Fostering Sustainable Innovation Within Organizations

Peter Vogel and Ursula Fischler-Strasak

1 Introduction

Over the past years many corporate business leaders have started to shift their strategy from a pure profit seeking one towards a balance in simultaneously striving to achieve economic, environmental and social goals (Elkington 1998; Preuss 2007; Roth 2009). As a result, challenges on the sustainability agenda have emerged as a new source of opportunities for innovation and competitive advantage (Fichter 2006; Hockerts 2008; Hansen et al. 2009). Research has shown that entrepreneurs are the main drivers of innovation, economic growth and social change (Audretsch 2002); hence, organizations try to adopt entrepreneurial approaches in order to spur their own innovativeness (Hamel 1999; Ireland et al. 2009). However, as recent publications have discussed, the promotion of entrepreneurship is a difficult and multifaceted issue requiring the consideration of dynamic processes describing the interplay of multiple external factors, local conditions and the individual innovators (Isenberg 2010; Krueger 2012; Vogel 2013). These difficulties are particularly distinct when discussing sustainable innovation, as risk-related reluctance in instigating this kind of innovation can still be observed among corporate leaders (Hall 2002). If established companies plan to take part in creating tomorrow's economy, it will be necessary for them to challenge prevailing assumptions about innovation processes (Hamel 1999). The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the main success factors of entrepreneurial ecosystems and discuss ways how to assimilate these in an organizational context.

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2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems as a Basis for Innovation

The economic and societal perspectives on entrepreneurship have drastically changed over the last half-century. While today there exists the widely accepted view that entrepreneurship is one of the major drivers of the global economy, social well-being, job creation, economic competitiveness and innovation (Audretsch 2002; Thurik and Wennekers 2004; ManpowerGroup 2012), this was not as clear in the past when it was the common belief that the large corporations and not startups were the sole creators of economic progress (Schumpeter 1942, p. 106).

Historically, the individual entrepreneur was the focus of attention of scholars and practitioners. In recent years, however, external factors as well as the interdependencies with the entrepreneurs and the outcomes have received increasing attention (Van de Ven 1993; Isenberg 2010; Krueger 2012; Vogel 2013). Entrepreneurial Ecosystems constitute "an interactive community that is composed of varied and interdependent actors and factors that evolves over time and promotes new venture creation" (Vogel 2013, p. 5). Figure 1 depicts the major components of an entrepreneurial ecosystem including the external environment (also referred to as "habitat"), the local entrepreneurship-specific factors and the individual entrepreneurs that create the new companies.

While this framework visualizes the fundamental elements of an entrepreneurial ecosystem, some other important framework conditions that influence the successful implementation of an entrepreneurial ecosystem should be mentioned.

- *Each ecosystem is unique!* Silicon Valley is consistently referred to as one of the prototype entrepreneurial ecosystem with regards to innovations (Herrmann et al. 2012). It is a unique combination of different factors such as outstanding talents (partly driven by academic institutions such as Stanford), the ample availability of capital and a truly entrepreneurial culture that are "allowed to circulate freely [. . .] and meld into whatever combinations are most likely to generate innovation and wealth" (Hamel 1999, p. 73). In environments like this, work is more than just a job – it is a lifestyle! People fully identify with what they do and they are incentivized to innovate. However, when developing a new entrepreneurial ecosystem it is not advisable to try and merely duplicate ecosystems such as the Silicon Valley as many of the underlying factors are quite different across the globe and cannot be altered easily (e.g., the culture or a country's political system). It is important to first understand a community's strengths and weaknesses in order to develop a strategic roadmap for the successful creation of a truly unique entrepreneurial ecosystem (Vogel 2013).
- *Holistic and supervised implementation!* It is advantageous to focus on the implementation of multiple local ecosystem factors in parallel. Setting up single initiatives (e.g. a training program to foster entrepreneurship) without the other critical elements being in place will most likely not lead to the desired outcome. Furthermore, it is recommended to execute the implementation plan in a coordinated and supervised manner. Ideally, that would mean to have an independent team dedicated to setting up and executing on this strategy (Vogel 2013).

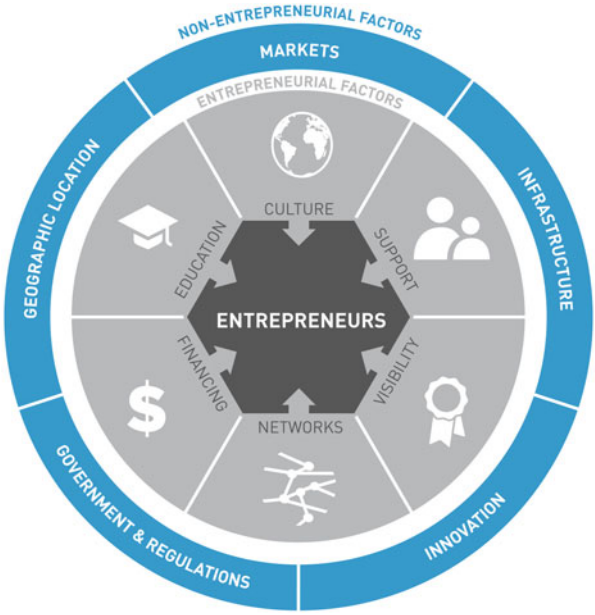

Fig. 1 The entrepreneurial ecosystem (graphic adopted from Vogel 2013)

- *Dynamic bureaucracy!* Bureaucratic processes should not cause stagnation during the creation of an ecosystem. Building an entrepreneurial ecosystem as well as starting up and running a company are equally dynamic and therefore require dynamic and flexible processes (Krueger 2012).
- *Building an entrepreneurial culture!* An entrepreneurial culture is essential to building a successful entrepreneurial ecosystem. Only if entrepreneurship is seen as an attractive career option and entrepreneurs are seen as responsible and respectable individuals, will individuals dare to take the step and become innovators.

In most large organizations, building structures and a culture of innovation is a challenging but not impossible undertaking that requires fundamental conceptual rethinking. Based on the core dimensions of entrepreneurial ecosystems, the following section will discuss recommendations for building environments of innovation in a corporate context.

3 Adopting Entrepreneurial Ecosystems to Foster Innovation Within Existing Organizations

Corporate entrepreneurship is seen as a major mechanism for revitalizing organizations and enhancing firm performance (Antoncic and Hisrich 2001). Hence, organizations are trying to learn how to build a work environment that

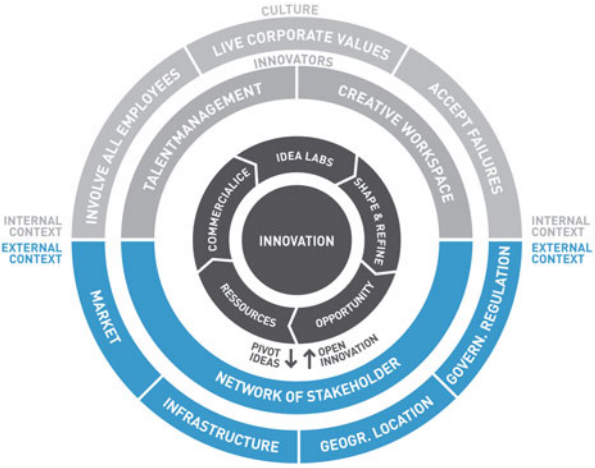

Fig. 2 Intrapreneurial innovation ecosystem

fosters innovation and nurtures the entrepreneurial passion of their employees. Inspired by the previously presented entrepreneurial ecosystem, Fig. 2 depicts the proposed intrapreneurial innovation ecosystem; a dynamic inter-relatedness between the internal- and the external context with the center containing the innovation process to spur organizational innovativeness. This section will discuss the five core dimensions of innovation – namely culture, architecture, communication and collaboration, talent management and financing – and then provide some insights into how corporate leaders can adopt them within their organization to drive innovation.

3.1 A Culture of Innovation

"Most organizations fail at unleashing one of their most valuable resources: human creativity, imagination, and original thinking. They lack a systematic approach to building a culture of innovation" (Linkner 2011). When talking about a culture of innovation, it is important to consider the factors that play a critical role, among them the organizations' value system, visions and norms on the one hand and the employees' mindset, passion and tolerance of failure on the other hand. Three central approaches to building a culture of innovation are discussed: (1) building an honest value system with innovation at the core, (2) furthering a leadership style which involves all employees in the innovation process, and (3) establishing a business culture where failure is broadly accepted and is a central element leading to new product or service development.

3.1.1 Live Honest Company Values

The majority of corporate value systems sound something like "Integrity – Communication – Respect – Excellence". These, however, seldom reflect the true values of the company. For an effective and efficient workplace to evolve, it is important that employees share and identify with the values of the company and feel like their own values are reflected in the corporate culture. Reed Hasting, founder and CEO of Netflix, defined the corporate values of his organization in his globally recognized document called "Netflix Culture: Freedom & Responsibility" (Shontell 2013) where he touches on a large variety of critical elements which comprise a culture of innovation. These include the cultural fit of individual employees, selflessness, rewarding performance as opposed to effort as well as freedom and responsibility for every employee at the core.

When building a value system that ought to nurture innovativeness, it is important to consider that values should reflect the true behavior and skills of the employees and not simply impose corporate values upon the company (Netflix 2009).

3.1.2 Involve All Employees in Idea Generation Processes

Without proactively developing new ideas, the ability to respond to dynamic market pressures, or to envision new products or services, organizations are at risk of losing their competitive position and becoming slow and unresponsive to rapidly changing market demands. One reason why entrepreneurial ecosystems have more vibrant markets for ideas than larger corporations is the absence of "prejudices about who is or is not capable of inventing [new products, services or] new business models" (Hamel 1999, p. 78). Companies often live hierarchies where experience counts far more than imagination. Leadership needs to overcome these obstacles by breaking down barriers and eliminating "arbitrary distinctions between 'suits' and 'creatives'" (Florida and Goodnight 2005, p. 126). It is not rare to see higher success rates of ideas that have been executed in the ranks without support from above (Amabile and Khaire 2008; Hamel 1999).

Involving all employees in the idea generation process will increase the odds of finding the best solutions to existing problems. It also sends the important signal that everyone is on the same team and strives towards the same goal.

3.1.3 Embrace a Culture Which Accepts Failure

During the process of generating new ideas, there is neither place for judgment nor the fear of failing (Brown 2009) as failure is a necessary element of an innovation culture (Hurley and Hult 1998), and "from failure comes learning, iteration, adaptation, and the building of new conceptual and physical models through an iterative learning cycle" (Hess 2012). New ventures typically enter the market with an early version of a product or service (beta version) and adapt it according to customer feedback; this is also true for some disrupting technology-based innovators such as Google, Facebook or Apple. Innovators within larger organizations, however, often need to go through a series of tedious internal approval processes, which aim at eliminating failure. But in the end, it is exactly the dynamic, iterative cycle of shaping and refining ideas that allows for innovative products, services or business models to emerge and shake up industries.

> If organizations want to become more innovative from the inside, they need to build the right culture – a culture that embraces a mentality of "failing fast and failing cheap".

3.2 Architecture for Innovation

"Organizations are designed to promote order and routine; they are inhospitable environments for innovation. Those who don't understand organizational realities are doomed to see their ideas go unrealized" (Levitt 2002, p. 137). Creativity requires an environment that stimulates and encourages new ideas to flourish, organizational processes that are aligned with functional responsibilities (Andriopoulos and Dawson 2009) and an overall organizational strategy in order to systematically take these new ideas to the market. The following thoughts show how an 'architecture for innovation' can facilitate the generation of creative ideas within an organization.

3.2.1 Establish Creative and Fun Workspaces

In the past, a workplace was viewed exclusively as a physical environment for work. However, in today's highly competitive environment this old fashioned perspective is becoming "increasingly unsuited to emerging patterns of work" (GSA 2006, p. 3). It requires exciting workplaces that promote an atmosphere for continuous innovation and creativity. While many organizations have embraced home-office practices over the past years to accommodate their employees' desire

for flexibility, they now start to realize that new and innovative "ideas spring from spontaneous chats between employees in the cafeteria or at the gym. That is [one] reason [why] they provide on-campus perks" (Cain Miller 2013). However, an innovative workplace is not just about a gym, day-care services, free espresso and food, health benefits and nice colorful offices with lots of sticky notes; it is also about meaningful tasks, a collective mindset, a positive mood, honesty and trust, loyalty, effectiveness as the benchmark for success, stunning people as well as a creative, fun and inspirational environment (Vogel 2012b).

"A new breed of workers (the knowledge workers) is emerging to provide the required creativity and innovation" (Schriefer 2005). It requires stunning and fun workplaces to attract these innovators, satisfy their needs and provide incentives to stay with the organization to ensure continuous innovation.

3.2.2 Launch Idea Labs and Flexible Commercialization Processes

Developing new products, services and business models is done best outside of existing business units through dedicated, independent creativity labs, which are strategically located at the edge of the organization, having one foot inside the organization and one foot outside. This is exactly where great ideas are born through the collision with other ideas (Johnson 2010). However, it is essential that these models are aligned with the overall strategy, facilitating the formation of alliances with internal stakeholders, such as the R&D units (Blank 2012). If organizations want to ensure that their idea lab does not fail to bring creative ideas to the market[1], a non-bureaucratic but efficiency-driven development and evaluation process needs to follow the idea lab sessions (Amabile and Khaire 2008).

By leveraging the fact that each individual has a set of ideas at any point in time (Hill and Birkinshaw 2010) organizations can systematically build creative spaces for collaboration that facilitate the recombination of these different 'idea sets' to form novel and innovative ideas.

3.3 Talent Management for Innovation

Managing "true innovators, people who are totally sold out to new ideas and new concepts" (Philipps 2007), is difficult but not impossible. Startups, mostly

[1] (such as the failure of the Qualcomm "Venture Fest" (Dos Santos 2013))

unconsciously and out of necessity, typically have an innovator-friendly approach to recruiting rewarding and retaining their talents. They need to offer them exhilarating work, which gives them intrinsic motivation to innovate, alongside an upside potential, because if they don't, they will most likely turn in their badges and leave (Hamel 1999). In corporate environments, talents are hardly ever utilized to their full potential. In fact, many talents that bring up creative ideas inside larger corporations face managerial responses such as "this is how things are done around here". The following section describes some talent management approaches to spur each employee's innovativeness.

3.3.1 Educate for Creativity and Innovation

"Creativity and innovation are becoming increasingly important for the development of the 21st century knowledge society" (Ferrari et al. 2009, p. iii). While creativity has long been seen as a characteristic of eminent people, a more differentiated perspective has emerged in recent years (Craft et al. 2001) describing certain elements of creativity – those related to attitudes towards finding effective solutions to everyday problems – as being accessible to everyone. With the right training, tools and techniques, every employee, team and organization can learn how to challenge the *status quo* and generate creative ideas (Seelig 2012).

> Individuals can be taught to develop the ability to generate and recombine ideas to address identified challenges.

3.3.2 Facilitate Talent Mobility

Talent drives economic growth and innovativeness. Talent mobility – both inside and outside the organization – is an enabler for organizations to close skill gaps, retain talent, remedy talent shortages as well as move more people to employability and employment (WEF 2012). In fact, if companies do not work on internal talent mobility programs, "highly creative and ambitious people who feel trapped in moribund businesses are going to leave" and never come back (Hamel 1999, p. 83). Corporate leaders need to ask themselves whether they want their employees to leave and create wealth for themselves by creating a spinout; for others by joining a competitor; or if they want them to stay and create wealth for the company by innovating within. Participating in talent mobility programs can be an exciting alternative to switching employers (Vogel 2012a); however, organizations need to "provide incentives for employees to abandon the familiar for the unconventional" (Hamel 1999, p. 83).

Innovation happens at the boundary of organizations. By allowing talents to freely move across departments as well as outside of the organization, business leaders can facilitate the generation of innovative ideas.

3.3.3 Customize Rewards to the Individual

If organizations want to retain their innovative talents, it is critical that these remain motivated at any point in time. A central part of this motivation and pro-entrepreneurial behavior is a well-structured reward system that encourages risk-taking and intrapreneurship (Ireland et al. 2009). However, due to fundamentally different identities that shape motivations and key decisions of entrepreneurs (Fauchart and Gruber 2011), the most effective incentives for intrapreneurs will most likely vary across employees. While some individuals are driven primarily by monetary incentives, others are driven by the purpose they follow or recognition by others. Therefore, some individuals might be incentivized best by receiving shares in the organization or large bonuses whereas other employees are best rewarded by being put on an even more challenging project (Florida and Goodnight 2005; Amabile and Khaire 2008).

If organizations want to maximize the innovativeness of their employees, they need to tailor the reward system to the employee's identity.

3.4 Communication and Collaboration for Innovation

"Open communication of information, ideas and feelings is the lifeblood of innovation" (Wycoff 2004). Yet, many large organizations are stuck in secrecy-driven R&D processes that seldom involve external stakeholders. In recent years, there have been two major trends in the entrepreneurial domain that have changed the way innovation is done: "pivoting" and "open innovation / crowdsourcing". The applicability of these two methods in an organizational context are briefly discussed below.

3.4.1 Pivot Ideas with Stakeholders

Organizations often start off with an idea that they think people want. They spend lots of time and money building a "perfect" product only to fail when they reach out to prospective clients learning about their indifference (Ries 2011). Driven by the

fear of harming the brand, corporations have institutionalized rather rigid processes when preparing a new product or service for entering the market. Many startups, on the contrary, have engaged in "pivoting", a radically new approach to innovation. They generate new ideas and rudimentary products or services, test them quickly and cheaply on the market, shed them if they do not cause the anticipated traction and move on to the next idea.

> Business leaders should encourage the pivoting of ideas with their network of stakeholders in order to effectively select winning ideas without threatening the brand reputation.

3.4.2 Leverage the Network Through Open Innovation

As opposed to the traditional early twentieth century paradigm of closed innovation – meaning that an organization has the entire innovation process under internal control – "open innovation is a paradigm that assumes that firms can and should use external ideas as well as internal ideas" to advance their innovativeness (Chesbrough 2003). In a world where inconceivable amounts of knowledge are widely dispersed, it is impossible for an organization to solely rely on their internal R&D; otherwise, they will lag behind or be overtaken by some small, agile competitor. With regards to the accumulation of innovative ideas, organizations can leverage their existing networks (e.g., clients, research organizations and universities) towards engaging in joint R&D projects and additionally involving the broad public through open innovation competitions (e.g., the Cisco I-Prize). These help to fill knowledge-gaps, solve problems or come up with the next big thing.

> In order to become or remain an innovative trendsetter, organizations could embrace "open innovation" and "crowdsourcing" as modern, inclusive processes of idea generation.

3.5 Marketplace for Capital

While both venture capitalists and CFOs are interested in funding successful projects, they surely do not follow the same approach. While the CFO's goal is to never make an investment that fails to deliver an adequate yield, a venture

capitalist's goal is to have at least one big winner amongst the wide range of projects. Along the same lines, an innovator inside an organization typically has to go through a line of hierarchical decision processes, whereas an external innovator can pitch to multiple investors, ideally have them compete with each other and then select the best offer. The following section will briefly describe how organizations can create an internal innovation-friendly marketplace for capital.

3.5.1 Build Entrepreneurial Processes to Select Winning Opportunities

Unlike in Silicon Valley, where it's rare to find successful start-ups that do not have to pitch their ideas multiple times, organizations are often designed in a way that an innovator has only one opportunity to pitch a new idea and a "no" (possibly due to an incompatibility with balance-sheet-driven KPIs) immediately means the end to it (Hamel 1999). In the case of an entrepreneur this normally looks fundamentally different with a first-stage risk-free evaluation from the 3Fs (family, friends or fools) and subsequent incremental feedback from the market.

> Organizations should embrace both, monetary and non-monetary evaluation criteria to evaluate ideas and simultaneously make multi-channel approaches available for protagonists that seek funding to present their concepts (Hamel 1999).

3.5.2 Balance of M&A Activities with Intrapreneurship

While many companies buy their innovations from external entrepreneurial ventures through expensive M&As (Hess 2012), creating an internal marketplace for capital that is paired with a proper intrapreneurial innovation process would allow tapping into a largely unutilized source of innovation. Yet the internal marketplace for capital needs to be separated from standard budgeting processes in order to offer flexibility at relatively low bureaucratic levels.

> Corporate leaders who want their organization to be innovation leaders should follow a simultaneous approach of M&A as well as funding of intrapreneurial projects.

3.5.3 Create an Internal Crowdfunding Portal

It is common knowledge that both entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs face difficulties in attracting early-stage funding in order to take their ideas to the market (Cassar 2004). In recent years, crowdfunding has rapidly evolved as a viable alternative to more traditional sources of funding such as banks or equity capital. Crowdfunding is a collective monetary effort of individuals, better known as the "crowd", to support projects and ideas initiated by other people or organizations (Belleflamme et al. 2011). Despite its prominence in startup funding, larger corporations are not making use of this novel concept. Innovators within organizations typically have one source of funding for their ideas and if their superiors reject it, their only chances are to either drop the idea, leave the company and join the competition, or build their own business.

> By creating an internal crowdfunding portal that facilitates the inter-departmental funding of ideas, corporations can capture a significant share of the value that is currently being lost.

4 Conclusion

Innovation is a crucial element of sustainable growth (Global Innovation Index 2012) and appears to be largely driven by entrepreneurs (Audretsch 2002), as big companies "are designed to be bad at innovation" (Wessel 2012). In most large organizations, building structures and a culture of innovation is a challenging but not impossible undertaking, requiring fundamental changes. The purpose of this chapter was to share insights into entrepreneurial ecosystems as major sources of innovation and offer some thoughts as to how certain elements from the entrepreneurial world could be translated into a corporate context. It should not be regarded as a case-proven formula for how business leaders could enhance their organization's innovativeness, but rather as a thought stimulus to critically reflect upon interal innovation processes and to courageously adopt one or more ideas from entrepreneurial ecosystems. To stay competitive, organizations must nurture innovativeness in a variety of areas and particularly embrace sustainability as a new source of opportunities. The question that remains is whether organizational leaders want to be part of defining the future or whether they capitulate to dauntless entrepreneurs.

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