

Chapter 4

Innovation Implementation: The Critical Facets

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ABSTRACT

Due to rapid evolution of technology, innovations are vital to most organizations (Choi & Chan, 2009, p. 245). Nevertheless, the results of innovations are in many cases not satisfying. Several studies have shown that an organization's failure to benefit from an adopted innovation can often be attributed to a deficient implementation process rather than to the innovation itself. Thus, the implementation process is a critical interface between the decision to adopt and the routine usage of an innovation. Ways and methods to implement innovation effectively have been under scholarship for some time now. Despite the number of studies which identify multiple causes of unsuccessful implementation processes, literature is lacking regarding the strategic facets of innovation implementation. Building on the derived knowledge of the underlying dynamics of innovation processes, through grounded theory and in-depth literature review, the present study aims to contribute to existing implementation literature by examining the strategic facets of innovation implementation.

INTRODUCTION

Due to rapid evolution of technology, innovations are vital to most organizations (Choi and Chan, 2009, p. 245). In addition, a growing number of customers are expecting organizations to act ecologically and socially responsible. Those circumstances force enterprises to adopt and implement innovations even beyond their core businesses. Nevertheless, the results of innovations such as improvements in efficiency due to total quality management, statistical process control, and manufacturing resource planning are in many cases not satisfying (Klein, Conn, and Sorra, 2001, p. 811). Several studies have shown that an organization's failure to benefit from an adopted innovation can often be attributed to a deficient implementation process rather than to the innovation itself (Klein & Sorra, 1996, p. 1055; Aiman-Smith & Green 2002, p. 421; Gary, 2005, p. 644; Karimi, Somers, & Bhattacharjee, 2007, p. 123). The implementation process, as the critical interface between the decision to adopt and the routine usage of an innovation

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(Klein & Sorra, 1996, p. 1057), has received increasing attention by scholars. The degree of implementation success is considered a better indicator for innovation quality than the degree of adoption success due to the fact that not all adopted innovations get ultimately implemented (Karimi et al., 2007, p. 103). Despite the growing number of studies which identify multiple causes of unsuccessful implementation processes, literature is lacking multidimensional models that explain the difference between successful and unsuccessful implementation efforts. Such models should take into account multiple and to some extent interrelated drivers of implementation success (Dean Jr. & Bowen, 1994, p. 393; Klein & Sorra, 1996, p. 1056; Klein et al., 2001, p. 811; Repenning, 2002, p. 110). In addition, Choi and Chan (2009, p. 245) point out that existing implementation studies tend to focus either on employee-related aspects, mostly on an individual level, or on organizational aspects such as management support, structure, and resources of the implementing organization. By combining these two approaches, Choi and Chan (2009, p. 251) show that management support significantly improves the implementation effectiveness as well as the innovation effectiveness by strengthening the collective innovation confidence and the collective innovation acceptance of employees.

The present study aims to contribute to existing implementation literature by examining the strategic facets of innovation implementation. In contrast to Choi and Chan (2009), this study does not focus on the strength of causal relationships between factors of influence and implementation success. Instead, the strategic facets within the organizations, which affect implementation success over time, are of particular interest.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In defining innovation, there is a need to distinguish the subtle difference between an “invention” and “innovation.” According to Merriam-Webster On-Line Dictionary, invention is “a device, contrivance, or process originated after study and experiment”.¹ However, the same source defines innovation as “the *introduction* (emphasis is ours) of something new, a new idea, method, or device.” Schumpeter (1996, p. 81-86) describes innovation as a process of creative destruction which is continuously revolutionizing macro level markets and structures. The widespread sub-categorization of the innovation process into the consecutive phases of invention, innovation, as well as diffusion and imitation can also be attributed to Schumpeter (1939, p. 84-102; Milling and Maier, 1996, p. 17). The invention phase is characterized by the discovery of a previously unknown solution to a problem. In form of an innovation, the invention is economically used for the first time during the innovation phase. In the subsequent diffusion and imitation phase, the innovation spreads through the market, thereby increasingly realizing the potential technological progress (Milling & Maier, 1996, p. 17-18).

On a micro level, innovations diffuse between actors of a social system or an organization through an existing or emerging set of relationships (Allen, 1977, p. 234-265; Roger, 2003, p. 5). Rogers (2003, p. 5-6) defines *diffusion* in the standard work *Diffusion of Innovations* as a process by which information is exchanged over certain communication channels between members of a social system. He differentiates between the five stages *knowledge*, *persuasion*, *decision*, *implementation*, and *confirmation*. The *knowledge stage* is initiated by the first encounter with the innovation and ends after a general understanding of the innovation has been acquired. In the following *persuasion stage*, an affirmative or negative attitude towards the innovation emerges. Next, *decision stage*, the innovation is at least partially tested before it is decided whether the innovation will be adopted or disregarded. In case of a positive adoption

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