

## Chapter 4

# Leveraging Communities for Sustainable Innovation: A Commentary

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### ABSTRACT

*The concept of using future innovation to achieve “right to market” (R2M) (Koudal & Coleman, 2005) is the focus of this paper. This paper discusses the relationship between entrepreneurship and innovation and posits that they form a system where innovation is optimised when these capabilities are closely linked. The authors contend that innovation activities are best ‘managed’ by an organization’s entrepreneur(s) and that part of this role is to identify Innovation Champions and facilitate their innovation-related activities. The authors also explore the social and community interaction necessary for innovation to flourish and explain the role of entrepreneurs in forming Communities of Innovation (CoInv) based on innovation champions and their networks. This paper argues that CoInv are essential to ensure that each separate innovation has commercial potential and is operationally accepted with support diffused throughout the organisation. The authors demonstrate these assertions through a case discussion and conclude with some final comments on the future of this research.*

### INTRODUCTION

The concept of using future innovation to achieve “right to market” (R2M) (Koudal & Coleman, 2005) is the main focus of this paper. R2M is defined as introducing the right products at the

right time in the right markets with the right supply chain, and then continually updating, optimising, and retiring them as necessary. This paper fills a gap in the innovation literature by contributing broad-based critical theoretical and practical insights for an organization attempting to successfully solve the challenging problems

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associated with implementing successful R2M initiatives in newly emerging global contexts (Friedman, 2000).

Current literature has largely overlooked that entrepreneurship and innovation form a system such that maximum business benefit is derived by optimising interaction between these drivers, especially when market opportunities are extremely transitory and fraught with risk. Previous papers have concentrated almost exclusively on entrepreneurial networking with extra- rather than intra-organizational partners; on isolated innovative processes; and on broad cultural contexts. This paper highlights the essential function that corporate entrepreneurs and innovators must play together to ensure that each separate innovation not only has commercial potential but is operationally accepted with support diffused throughout the organisation.

We assert that in the entrepreneur-innovation system it is the corporate entrepreneur's role to promote and manage innovation processes based not only on the entrepreneur's acute commercial understandings and intuitive market sensitivities, but also on an appreciation of the social learning and knowledge sharing that is a feature of a vibrant innovation environment. We therefore posit that two critical features of the proposed entrepreneur's role are the identification of 'innovation champions' (Glynn, 1996; Howell, 2005) and their influence networks, and the facilitation of all manner of innovative capability through the guidance, the support, and the development of a type of CoP that we term Communities of Innovation (CoInv).

Based on the literature innovation champions we show are unique people with singular innovation-related potential who need not only procedural and resource support to ensure their idiosyncratic experience-based social learning and knowledge sharing, but also the social and cognitive support that is provided through the social activity and Human Capital exploration that takes place via CoInv. Providing the guid-

ance, the support, and the development of these CoInv must all be situated within the mandate of an organization's entrepreneur(s) - these activities will be even more critical to successful R2M in today's increasingly dynamic and complex globalised markets (Friedman, 2000).

The insights provided in this paper will enable an organization to plan and adopt a systemic broad-based R2M strategy and implementation, robust with respect to emerging globalisation complexities, and strongly grounded in sound theoretical ideas that ensure its innovations now and in the future are focused, agile, timely, and R2M significant.

The paper is structured as follows: firstly we discuss Entrepreneurship and Innovation followed by a discussion of Innovation Champions; we then look at the role of Innovation and communities especially Communities of Innovation; we then consider how to identify Innovation Champions and demonstrate this method through a Case discussion, concluding with some final comments on the future of this research.

## **Entrepreneurship and Innovation**

Koudal and Coleman (2005) have studied the growth strategies and supporting operations of nearly 650 companies around the world. They conclude that although innovation may be difficult, without it companies will eventually languish and fail. *Although in every* industry, the leading companies are innovators, the lauded exemplars keep changing (Muller, Valikangas, & Merlyn, 2005; Peters & Waterman, 1982) and such high turnover suggests that the underlying problem isn't so much one of innovation as one of *sustained* innovation. Indeed a number of authors (Thornbery, 2001; Zahra, 1995; Pinchot, 1985) have noted that without the presence of some form of entrepreneurial activity to exploit opportunities as they arise, innovation remains little more than a short-term aspiration, rather than a sustainable tangible one.

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