Managing Innovation and R&D

Abstract:
Many seasoned and successful leaders have tried to extend their past non-R&D management modus operandi to research teams and end up suppressing creativity and alienating their best talents. The usual management concepts do not apply to R&D environments and professionals. "Organizations were created to deal with the lowest common denominator," says Tom Duening, a professor of management at the University of Houston and co-author of Managing Einsteins: Leading High-Tech Workers in the Digital Age. Super high performers, Duening says, "have been fast-tracked through school, lauded as indispensable, and are constantly in demand. But a company's management structure doesn't account for that." Managing R&D organizations towards high productivity and excellence presents unique problems and unusual challenges. This uniqueness stems from the nature of the work, deliverables, and most importantly the type of people involved in R&D. Depending on the uncharted depth of the subject and loftiness of the aim, the work can involve considerable uncertainty in timing and significance of the output over a specific time duration. Uncertainty is an integral element of research resulting in a unique quality in the venture. And researchers and innovators are often very unique individuals as well. They are usually highly intelligent individuals, mostly with postgraduate backgrounds. Throughout their education they have been expected to demonstrate individual excellence and deliver independent creativity. This process has resulted in individuals with different social skills, and often seemingly difficult or "peculiar" behaviors. The unique nature of the work and unusual characteristics of the work force, therefore, demand unique management skills for success. "Managing an R&D organization is essentially the art of integrating the efforts of diverse, creative, intelligent, and autonomous individuals," Says Ravi, K Jain, Dean School of Engineering at the university of the Stocktonand co-author of Managing R&D and Innovation: Managing the Unmanageable.