the budget to complete it
Location	[Location and working pattern]

ABOUT THE ROLE

[Company] wants innovation to be something every team does, not something a few people are known for. As Chief Innovation Officer, you are accountable for the company's ability to innovate: how well it spots, validates and brings new opportunities to market. You are not hired to be our chief inventor. You are hired to build and run the innovation function that lets everyone else invent: the agenda, the process, the tools, the culture and the measures.

YOUR MISSION

To empower [Company] to thrive through the discovery and pursuit of new business opportunities. That means improving how we spot and frame opportunities, strengthening how we identify and validate the ones with high potential, and aligning the leadership team to invest in validated opportunities and bring them to market.

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L0. Secure funding in the budget cycle, set clear criteria for allocating it, and create flexible funding for promising initiatives.

IN YOUR FIRST YEAR

- Agree the innovation agenda with the leadership team, tied to our strategy.
- Bring today's programmes, events and teams into one opportunity pipeline, from idea to validated opportunity to launch.
- Introduce an innovation performance scorecard and report it to the leadership team every quarter.
- Complete the core innovation team.
- Make the handover from validated opportunity to product team work, so that validated concepts reach the market.

WHAT YOU BRING

- Experience of architecting and running an innovation function or programme across a large organisation, with results you can show.
- Experience of taking new products or services from concept to market.
- Mastery of the innovation process; strategic thinking; a deep understanding of technology, including what AI can and cannot do; product sense and prioritisation; the ability to speak the corporate, product and technical languages; relationship building and influence; customer and market understanding; financial acumen; a hands-on leadership style; and an appetite for calculated risk.
- Readiness to change the innovation function itself as the company changes.

Not required: deep expertise in our industry. We will put domain experts on your team. What we need from you is the ability to make the whole company innovate.

HOW WE WILL MEASURE SUCCESS

- **Output:** how ideas convert into validated opportunities and launched products, and how fast.
- **Impact:** the business results of what reaches the market, against targets set before launch.
- **Culture:** the size and activity of the innovation community, and the attitude to experimentation.
- **Image:** how innovative customers, partners and candidates see us.

We will not judge the role on activity counts such as ideas submitted or workshops held.

WHAT WE COMMIT TO

- A direct reporting line to the CEO, and regular time with the board.
- A team and a budget of your own from the first day.
- Clear boundaries with the other executives, agreed before you start.
- Measures that fit a programme designed to deliver over years.

Chief Innovation Officer

A member of the executive committee

Reports to	The CEO, with regular board time; the scope may also cover the organisational design for innovation, R&D programmes and specific investments
Team	The core team, plus service teams such as market intelligence, opportunity validation and venture building
Location	[Location and working pattern]

ABOUT THE ROLE

[Company] wants innovation to be something every team does, not something a few people are known for. As Chief Innovation Officer, you are accountable for the company's ability to innovate: how well it spots, validates and brings new opportunities to market. You are not hired to be our chief inventor. You are hired to build and run the innovation function that lets everyone else invent: the agenda, the process, the tools, the culture and the measures.

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L0. Secure funding in the budget cycle, set clear criteria for allocating it, and create flexible funding for promising initiatives.

IN YOUR FIRST YEAR

Scale capabilities across divisions, embed innovation in the business units, build AI into discovery and validation, and take new ventures forward.

WHAT YOU BRING

- Has led innovation at C-level and built new businesses, ideally with P&L responsibility.
- Mastery of the innovation process; strategic thinking; a deep understanding of technology, including what AI can and cannot do; product sense and prioritisation; the ability to speak the corporate, product and technical languages; relationship building and influence; customer and market understanding; financial acumen; a hands-on leadership style; and an appetite for calculated risk.
- Readiness to change the innovation function itself as the company changes.

Not required: deep expertise in our industry. We will put domain experts on your team. What we need from you is the ability to make the whole company innovate.

HOW WE WILL MEASURE SUCCESS

- **Output:** how ideas convert into validated opportunities and launched products, and how fast.
- **Impact:** the business results of what reaches the market, against targets set before launch.
- **Culture:** the size and activity of the innovation community, and the attitude to experimentation.
- **Image:** how innovative customers, partners and candidates see us.

In the first year: Outcomes across the divisions: the share of revenue from new products, new ventures launched, and the state of the culture.

We will not judge the role on activity counts such as ideas submitted or workshops held.

WHAT WE COMMIT TO

- A direct reporting line to the CEO, a seat on the executive committee and regular time with the board.
- A team and a budget of your own from the first day.
- Clear boundaries with the other executives, agreed before you start.
- Measures that fit a programme designed to deliver over years.

Ten competencies

The ten competencies come from *Innovation Mode* (pp. 51–53). For each, the scorecard gives the evidence that shows it and the red flag that warns against it. Score each competency from 1 to 4 on evidence, not impression: 1, no evidence; 2, can describe it; 3, has done it; 4, has done it more than once, at scale. Then double the scores marked for your version.

Competency	Strong evidence	Red flag	Weight double for
1. Mastery of the innovation process	Has architected an innovation function or programme end to end, and can explain what came first and why.	Describes innovation as a calendar of events: hackathons, idea challenges, a lab.	Build, Scale
2. Strategic thinking	Has turned a company strategy into an innovation agenda, and can trace initiatives back to it.	Creativity with no line to the strategy or the company's purpose.	Scale, Lead
3. A deep understanding of technology	Explains what current AI can and cannot do in your context, and what will become feasible within your horizon.	Treats technology as the answer, and forgets people, culture and process.	Lead
4. Product sense and prioritisation	Has taken products from concept to market, and has stopped projects on the evidence.	Cannot name a project they stopped.	Scale, Lead
5. Communication	Moves between corporate, product and technical language in the same conversation.	Buzzwords where specifics should be.	Build
6. Relationship building and influence	Has built coalitions across functions and won over a senior leader who resisted.	Succeeded only where they had formal authority.	Build, Scale, Lead
7. Customer and market understanding	Has set up ways to sense the market and test with real customers.	Every opportunity they mention came from inside the company.	Scale
8. Financial acumen	Has secured innovation budgets, built business cases and funded work outside the annual cycle.	Promises a return on every idea, or cannot talk about money at all.	Lead
9. A hands-on leadership style	Still takes part as an innovator: ideas, prototypes, workshops.	The gatekeeper who approves everything and contributes nothing.	Build
10. Risk appetite	Can describe a failure they designed for, what the company learned and what happened to the team.	A career without a single failure, or bets with no limit on the downside.	Build, Lead

The weights are a suggestion; adjust them to your context. One quality cuts across all ten: the leader must be ready to innovate the innovation function itself, because the company will change under them.

Scoring sheet

Candidate: _____ Interviewer: _____ Date: _____

Version: ☐ Build ☐ Scale ☐ Lead

Competency	Score (1-4)	Weight (1 or 2)	Total	Evidence noted
1. Mastery of the innovation process				
2. Strategic thinking				
3. A deep understanding of technology				
4. Product sense and prioritisation				
5. Communication				
6. Relationship building and influence				
7. Customer and market understanding				
8. Financial acumen				
9. A hands-on leadership style				
10. Risk appetite				
Total				

Fourteen questions

Each question tests one or two competencies. Ask for examples, not opinions, and score the answer on the scorecard.

The role itself

1. What is the job of a Chief Innovation Officer: to innovate, or to make the company innovate?
Listen for the second, and what it means in practice: the system, not the ideas. (Competency 1)
2. Walk us through an innovation function you built. What did you put in place first, what did you leave for later, and why?
Listen for a sequence with reasons, and low-cost starts before expensive platforms. (1)
3. We run [two hackathons a year and an idea portal]. What would you keep, stop and add?
Listen for questions about outcomes before answers about events. (1, 4)
4. When did you last contribute an idea or a prototype yourself?
Listen for recent, specific examples. (9)

Strategy and portfolio

5. Here is our strategy. Which three problems worth solving would you put on our innovation agenda?
Listen for problems, not solutions, each traced to a strategic goal. (2)
6. Tell us about an innovation project you stopped. What evidence made the call?
Listen for evidence set before the project started. (4, 10)
7. Two opportunities compete for one budget: a safe extension of our core product and a risky new business model. How do you decide?
Listen for a portfolio view rather than a single bet. (4, 8)
8. Tell us about an opportunity you found and tested with real customers. What did you learn that changed the plan?
Listen for evidence from the market, not opinions from inside the company. (7)

Technology and AI

9. Where should AI sit in our innovation process today, and where should it not, yet?
Listen for both halves. Sophisticated AI systems add most value once the culture and the basics are in place. (3)
10. How would you work with our CTO and our Chief AI Officer so that you are not competing for the same initiatives?
Listen for clear ownership and a shared portfolio. See Chief AI Officer vs Chief Innovation Officer. (6)

People and influence

11. Tell us about a senior leader who resisted your programme. What did you do?
Listen for influence without authority, and the middle managers, not only the executives. (6)

L2. Explain your plan to our board in two minutes. Now explain it to one of our engineering teams.

Listen for the same plan in two languages. (5)

Money, risk and measurement

L3. How would you measure innovation here in the first year, and which numbers would you refuse to report?

Listen for output, impact and culture, and a refusal of vanity metrics such as ideas submitted. (1, 8)

L4. Five years from now, how will we know you succeeded?

Listen for a company that innovates without depending on them. (2, 10)

The work sample

Give the shortlisted candidates a short briefing pack: the strategy, the current innovation activity and the organisation chart. Ask each to present a 90-day plan to the hiring panel. Compare the plans with the preparation steps below: the strongest put assessment and listening before announcements, and the team before the tools.

The first 90 days

Chapter 10 of *Innovation Mode* opens the innovation programme with a preparation phase: assess, frame and plan, then win the leadership's approval before anything is announced. The book sets the steps and their order, not a calendar; the 90-day split is a planning convention that fits most companies. Page numbers refer to *Innovation Mode* (Author's Edition, 2026).

Days 1 to 30: listen and assess

- Run the preliminary assessment: surveys and interviews with people across the hierarchy, on how innovation is perceived, what needs to change and what people expect (p. 327).
- Compare the current innovation set-up with the ideal innovation architecture: a gap analysis of capabilities, resources, skills and talent (p. 327).
- Make the first two hires: an innovation architect and a programme manager (p. 327).
- Map the stakeholders: the sponsors, product leaders, champions and domain experts (p. 329).

Days 31 to 60: frame

- Place the company on the Innovation Maturity Index, and write up the gaps, the blockers and the blind spots (pp. 327–329).
- Articulate the innovation vision with the executives: what innovation means for this company, and what success looks like (p. 327).
- Draft the innovation agenda: the strategic problems worth solving, as the leadership prioritises them (p. 328).
- Prioritise the capabilities by urgency and dependence on technology: start what is urgent and simple now; explore what is urgent and complex (pp. 334–336).

Days 61 to 90: commit

- Compile the Innovation Masterplan: the vision and goals, the agenda, the current state, the team, the budget, the success criteria, the stakeholder map and the style of innovation (pp. 328–330).
- Draft the roadmap and the hiring plan for the rest of the core team (p. 328).
- Agree the budget, and a way to request more as the programme grows (p. 329).
- Win the leadership's approval, then prepare the announcement and the briefing for middle managers (pp. 336, 340).

After day 90, a formal announcement opens the first phase of the programme, Power-Up. With a well-staffed core team, it typically takes three to six months to reach the awareness and readiness of Level 2 (p. 338).