A Short Course on Innovation

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An innovation is a departure from existing practices or technologies and represents a significant breakthrough from the state of the art of a specific activity at the time it appears. Innovation ranges from minor variations in current practices to radical departures that call for major organizational reorientations.

One thing is clear: innovation is never about recycling ventures.

Innovations within organizations are not random. They occur in relation to the past and present conditions of the organization. At least, three forms of innovations can take place in organizations:

1. Programmed innovation as the one that is planned through product or service research and development.
2. Non-programmed innovations as when there is slack or reserve of resources in the organization, and they are used for innovation purpose.
3. Distress innovation as the case when it is forced within the organization, such as when crisis is perceived and new actions are taken.

The point is that innovations can be developed within organizations or be imposed upon it by market forces.

The characteristics of innovation itself are of critical importance in determining whether or not this of effort will be adopted in a sustained manner.

In the classical research piece (which I used as a text book with my graduate students in the courses of organization theory), Innovations and Organizations, Zaltman, Duncan, and Halbek established that the following characteristics of innovations make it more or less attractive and thus more or less likely to be utilized by organizations.

1. Cost factors of innovation involve two elements, the economic and the social. Economic cost includes the initial cost of adopting an

innovation or a new program and the continuing costs of keeping it in operation. Social costs involve changed status arrangements within the organization as individuals and groups gain or lose power because of the new developments. Either type of cost is likely to be viewed as exorbitant by opponents and minimized by the proponents of the proposed change.

2. Innovations will be selected for their yield high returns on investments. The situation is much more difficult when an innovation or a technological policy is in the non-business sector…
3. The most efficient innovation will be selected over the less efficient status quo situation or alternative innovation.
4. The less the risk and uncertainty, the greater the likelihood of adopting on innovation.
5. The clarity of the results is associated with the like hood of innovation.
6. The more the compatible the innovation with the existing culture, the more quick and likely it is to be adopted. This implies that organizations are conservative in their innovations and technological policies since anything that's not compatible is likely to be radical for the status quo.
7. More complex innovations are more difficult or less likely to be adopted. This is stain toward conservatism.
8. If an innovation is perceived to have sound scientific status, it is more likely to be adopted.
9. The greater the advantage to be achieved, the more likely that the innovation will be adopted.
10. Innovations are more likely to be adopted if they originate within the organization (and if they start at the top). This is based on the perceived credibility of the source of innovation.
11. The timing of the innovation is critical. In some cases, an innovation is worthwhile only if it is adopted in a particular time or in a particular sequence in the organization's operations.
12. The decision to innovate is related to the reversible possibilities and whether the innovation or the technological project is divisible in parts or segments.
13. Organizational commitment for innovation is fundamental. This involves the correct behaviors and attitudes toward these change efforts. The higher the lever of commitment with the innovation effort, the more successful the venture.

14. If an innovation project or a technological policy is destructive to interpersonal relationships, it is likely to be adopted or it will be more difficult to implement.
15. If an innovation is likely to affect a large part of the public, it will involve a larger decision-making body than the one that is limited to a small group. The larger the scale of the decision-making body, the more complex will be the process of adoption.
16. The larger the number of steps of approval an innovation must pass through, the more difficult the adoption.
17. If innovation itself can be modified as conditions or the technology changes, it stands more chance of adoption.
18. The adoption of one innovation will increase the organizational capacity to engage in other ventures.
19. The more knowledgeable the human resources of the organization are, the more receptive they will be to innovations and technological ventures.
20. The less radical innovations are the ones most likely to be easily or quickly adopted.

Innovations do not come with automatic adoption instructions. Innovation characteristics interact with the organizational characteristics within very concrete market forces.

In short, organizations have varying potential for change and innovation, and these processes flow better if this kind of work is wisely facilitated…and design…

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