

Chapter 26

A Benchmarking Study on Organizational Creativity Practices in High Technology Industries¹

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this chapter is to provide a benchmarking list of initiatives that deal with the development of corporate or organizational creativity and innovation in the emerging sectors of bio-technology, nano-technologies, information and communication technologies, and eco-innovation, together with companies of other sectors, perceived as good examples of organizational innovation.

Twenty two interviews were conducted with top management in these organizations. The interviews were made by telephone addressing specific strategies in three domains: creative management, creative people management, and creativity management. Results indicate that high technology organizations, dependent upon financial support, do not seem to concentrate on corporate innovation, and do not have alternatives to budget reductions made in R&D, due to the present financial crisis, in order to innovate. The remaining companies provided several suggestions as to the way corporate innovation systems can be built and sustained within the framework of the future European innovation policies, devoted to workforce development, the service sector and the SMEs.

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INTRODUCTION

The idea for this chapter followed a report from a contract with the *Gers Chamber of Commerce*, as partner of the European project (Interreg IV B SUDOE) “CREA BUSINESS IDEA,” linked to the belief that high technology institutions, in specialized countries or regions, researching for sophisticated products, were likely to have sound policies and practices in order to lure and incentivise the best talent to produce the best products.

Thus, the initial objective of this study was to produce a list of organizational creativity best practices, drawn from the above examples, and to identify the required skills to adapt these best practices to the existing SMEs. This was done, firstly, by analysing current practices of organizations, from the technology and emerging sectors of bio-technology and bio-medicine, nano-technologies, information and communication technologies, eco-innovation, and the Irish “soft landing” policy.

As the interviews progressed, this perspective proved to be wrong, as it became clear that leading (with respect to technology) industries, laboratories and universities were highly dependent upon R&D financing and did not possess alternatives to the lack of funding, due to the present crisis, and the subsequent reduction of state and private support to research. These industries, especially those supported by public funds, did not seem to be able to develop practices of corporate innovation, so that we could learn from them. We, then, decided to take the benchmarking study to companies that had been recommended as good examples of corporate creativity and innovation, no matter the sector in which they operated.

The suggestions were made by experienced consultants and academics related with EACI – European Association for Creativity and Innovation - with whom we are connected through the association we represent. Thus, the objective remained connected to corporate creativity benchmarking but aimed at corporate good examples, irrespectively of the sector or activity in which companies operated.

The striking example was the way Ireland changed its “soft landing” policy of providing financial support to attract talented people to work in Ireland, into a policy aimed at a workforce development orientation, taking advantage of the existing personnel. This example also made us turn to the analysis of the European politics of innovation, as its development was closely linked with our research.

THE EU APPROACH TO INNOVATION

Innovative performance and evaluation are extensively reported in various EU and other institutional documents, which provide several analyses of international examples (e.g. *Étude sur les bonnes pratiques de dix pôles de compétitivité étrangers*, from DGCIS, 2009; *Assessing Community innovation policies in the period 2005-2009*, from EU Commission, 2009; *Les clusters américains*, from DGE, 2008; *Best practices in innovation policies*, from Tekes Institute, 2005; *European innovation scoreboard, 2009*, from EU Commission, 2010).

The 3rd edition of the Oslo Manual has included considerations about other types of innovation besides product and process, namely marketing and organizational innovation. Nevertheless this last definition (*the implementation of a new organizational method in the organization’s business practices, workplace organization or external relations*) is still far from allowing a quantitative analysis of data, thus making it difficult to gain further insights leading to improved success rates. One of the reasons seems to be the wide spectrum of what might be designated as an example of “organizational innovation.” Also, creativity appears connected with arts or creative industries, namely with design, or other indexes, as in the works of researchers like Richard Florida (Florida & Tinagli, 2004) the quality of the educational system, the desire of people to express themselves (artistically), or the openness of a society towards

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