



Mind the Bridge

# OPEN INNOVATION OUTLOOK 2025

**Trends for 2025  
in Corporate-Startup  
Engagement**

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Photo Credit: Mind the Bridge



# REDEFINING OPEN INNOVATION IN 2025 FROM TURBULENCE TO TRANSFORMATION

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In December 2024, in Paris, during the closed-door session of the ninth edition of the **Corporate Startup Stars Awards** - organized by **Mind the Bridge** and the **International Chamber of Commerce** - we had the privilege of engaging with the heads of innovation from several of the world's top 100 most innovative corporations.

This gathering provided an invaluable opportunity to exchange insights, assess which Open Innovation tools have proven successful, and explore future plans. In this brief report, we summarize the key outcomes of our discussions, supported by findings from a structured survey conducted at the end of the session.

## Clear trends emerged.

The turbulence of 2024 serves as a reminder that innovation is rarely a linear process. While economic cycles inevitably influence corporate priorities, the core principles of Open Innovation - collaboration, adaptability, and leveraging external ideas - remain foundational to long-term success.

As we step into 2025, a few messages resonate strongly:

- **The commitment to Open Innovation endures**, even as methods evolve.
- Open Innovation is shifting from "back to basics" to embracing new, more **"hybrid"** and **"sophisticated"** approaches.
- **The era of "isolated innovation" is over.**  
Ecosystems and collaboration define the future.

## 2024 may be remembered as a year of realization.

It underscored the need to cut ties with outdated approaches and to redesign more effective models. These new models must reflect the complexities of modern business, which demand greater cooperation and adaptability.

As Nassim Nicholas Taleb's concept of **antifragility** suggests: organizations must learn to thrive, improve, and grow stronger under stress and volatility.

### **Disclaimer:**

*The data presented in this report reflects the perspectives of over 50 senior innovation leaders - the proclaimed "Corporate Startup Stars."*

*It is important to note that the findings may not universally apply to all contexts.*





# OPEN INNOVATION BUDGETS

## 2024: A CHALLENGING YEAR FOR OPEN INNOVATION

**2024 marked a turning point for Open Innovation**, as economic pressures led many of the world's most innovative corporations to reassess their strategies. This shift didn't come out of the blue.

Each December, we survey Heads of Innovation from the **world's top 100 most innovative companies** to gauge their plans for the year ahead.

In 2023, a striking 27% of respondents predicted budget cuts for 2024 - a sharp increase from just 6% the previous year.

## RETRENCHMENT IN ACTION: KEY CLOSURES IN 2024

As anticipated, **2024 saw significant pullbacks in Open Innovation initiatives**. While some adjustments went largely unnoticed, others made headlines. Among the most notable:

- **January: Walmart shut down Store No. 8**, its tech incubator launched in 2017. Despite delivering several high-profile successes, the initiative was deemed unsustainable.
- **March: SAP closed SAP.IO**, its global Open Innovation arm that once served as a benchmark for acceleration, intrapreneurship, and venture building. The unit's 50 staff across a dozen locations were disbanded.

- **August: AXA divested from AXA Venture Partners (AVP)**, transitioning the corporate venture fund into an independent VC firm after its management acquired 70% of AXA's stake.

These were some of the most high-profile examples, but **countless other closures or reductions slipped quietly under the radar**.

While companies eagerly celebrate the launch of new initiatives with great fanfare, they often fall silent when it comes time to shut them down.





## CAUTION TAKES CENTER STAGE

Conversations with innovation leaders paint a consistent picture: **caution is the prevailing sentiment**. However, it's not all doom and gloom.

Despite the pullbacks, **Open Innovation remains a cornerstone for many corporates**.

## 2025: TOWARD A RENEWED DAWN FOR OPEN INNOVATION

Looking ahead, forecasts for 2025 reveal **a cautiously optimistic outlook**:

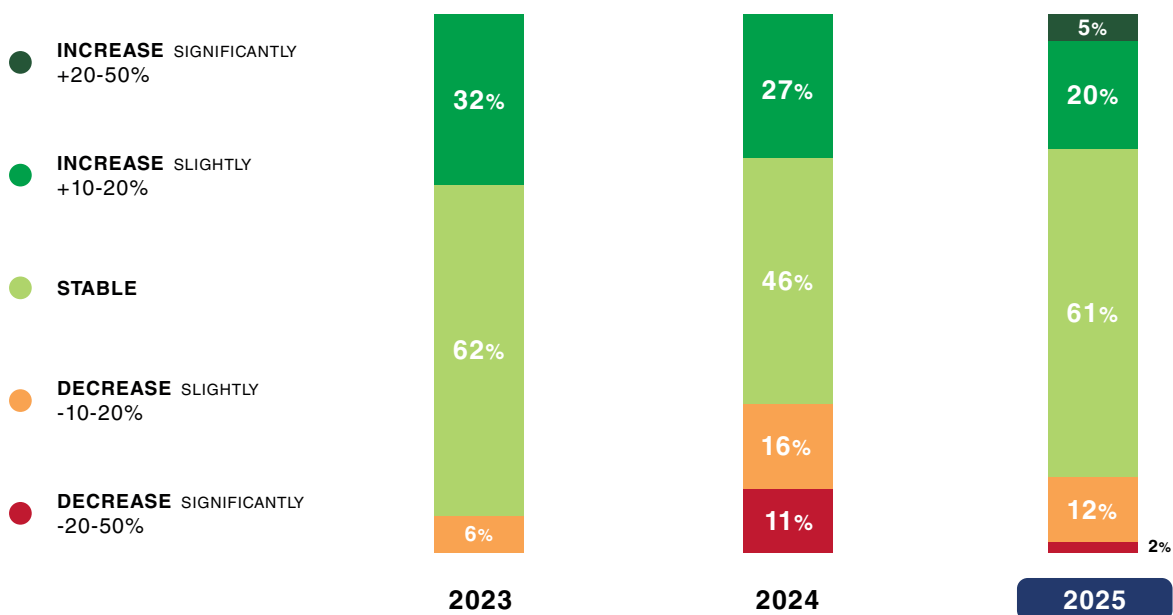
- **86%** of corporates expect to **maintain or increase** their Open Innovation budgets, up from 73% in 2024 (though still below 94% in 2023).
- **25%** of corporates plan to **increase spending**, with 5% projecting significant growth.
- **14%** of corporates anticipate **scaling back** operations, down from 27% in 2024.
- Only **2%** of corporates expect to **cut** their Open Innovation budgets significantly.

This renewed confidence suggests that while the approach may evolve, **Open Innovation is here to stay**.

Companies are **consolidating budgets** and focusing on strategic investments, ensuring they remain competitive in an increasingly complex global market.

FIGURE 1  
INNOVATION BUDGET: FORECAST

Source: Mind the Bridge



# OPEN INNOVATION IMPACT AND KPIs

## THE MULTIFACETED IMPACT OF OPEN INNOVATION

Innovation leaders consistently highlight the **transformative influence** of Open Innovation across several dimensions:

- **Strategy:** Nearly all (90%) agree that Open Innovation reshapes their company's long-term strategy.
- **Sustainability:** 78% recognize Open Innovation as a catalyst for corporate sustainability and environmental impact reduction.
- **Financial:** 76% are focused on financial performance (e.g., new revenue streams, cost reductions, process efficiency, and ROI)
- **Technology:** 76% have a goal of onboarding transformative technologies.
- **Branding:** An increasing number of corporates (40%) highlight how Open Innovation impacts the company's brand image and market positioning.
- **Diversity:** Only 17% of companies note Open Innovation's potential to drive diversity initiatives, highlighting a less explored opportunity.

## THE OPEN INNOVATION MEASUREMENT CHALLENGE

Figure 3 highlights the **most commonly used KPIs** adopted by global leaders to evaluate the impact of their Open Innovation initiatives.

While the benefits of Open Innovation are widely acknowledged, many of its outcomes remain **intangible** and **challenging to measure**.

As a result, only a minority of corporations have implemented **robust KPI systems** capable of effectively capturing these impacts.

- **Financial Impact:**  
The most measured dimension, with almost all (95% of companies employing KPIs to track financial outcomes such as cost savings, revenue growth, and ROI.
- **Technological Integration:**  
Two thirds of companies use KPIs to monitor the adoption and implementation of transformative technologies.
- **Strategic Impact:**  
While 90% of companies view strategy change as the ultimate goal of their efforts, only 22% have established metrics to effectively measure its impact.
- **Sustainability:**  
While increasingly monitored (22% of corporate), sustainability KPIs tend to lack structure and consistency, limiting their effectiveness.
- **Branding:**  
Branding is increasingly prioritized and is starting to be consistently measured, with more than one third of corporates having put dedicated KPIs in place.
- **Diversity and Cultural Impact:**  
These dimensions are often overlooked, with less than 10% of corporates identifying them as critical areas for measurement.

## BRIDGING THE GAP

This measurement disparity exposes a significant challenge: although the transformative potential of Open Innovation is broadly recognized, **its true impact often goes underreported** due to the absence of reliable metrics.

Yet, the difficulty of measurement should not serve as an excuse for inaction. To **protect budgets and sustain momentum**, innovation leaders must establish robust KPI systems that provide structured, actionable data.

**Demonstrating tangible results is critical** - and it is far more effective to proactively implement these systems rather than reacting to external pressures.

**Closing this measurement gap will be pivotal** to unlocking the full transformative promise of Open Innovation.

FIGURE 2  
OPEN INNOVATION: IMPACT VS. KPIS IN PLACE  
Source: Mind the Bridge

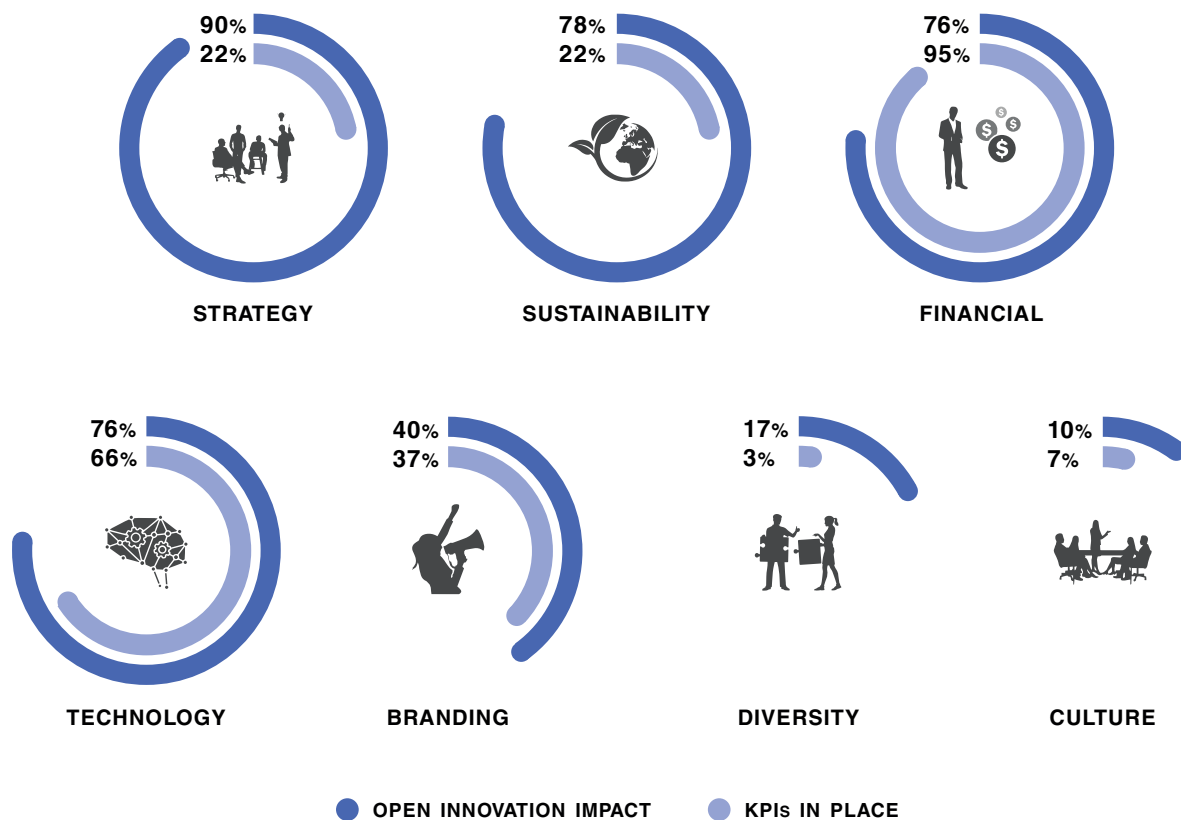
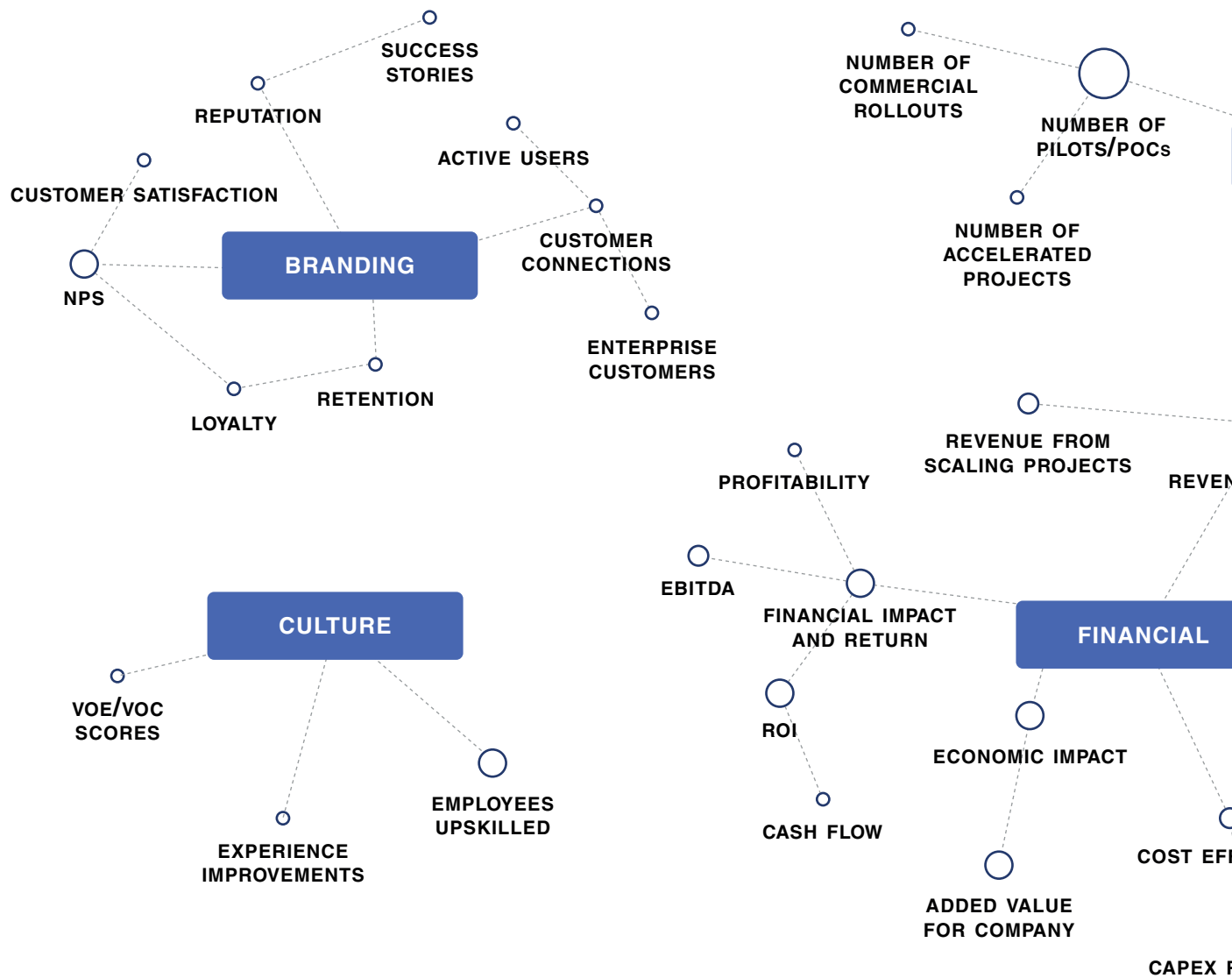
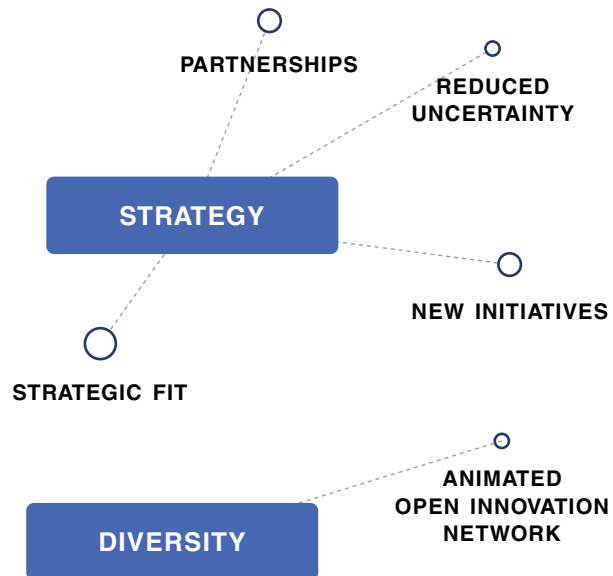
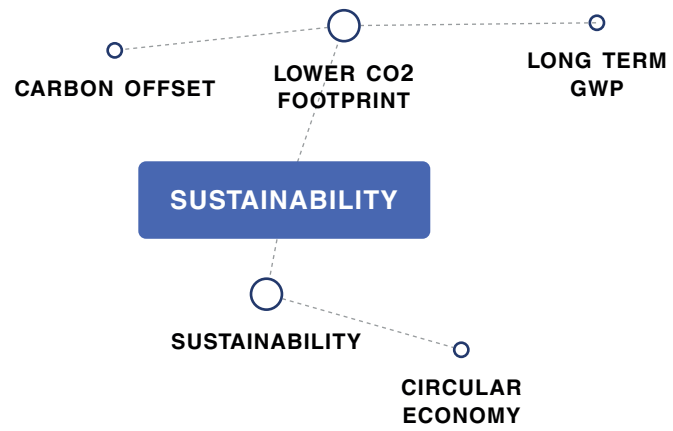
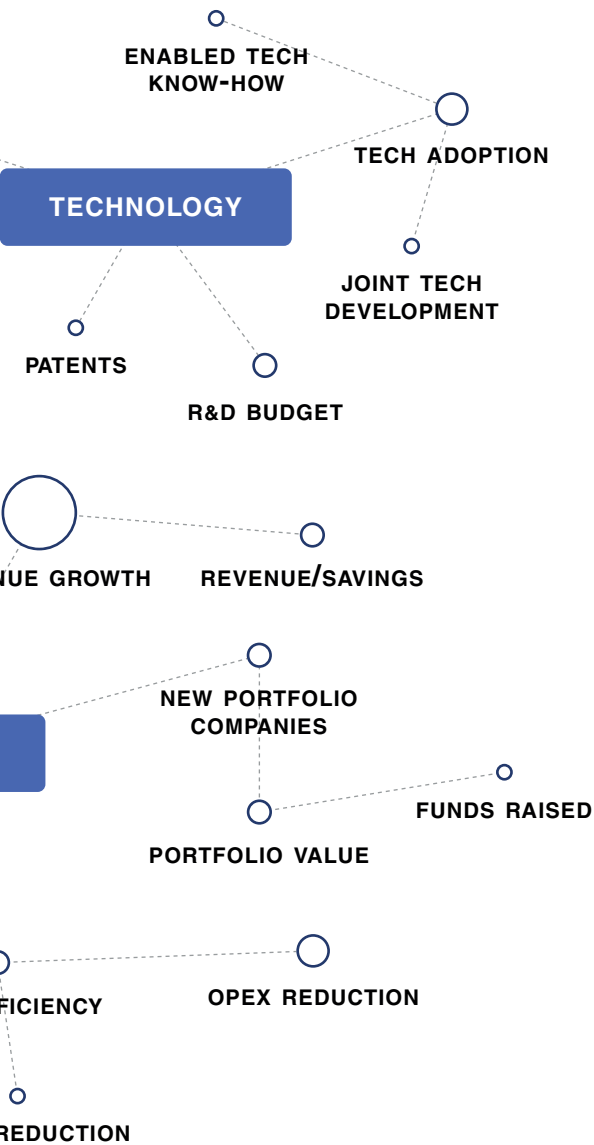




FIGURE 1  
MOST ADOPTED OPEN INNOVATION METRICS  
Source: Mind the Bridge





# OPEN INNOVATION ORGANIZATION

## THE CASE FOR DEDICATED INNOVATION UNITS

Establishing a structured unit is a critical step toward fostering innovation in a systematic and scalable way.

**Nearly all corporations** (90%) have created dedicated organizational units to manage Open Innovation.

These teams, typically lean and composed of 4–6 members, are tasked with driving transformative initiatives across the company.

## THE PROBLEM OF DISTANCE FROM THE TOP

If innovation is truly a strategic priority, why is the Head of Innovation so distant from the CEO?

Our data reveals that Open Innovation often remains **disconnected** from the heart of decision-making.

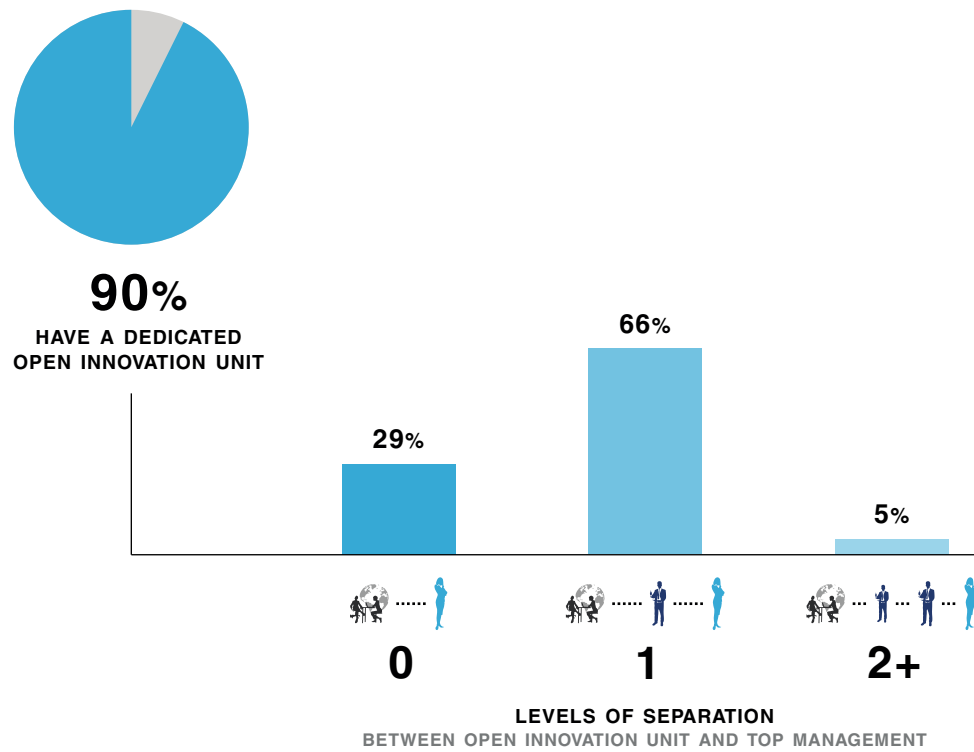
- Only **29%** of Open Innovation units report directly to the CEO.

- **More than two-thirds** are positioned at least one level removed from top management.

A genuine commitment to Open Innovation is hard to claim when its leader operates two levels below the top.



FIGURE 4  
WHERE INNOVATION SITS IN THE ORGANIZATION CHART  
Source: Mind the Bridge



# OPEN INNOVATION MODELS

## THE GOLD STANDARD OPEN INNOVATION FRAMEWORK: MODELS AND ENABLERS

In recent years, corporates have accumulated significant experience in collaborating with startups across various initiatives and tools.

As a result, **Open Innovation is no longer a black box** or a realm of blind experimentation.

Instead, **best practices are emerging**, guiding companies toward more structured and effective approaches.

However, the models and tools employed by corporates to engage with startups are diverse and continually evolving.

As illustrated in Figure 5, these range from **Intrapreneurship** programs, **Accelerators**, **Startup Studios**, and **Venture Builders**, to **Outposts/Antennas** in global tech hubs, partnerships (**Venture Client**), investments (**CVC**), and acquisitions (**M&A**).

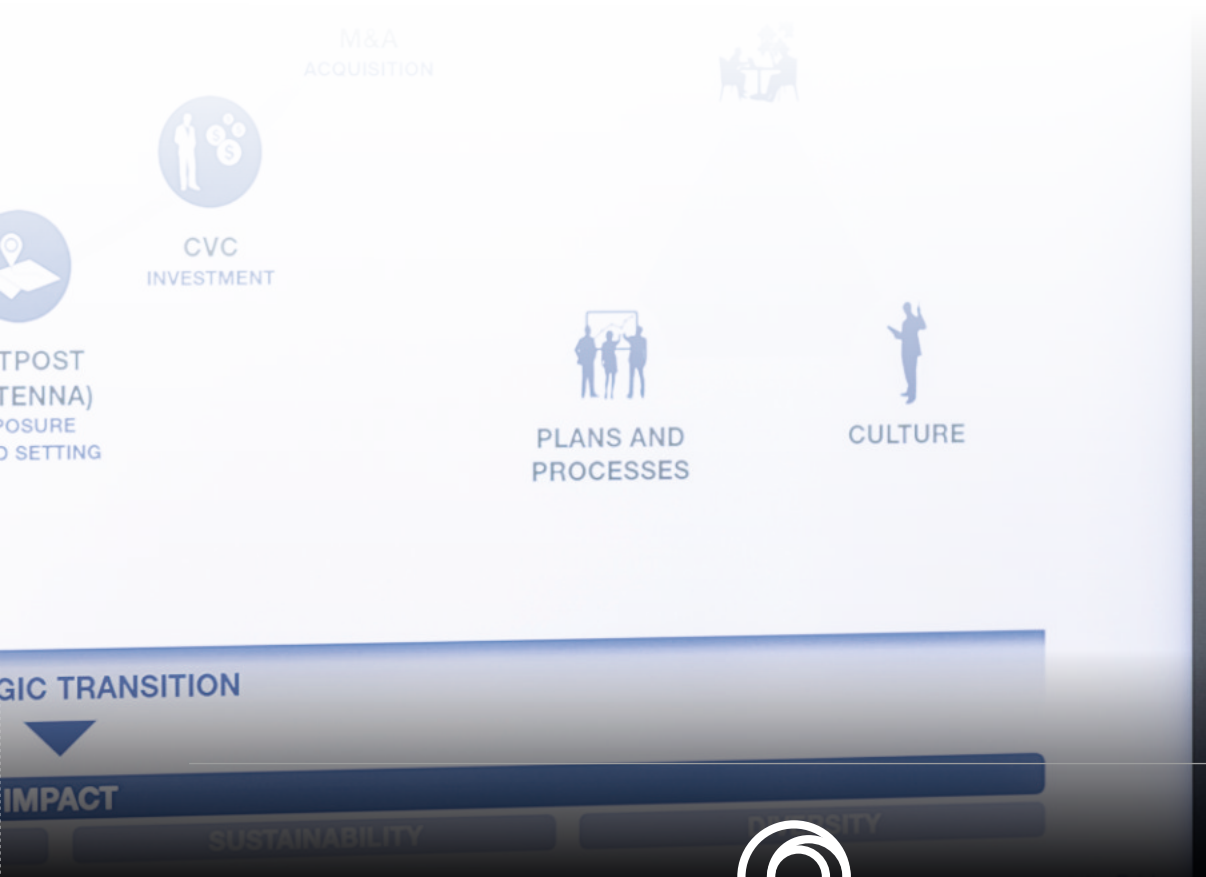
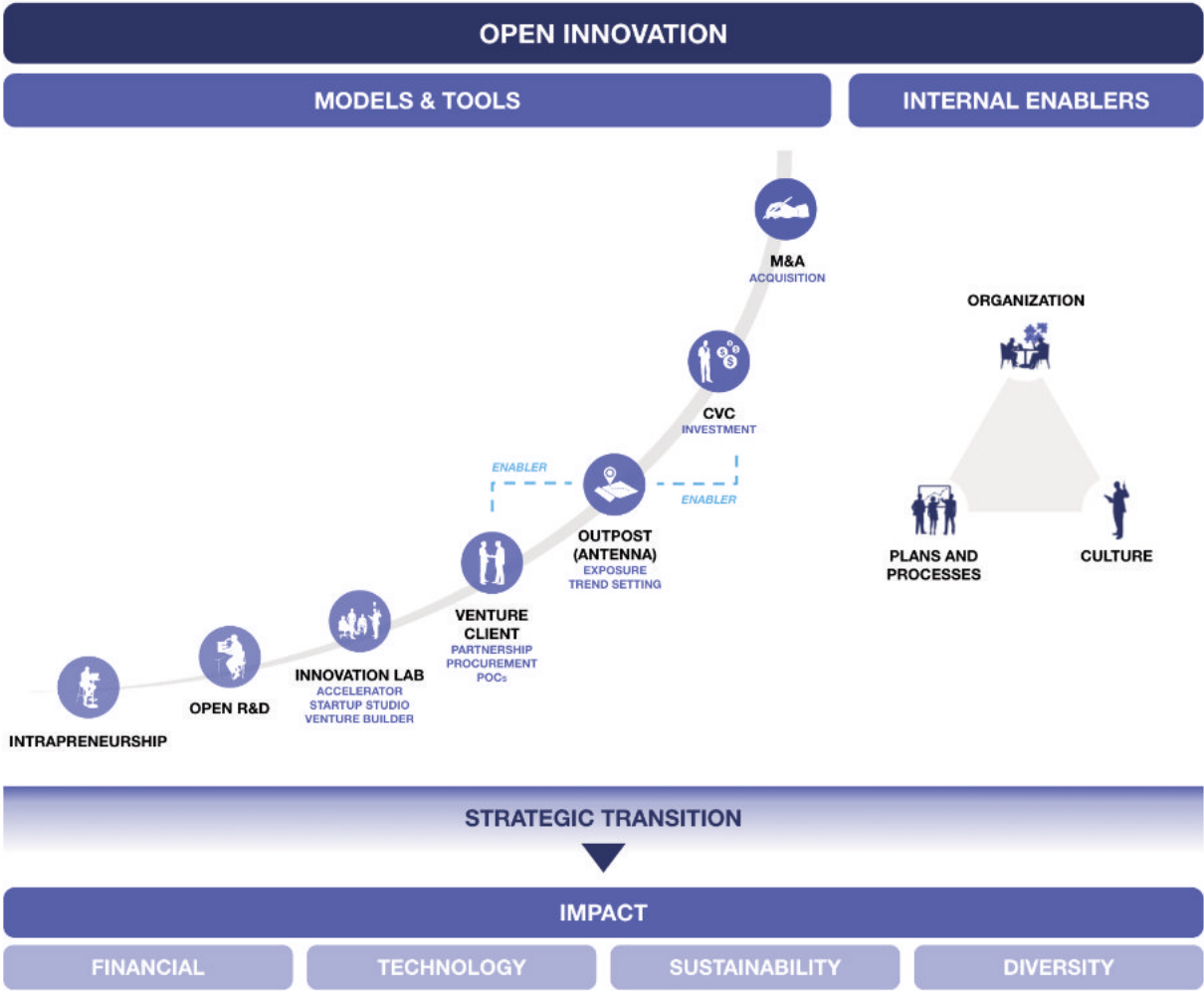
Additionally, **R&D** has become more open to external collaboration, adopting patterns that mirror lean startup processes (**Open R&D**).

While these external engagement tools are critical, the **internal enabling conditions** - such as **Innovation Strategy**, **Organizational Structure**, **Processes**, and the underlying **Corporate Culture** - are equally vital in delivering impact and extracting strategic value from Open Innovation.

These internal factors, though less visible, play a pivotal role in the success of corporate innovation initiatives.



FIGURE 5  
THE GOLD STANDARD OPEN INNOVATION FRAMEWORK  
Source: Mind the Bridge





## THE STATE OF OPEN INNOVATION TOOLS: CONSOLIDATION AND EMERGING TRENDS

We surveyed companies to identify which Open Innovation **tools** have proven **effective** and to uncover their plans for the future.

The findings reveal a clear trend toward consolidation, as corporates weigh expansion against downsizing in their Open Innovation strategies.

## OPEN INNOVATION: WHAT IS TRENDING AND WHAT IS NO LONGER

The **Venture Client** model remains a **cornerstone** of corporate innovation, with nearly all leaders (90%) employing it. Among those not yet utilizing this approach, 7% plan to implement it soon, reinforcing its continued relevance and widespread adoption.

**Intrapreneurship** programs, **Corporate Outposts**, and **Corporate Venture Capital (CVC)**, are expected to **consolidate further in 2025**, reflecting their established roles in innovation ecosystems.

Emerging tools also show promise.

**Venture Builders**, a relatively new approach, are gaining traction, with 13% of companies planning to launch one.

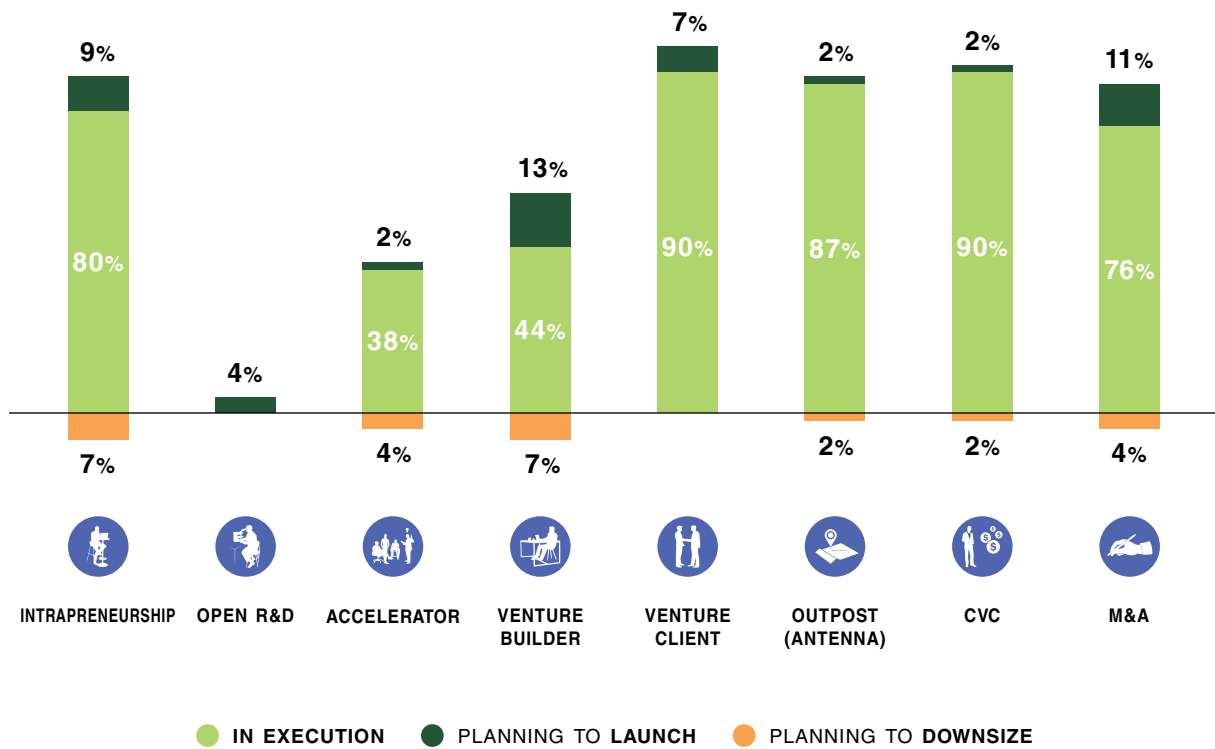
However, 7% are reconsidering and planning to scale back, highlighting mixed sentiments about this tool's scalability.

Meanwhile, **Corporate Accelerators**, already in decline and adopted by less than 40% of corporate leaders, are set to face further downsizing.

At the same time, **Startup M&As** are seeing renewed interest, with 11% of companies planning to pull the M&A trigger (while 4% intending to scale back).



FIGURE 6  
**OPEN INNOVATION MODELS ADOPTION: CURRENT AND FORECAST**  
 Source: Mind the Bridge



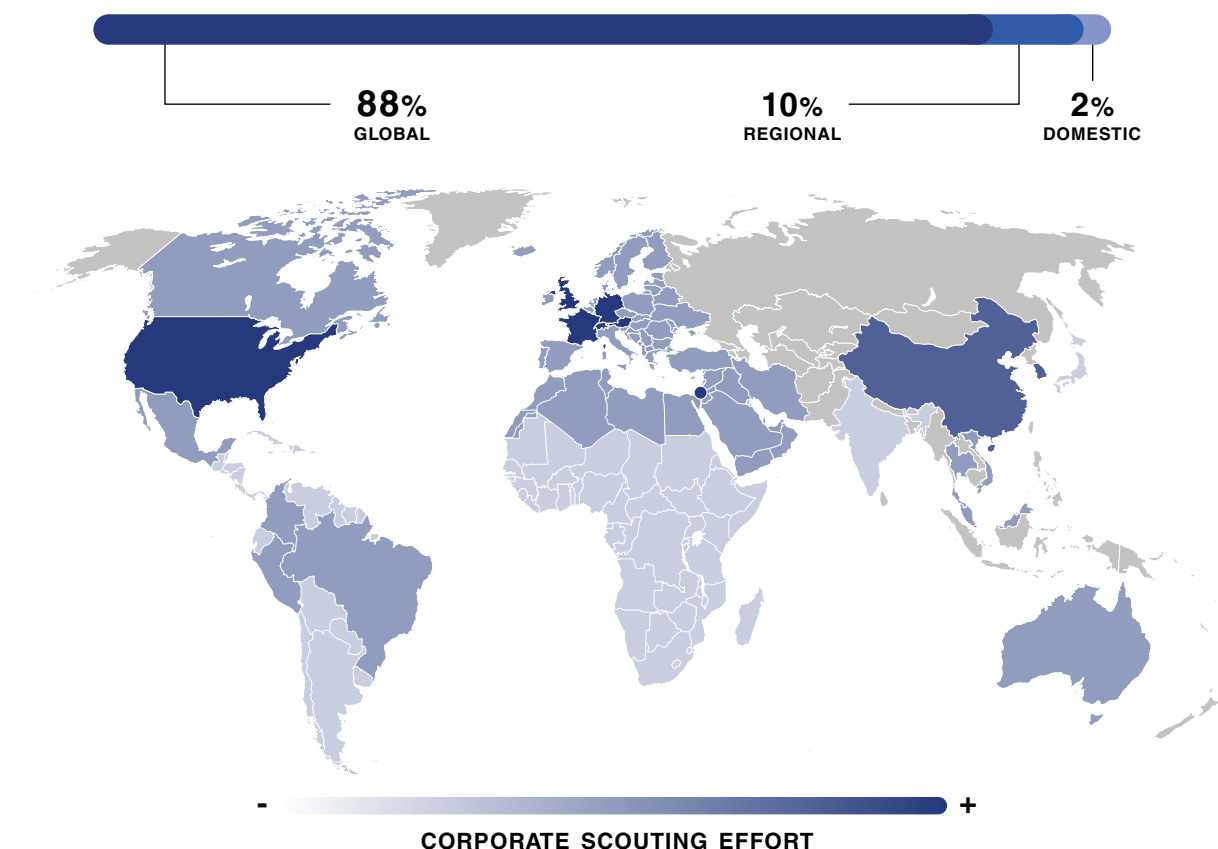
# STARTUP ECOSYSTEMS

## GLOBAL TRENDS IN STARTUP SCOUTING: CORPORATE APPROACHES AND EMERGING GEOGRAPHIES

Nearly all Corporate Startup Stars (88%) have adopted a **global approach to startup scouting**.  
A small minority (10%) still maintain a regional focus.  
Only 2% primarily seek domestic solutions.  
Beyond the usual suspects - **Silicon Valley, the US East Coast, Israel, and the UK** - corporates are increasingly eyeing emerging startup geographies, including:

- **Canada** (Toronto)
- **South East Asia** (particularly **Singapore** and **Seoul**).
- **Latin America** (with a focus on **Brazil**, **Colombia**, and **Peru**).
- **Australia**.
- The **MENA region** (**UAE/Saudi Arabia** and the **Maghreb** region).

FIGURE 7  
WORLD'S MAIN SCOUTING GEOGRAPHIES  
Source: Mind the Bridge





# INNOVATION PRIORITIES

The start of a new year often brings a **renewed focus on priorities and goals**.

To understand the direction for 2025, we asked innovation leaders to share their top three priorities, summarized on the pinboard on the following page.

In their 2025 wishlist, corporate innovation leaders are placing significant emphasis on **sustainability**, **digital transformation**, and **scaling impactful innovation**.

Innovation managers are gearing up to double down on **decarbonization**, **electrification**, and addressing **ESG challenges**.

At the same time, **AI remains a top priority**, reflecting an ongoing push to leverage emerging technologies for business growth and operational efficiency.

There is also a notable focus on **partnerships** - both with startups and within external ecosystems - highlighting a commitment to collaborative growth.

Internally, fostering a **culture of innovation**, refining **processes**, and **optimizing** open innovation tools signal a strong intent to align these efforts with broader strategic business goals.



# THE NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS C

## ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND PROCESSES

DEFINE  
AN OPEN  
INNOVATION  
PLAN

TO PROMOTE  
AND  
DISSEMINATE  
INNOVATION  
CULTURE

INTERNAL  
COMMUNITY  
BUILDING

STRENGTHEN  
THE INTERNAL  
AND  
EXTERNAL  
INNOVATION  
COMMUNITY

CULTURE  
TRANSFORMATION

SHAPE  
POLICIES

SIMPLIFY  
OPEN  
INNOVATION  
PROCESSES

BUILD  
PROCESSES  
FOR OPEN  
INNOVATION

DEFINE AN  
IMPACT  
MEASUREMENT  
METHODOLOGY

DEFINE A  
PRIORITIZATION  
FRAMEWORK

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

DECARBONIZATION

SUSTAINABLE,  
OPEN FINANCE

SUSTAINABILITY

ELECTRIFICATION

ALTERNATIVES  
TO PLASTIC

CLIMATE  
IMPACT

HELP CUSTOMERS  
ADDRESS ESG  
CHALLENGES  
THROUGH  
STARTUP  
INNOVATIONS

DRIVING  
NET ZERO IN  
INGREDIENTS  
AND  
MATERIALS

IDENTIFY  
CENTRAL  
BUDGET FOR  
SUSTAINABILITY

## EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

REALIGN R&D  
AND EMERGING  
TECH  
WITH OPEN  
APPROACH

GENAI

LLMs

APPREHEND  
AI

ADAPT OUR  
NETWORKS  
TO THE IMPACT  
OF AI

RESPONSIBLE  
AI

AI FOR  
ADVANCING  
R&D  
PROCESSES

IoT

LEVERAGE AI  
FOR IDEATION  
(WITH COMPANY-  
WIDE SUPPORT)

USE GENAI  
TO SPEED UP  
VENTURE  
BUILDING  
PROCESS



# OF GLOBAL INNOVATION LEADERS

## BUSINESS GROWTH AND STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES

TAP INTO NEW  
GROWTH  
OPPORTUNITIES

REVENUE  
GROWTH  
THROUGH  
PARTNERSHIPS

EXPAND OUR  
PORTFOLIO

BUILD  
BRIDGES  
TO CORE

EXPLORE THE  
US ECOSYSTEM

UNDERSTAND  
THE  
OPPORTUNITIES  
OF THE  
EUROPEAN  
ECOSYSTEM

ASSET  
EXPLOITATION  
BEYOND  
CAPTIVE  
MARKET

ACHIEVE  
DIGITAL LEAD  
IN CORE  
MARKETS

SCALING  
GROWTH  
BUSINESSES  
PROFICIENTLY

FOCUS ON  
EXTERNAL  
ECOSYSTEM

LAUNCH MORE  
CHALLENGES  
AND DEVELOP  
POCS

OPPORTUNITY  
SPACES  
(WHAT IS THE  
NEXT BIG THING)

## OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY/PIPELINE MANAGEMENT

INCREASE THE  
EFFICIENCY  
OF OPEN  
INNOVATION  
IMPACT

MEASURE AND  
INCREASE THE  
BUSINESS  
IMPACT OF POCs

MANAGING  
INNOVATION  
PIPELINE

SCALING  
POCS  
GLOBALLY

OPTIMIZE USE OF  
OPEN INNOVATION  
TOOLS TO  
INCREASE  
SUCCESS RATE

FROM POC  
TO STRATEGIC  
PARTNERSHIPS  
PROGRAM

ACCELERATE  
CURRENT  
INNOVATION  
PRODUCTS

START FROM  
BUSINESS  
NEEDS TO FIND  
ADEQUATE  
TECH  
SOLUTIONS

IMPROVE  
CAPEX  
EFFICIENCY/  
PRODUCTIVITY

CONCRETE  
BUSINESS VALUE  
FOR BUSINESS UNITS  
(INCREASE  
VENTURE CLIENT)

## WORKFORCE AND COLLABORATION

WORKFORCE  
MANAGEMENT

FOCUS ON  
THREE  
TECH  
"BIG BETS"

INCREASE  
EMPLOYEES'  
EXPERIENCE

IMPROVE  
CUSTOMER  
EXPERIENCE

AUTOMATION  
TO DEAL WITH  
THE SPEED OF  
SCALE AND  
LABOR  
SHORTAGE

IDENTIFY  
TECHNOLOGIES  
ALIGNED  
WITH BUSINESS  
NEEDS





# STARTUP STARS

2024



N GROUP

nder

stc



STELLANTIS

etisalat

CREDICORP

xiaomi

ENGIE

UBS

THALES

OL

ABB

TOSHIBA

VINCI

Schneider Electric

Allianz



V O



3M

KDDI

Lenovo

VIDIA

enel

Ecobank  
The Pan African Bank

JAPAN AIRLINES

logitech

PETROBRAS

BARCLAYS



VALE



sodexo

CEMEX

VISA

acciona

DANONE  
ONE PLANET. ONE HEALTH



Shinhan Bank

LG

BNP PARIBAS

HITACHI

ArcelorMittal

kpn

sico

M&S

a2a

REHAU

VusionGroup

Sicredi

FLUIDRA

2024 RISING STARS



# METHODOLOGY

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## DEFINITIONS - GOLD STANDARDS OF OPEN INNOVATION

### ***Open Innovation Outposts***

An “Open Innovation Outpost” is as a team of people (at least 1 full time person) — and often a physical site — that is set up by a corporate in a global technology hub (e.g. Silicon Valley, Israel) to perform and/or support activities of technology scouting, Open Innovation, startup investment, and M&A.

### ***Intrapreneurship Programmes***

Intrapreneurship Programmes were originally developed by corporate Human Resources Departments as internal — mostly educational — programmes of idea generation, with the goal of stimulating entrepreneurial attitudes among employees. Now, Intrapreneurship Programmes are increasingly going beyond mere educational goals and are turning into a source of origination to generate deal flow.

### ***Corporate Accelerators***

Traditionally, Startup Accelerators are entities that offer fixed-duration, cohort-based, selective programmes addressing early-stage startups that are focused on providing services (e.g. mentorship and training), usually taking a non-controlling equity stake in the portfolio companies (Nesta, 2014).

### ***Venture Builders***

Venture Builders are unique models of Startup Accelerators where a limited number of selected projects do not only receive dedicated, hands-on support, but also financial support to rapidly scale up, and are designed for rapid development and deployment of internal strategic projects.

Typically, Venture Builders:

- Are integrated with Intrapreneurship Programmes (of which they represent the natural continuation/follow-up)
- Leverage multiple idea origination sources (internal/intrapreneurship, strategic, and external i.e. startups)
- Are hyper-selective (very few projects per year are supported)
- Follow an “as-a-service” model to complement internal skills with entrepreneurial input
- Have a flexible capacity of fast deployment of projects/solutions
- Require budget and/or a dedicated fund. In some cases, Venture Builders are set up in collaboration with the corporate's venture capital fund.

The model is still evolving and it can vary by a significant degree from company to company.

### ***Venture Client***

Venture Client is the process of acquiring products and solutions from a startup. It is heavily adopted, but it requires a global reach to be effective.

Typically, the model requires:

- Active scouting at global scale (focusing on advanced tech ecosystems) of mature solutions (scaleups)
- Initial testing via POC/pilot for fast deployment, overseen by Innovation (e.g. by “Implementation Managers”)
- Guided involvement of BUs from the definition phase of challenges/needs, overseen by Innovation Managers
- Activating a legal/procurement fast-track for startup onboarding (since the POC phase)

The Venture Client model allows for a fast adoption of mature innovative solutions (scaleups), increases the reputation of the corporate's innovation unit, and stimulates positive competition among BUs. Typically (Mind the Bridge, 2021), the Venture Client model requires a long list of scouting prospects (1,000-5,000 per year). A subset of these (about 1%) might enter into pilot phase and if successful, move into commercial agreements for full-scale deployment (procurement).

### ***Startup Investment & CVCs***

Corporate innovation leaders typically invest in startups through dedicated vehicles (Corporate Venture Funds — CVCs), though with different implementation techniques, ranging from close funds to evergreen off-balance sheet approaches. Some invest indirectly, by participating as Limited Partners (LPs) into third-party funds, though in those scenarios hit rates are reportedly low. Corporate Venture Capital (CVC) funds are corporate investment vehicles typically with both strategic and financial objectives.

### ***Startup M&A***

In the case of a strong strategic fit, corporates may complete their innovation journey with a startup acquisition. Typically, apart from global tech leaders, established corporates are not particularly active on the Startup M&A front (Mind the Bridge, 2021). The ones that engage in startup acquisitions do so eventually (less than three acquisitions per year).

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# Mind the Bridge

## ABOUT MIND THE BRIDGE

Mind the Bridge is a global open innovation platform, providing services and products to corporates and local startup ecosystems. Headquartered in Silicon Valley with offices in Barcelona, Seoul, Tel Aviv, New York and Milan, it has been working as an international bridge at the intersection between startups and corporates since 2007.

Mind the Bridge scouts, filters, and works with 10,000+ startups a year supporting global corporations with open innovation initiatives that translate into curated deals with startups (POCs, procurement, investments, and/or acquisitions). It also provides corporates with advisory services and benchmarking on innovation strategies and structures.

Mind the Bridge developed MTB Ecosystem, an AI-powered open innovation matching platform for innovation ecosystem hubs and corporates.

Mind the Bridge, in collaboration with the International Chamber of Commerce, annually hosts the 'Corporate Startup Stars' awards, recognizing the most startup-friendly global corporates, and the 'Startup Ecosystem Stars,' which highlights public and private organizations - at municipal, regional, national, and transnational levels - that support innovation within their ecosystems.

For more info:

<http://mindthebridge.com> | [@mindthebridge](https://twitter.com/mindthebridge)