

There is no doubt that successful innovation begins and ends with people. While I would have agreed with this statement before embarking on my journey in the class *The Management of Innovation*, I would have greatly failed to grasp the extent to which it holds and the specific reasons why. From the concepts of leadership, ownership, and change agents highlighted by Isaksen and Tidd (2006), to the management of innovation principles discussing leadership and innovation networks proposed by Davila, Epstein, and Shelton (2005), my eyes have been opened to the fact that successful innovation depends on every single individual within an organization, in addition to others from external sources. Ultimately my future actions within any position and within any business have been forever altered, having learned that no matter what one's position is within an organization, there is a role to play to enhance innovation success.

For me, the first indications that successful innovation required the work of all individuals rather than an important few came from discussing leadership in class. While the study of leadership and management originally focused on key individuals, such as the one, two, or multi dimensional approaches discussed by Isaksen and Tidd (2006), more contemporary approaches have altered course to increasingly recognize the role of all individuals within the organization. Consider for example the work of Kouzes and Posner (1995; as cited in Isaksen and Tidd, 2006) who have "broadened the conception of leadership from being about a select few at the top of the organizational hierarchy, to being everyone's business" (p. 131) with their five leadership practices that anyone within an organization can enlist. Likewise, Greenleaf (1973; as cited in Isaksen and Tidd, 2006) asserts that "true creative leadership emerges from those whose primary motivation is a desire to help others" (p. 133). Evidently, one must not possess any particular position to adopt or practice servant leadership.

While the above leadership theories have progressively expanded to include all organizational members, the importance of strong leadership in the more traditional sense - from upper level management, must not be underestimated. As Davila, Epstein, and Shelton (2005) assert, innovation management depends on effective leadership from the top, as executives must put theory into action and demonstrate commitment by following through with action. Ultimately, upper level leaders influence successful innovation by defining the innovation strategy, designing innovation portfolios, encouraging value capture, and creating an organization that promotes product, business, and management model innovation (Davila, Epstein, and Shelton, 2005). Considering leadership, I ultimately recognize the extreme importance of senior management to facilitate innovation, yet I also appreciate that all individuals, irregardless of position within an organization, may engage in leadership activities to further enhance innovation success.

Aside from leadership, the concept of ownership as discussed by Isaksen and Tidd (2006) also highlighted for me how individuals throughout the organization may enhance innovation success by providing new ideas and motivations for change. Ownership refers to having “a sufficient degree of interest, influence and imagination for a particular task,” (Isaksen and Tidd, 2006, p. 139) all of which are necessary to create change initiatives and support the management of change. While influence must be present, it refers to having an appropriate amount of authority, responsibility and accountability to claim ownership of the task (Isaksen and Tidd, 2006), which does not necessarily imply one must be in a senior management position. For example, Katzenbach and his colleagues (1995; as cited in Isaksen and Tidd, 2006) promote the goal to “push ownership and enliven sponsorship throughout the organization rather than waiting for permission from those at the top” (p. 140). While Isaksen and Tidd also echo the arguments of Davila, Epstein, and Shelton (2005) in that top management must “translate the concept into reality by finding mechanisms that demonstrate and reinforce the sense of management involvement, commitment, enthusiasm and support” (p. 141), it must be clear that this is not necessarily the same as

being the active change agent. Isaksen and Tidd also emphasized that innovation can happen despite senior management due to guerrilla tactics and offer the switch of IBM into a leading IT firm as an example. This fact is congruent with the interactive model of innovation, which proposes that innovation actually consists of knowledge transfer over complex communication paths spanning various business functions (Trott, 2005), again demonstrating that everyone is involved in the innovation process. Integrating these findings, it is clear to me that all individuals may influence innovation levels by providing ownership, sponsorship, or acting as change agent, and by being involved in the complex communication networks that facilitate innovation.

The sixth innovation rule offered by Davila, Epstein, and Shelton (2005) further emphasizes the notion that innovation is based on information transfer between organizational citizens, but also takes the interactive model a step further as they assert that networks must exist both inside and outside the organization with suppliers and customers to create innovation hubs. It is strongly emphasized in this principle that single individuals are not the building blocks for innovation, but rather the collections of people that transcend organizational boundaries. This assertion further expanded my understanding that innovation is not the concern of a select few, but must involve all.

Moving forward in my career, there are no absolute certainties. Despite this, I now continue my business travels recognizing that no matter what my future job positions may be, I will have the opportunity to influence and enhance innovation within my organization. If in a senior management or other leadership position, I will act with accordance with the first innovation principle. If not, I will still embrace the leadership activities initially discussed, recognizing that leadership does not need to rest with a select few. In addition, I will do my part to create and foster innovation within the various networks that I will indubitably be intertwined with, and embrace ownership and sponsorship as appropriate. Innovation will be my business, and I will have a role to play.

References

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