

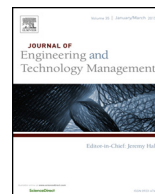


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Exploring the relationship between flagship platform projects and intrapreneurial self-renewal activities: Managing intrapreneurial equivocality

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the relationship between flagship projects and intrapreneurial self-renewal activities in an explorative, in-depth case study of the concept phase in a multi-project setting. Five renewal processes (design management, project control, system engineering, time management, and decision making) stood out in the study; each of which had an impact on organizational performance. These five processes were of an equivocal character and should be seen as entrepreneurial because they influenced organizational performance. In line with previous literature, it is proposed that, in general, any type of business project would infuse intrapreneurial activities; however, flagship projects in particular increase the level of intrapreneurial equivocality and infuse *parallel* and *collective* development of intrapreneurial activities because such projects call for significant organizational self-renewal. Our particular contribution is that we define and introduce the concept of intrapreneurial equivocality.

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1. Introduction

Drucker (1954/1986, p. 37) has asserted that there “is only one valid definition of business purpose: *to create a customer*”. He continued “associated with this purpose are two (and only two) basic functions—marketing and entrepreneurship”. This paper deals with the latter, which now is accepted to better described as intrapreneurship, i.e., entrepreneurship within an organization (Pinchot and Pinchot, 1978). Although rather old, Drucker’s idea remains the same—in order to survive, companies must find a way to renew themselves. Underlying and surrounding this concept is the idea of “intrapreneurial equivocality”. That is, intrapreneurship tends to be related to something the organization has not experienced before. Consequently, management is not certain about what questions to ask about developments and if a question is posed, the situation is ill defined to the point where a clear answer is not forthcoming. Put another way, asking a yes/no question is not feasible—the definition of equivocality (OrgCon, 2008).

Clearly the situation of being able to manage new complex situations is important since organizations tend to experience breakdowns in strategic development work (Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013). A key challenge for organizations seeking to improve the management of innovation lies in determining when to lend direct managerial support (and how much support)

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to those championing such projects (Kelley and Lee, 2010). In this paper intrapreneurs in new product development projects are the focus for the study. In particular, the approach a specific firm has made to renew itself through an intrapreneurship approach in a flagship project (cf. Damodaran et al., 1999) is examined. A central point of view is that intrapreneurs take ownership (Seshadri and Tripathy, 2006) and that “Intrapreneurs are not necessarily idea-generators, but have the capacity to turn ideas into significant results to stimulate innovation and foster growth in organizations. They can be found in all levels of organizational hierarchies and in all segments of business, and they have a sense of ownership” (Sinha and Srivastava, 2013, p. 98).

The paper thus relates to the general research question:

How do large organizations perform intrapreneurial self-renewal activities?

Specifically, the purpose of the paper is to identify approaches taken to reduce equivocality in an organization project, characterized as basic to survival, i.e., “flagship” in nature. Progress in this case involved infusing *parallel* and *collective* developments, which called for significant organizational self-renewal. The need to understand the role of team-based intrapreneurship and the concept of intrapreneurial equivocality is also covered. The paper has a basis in management of radical innovations (Kelley and Lee, 2010; Kelley et al., 2011; O’Connor, 2008; O’Connor and McDermott, 2004). In particular, it contributes to intrapreneurial theory as previously presented by Brunåker and Kurvinen (2006), Antoncic and Hisrich (2003), Dovey (2009) and Börjesson et al. (2014) who emphasized the need to understand the role of daily activities in organizational change. In particular, the paper contributes to intrapreneurial theory by linking to project literature (e.g. flagship projects), elaborating the need for team-based intrapreneurial activities, and emphasizing the importance of developing internal service processes.

2. Theoretical framework

The concept of intrapreneurship is grounded in the terminology of entrepreneurship (Marcus and Zimmerer, 2003), and intrapreneurship research has been developed through three interrelated research areas. Thus, this study draws on literature related to intrapreneurship, corporate entrepreneurship and corporate venturing (cf. Felício et al., 2012; Antoncic and Hisrich, 2003), and focuses on contributing to studies of large firms (cf. Schollhammer, 1981, 1982; Burgelman, 1985; Kanter, 1984; Pinchot, 1985; Rule and Irwin, 1988; McKinney and McKinney, 1989; Guth and Ginsberg, 1990; Zahra, 1991). The concept of course has a basis in management of radical innovations (Kelley and Lee, 2010; Kelley et al., 2011; O’Connor, 2008; O’Connor and McDermott, 2004). Finally, this paper concerns the situation of equivocality as it relates to intrapreneurship, which suggests that the observations of Kaplan and Orlikowski (2013) on past-present-future and temporal work are important.

In this section we define intrapreneurship, discuss intrapreneurship in large firms, and illustrate the progress of self-renewal studies. We end by coining and defining the term “intrapreneurial equivocality” and flagship projects.

2.1. Intrapreneurship

Over the years there have been various definitions of intrapreneurship. The original concept is commonly traced to Pinchot and Pinchot (1978), i.e., who emphasized the need for organizations to allow for entrepreneurial behavior within the organizations. Sharma and Chrisman (1999, p. 18) defined intrapreneurship as “the process whereby an individual or a group of individuals, in association with an existing organization, create a new organization or instigate renewal or innovation within that organization”. Other researchers have emphasized the role of the team in such intrapreneurial activities, i.e., “Intrapreneurship is organizational entrepreneurship, in which teams of employees band to develop new technology and produce new products. It appears to combine the individualistic trait of being able to work independently to generate create ideas with the collectivistic ability to collaborate in teams (in-groups) for new product development” (Abraham, 1997, p. 179).

More contemporary researchers tend to emphasize the importance of novelty, i.e., “intrapreneurship” is defined as entrepreneurship within an existing organization, referring to emergent behavioral intention and behavior of an organization as related to departure from the customary (Antoncic and Hisrich, 2003, p. 9). This paper concerns the situation of equivocality. Put another way, departing from the ordinary typically means infusing equivocality in the organization. Consequently, this paper draws on the intrapreneurship definition made by Antoncic and Hisrich (2003).

2.2. Corporate entrepreneurship (intrapreneurship) in large firms

Corporate entrepreneurship (intrapreneurial activity) is vital for organizational survival (Felício et al., 2012; Conceição et al., 2002). Li and Gammelgaard (2014) note that corporate entrepreneurship should not be confused with the concept of “entrepreneurship”, which relates to the creation of new firms. Corporate entrepreneurship is associated with opportunistic activities in *established* firms. Such activities are performed by both shop floor workers and managers who initiate organizational change in daily activities (Börjesson et al., 2014; Brunåker and Kurvinen, 2006; Antoncic and Hisrich, 2003; Dovey, 2009), and demand interplay between the organization and the intrapreneurs (Russell, 1999). Further, intrapreneurship can be a vital element in organizational development since intrapreneurship has a beneficial effect on revitalization and performance of large firms (Schollhammer, 1981, 1982; Burgelman, 1985; Kanter, 1984; Pinchot, 1985;

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