Innovation leadership involves synthesizing different leadership styles in organizations to influence employees to produce creative ideas, products, services and solutions. Every organization has unique processes and cultures to support innovation, but often there are best practices that can be drawn from models in other industries.

NetApp, a developer of innovative data storage solutions, is one best practice leader who leverages an operational philosophy and culture built on shared core values: Trust and Integrity, Leadership, Simplicity, Adaptability, Teamwork and Synergy, Go Beyond, Get Things Done. NetApp, founded on innovation, continues to explore new ways to extend the creativity and success of their engineers and reached out to NC State to create a consortium for business innovation.

Beginning in 2012, NetApp piloted two innovation leadership programs, consisting of a 2 module, 4 day project-based design that improved participants’ analytic skills and ability to manage innovation. The first module focused on understanding customer needs, internal innovation processes, and how to build a business case for funding. Participant teams worked on specific organizational projects linked to organizational initiatives, and presented business plans to begin the second module. Using the business plan as a focus, the second module helped participants learn how to influence others, manage change, and lead teams in the execution of the plan. NC State coaches and NetApp leaders worked with the teams to develop their plans, and roll out the execution.

NetApp is excited in 2014 to welcome new partners to the consortium, to share best practices and learn from each other how to build effective innovation processes and develop innovation leaders.