

Editorial

The Tourist and the Traveller: Embracing the Paradoxes of Innovation

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Have you ever been a tourist or a traveller? How did you plan that? What experiences did you collect? Ask a tourist and they will tell you that it is all about maximising time and money – see as many things as possible, take a picture and move on. Ask a traveller and they will tell you all about the hidden secrets of the land, how they felt when they met “that person” and how the experience has changed their worldview. So, question for the budding globe trotter is – what would you rather have – efficient quick wins or productive shifts in mindset? Maybe the plan is to have both at the same time and if so, you share similar sentiments to those who are either contemplating or already are on the journey of innovation. Yes, innovation is a journey in which destinations are often temporary. Where, journey is that of collecting knowledge and learning from experiences and destinations are the ‘photo-opportunities’, the time to sharpen up, go-to-market and get smarter. Destinations are temporary as the quest to get to the ‘next best thing’ keeps the senses active. Scholars in innovation call this the circular path of innovation: research-development-commercialisation-feedback-reflection (and repeat).

The latest research on environmental sensitivity suggests that the stronger the ability to perceive and process external stimuli, the more the affinity towards exploration and prosocial behaviour (Pluess, 2015). Paradoxically, being more sensitive to the environment, psychologically results in overstimulation and hence burnout (Homberg, Schubert, Asan & Aron, 2016). As environments become global, competitive and complex, many structural, psychological and strategic processes influence the decisions and behaviour of actors on the journey of innovation. Firstly, the realisation that innovating requires looking beyond economics and second that it is packed full of paradoxes. For instance, quality vs cost, convergence vs divergence, exploration vs exploitation, profit vs social responsibility and control vs freedom, to name a few. These paradoxes are “contradictory yet interrelated elements” (Lewis, 2000, p.760) – value-creating on one hand and value-contracting on the other. The innovation literature has recognised and reviewed several of these as tensions in transaction cost economics or relational exchanges in creativity (for insights see Sheremata, 2000; Smith & Tushman, 2005; Gebert, Boerner & Kearney, 2010). If one is looking for practical examples, look at Xerox for what happens when one does not travel with time,

look at 3M for what happens when one actively looks for social interactions, especially when feeling lost. Notice how by embracing paradoxes IBM rose from the ashes of near bankruptcy and how the Coca-Cola combined the branding vs taste paradox to consistently beat its near rival Pepsi, despite Pepsi's success at taste test challenges.

Lewis (2000) posits that paradoxes are "cognitively and socially constructed" (p.761), grounded in the difference, distance and identity frameworks (DeFillippi, Grabher & Jones, 2007). Pragmatically, they address the issues of feelings, demands, power, interests, perceptions, intentions and behaviour in practice. For example, on one hand it may feel good to discover as many new places as possible but the approach can also constrain integration and learning. On the other hand, staying in one place in search of that enlightening moment means many other opportunities may pass by! Apparently, embracing co-existence of opposing forces when under time pressure has higher probability of success in the endeavour (Sheremata, 2000). So, is that what one should do?

For starters, managers need to recognise the paradoxes in the context of their environment. Extant research suggests they can be broadly categorised into tensions related to boundary, relationships and organising (Jarvenpaa & Wernick, 2011). Here boundary refers to organisational dimension (i.e. inflow vs outflow of knowledge) as well as temporal dimension (i.e. present vs future) (Eisenhardt, 2000). For instance, Jarvenpaa and Wernick (2011) found that in Finland boundary tensions tend to be centred more on the input rather than output. That is to say on one hand innovators are driven by demand and internal value creation while on the other hand institutions such as the European Union promote open innovation, long-term project legitimacy and academic novelty. For managers, this means balancing current resources with future needs and industry-focus with publication potential (Jarvenpaa & Wernick, 2011). The category of relationships refer to the social aspect – who and how of interactions and exchanges in innovation process. This category of paradoxes captures spatial homogeneity vs heterogeneity across ecological, power and identity dimension as well as cognitive cohesiveness vs diversity across knowledge and experience contexts (Antons & Piller, 2015; Dahlander & Gann, 2010). Interestingly, while homogeneity is preferred, more so in terms of past experiences than identity, it also leads to conformity and reduced innovativeness (Jarvenpaa & Wernick, 2011). Cohesion thus can be argued to be better in the later stages of development and commercialisation and diversity in the earlier research stage of innovation. Organising for innovation then is about promoting and managing innovation, with motivated self-presentation and self-determination on one hand and controlled routines on the other (Dougherty, 2006). From a managerial perspective, organising brings about tensions of closed vs open innovation – should we embrace collaborative participation to scan and develop knowledge or should we focus on creating intrinsic economic value through intellectual property protection? While the collaboration may access larger pool of knowledge, it may also compromise competitive advantage in the future.

Important to note is that trying to alienate these tensions in practice or research is counterproductive, for they are inter-related, vary in intensity across innovation stages and are nested within internal and external exchanges (Jarvenpaa & Wernick, 2011). A polarised focus on tensions tends to shift the actor's perspectives away from simultaneity, encouraging the tendency to choose or trade-offs the seemingly opposing

truths (Ford & Backoff, 1988; Jarvenpaa & Wernick, 2011). Falling into the contingency-oriented thinking leads one to believe that there must be a right and a wrong and that they must choose one – the mythical fixed pie (Bazerman, 1998). So when one focuses on resolving the paradoxical tension, they allocate resources to one pole or the other, rather than embracing the power of plurality (Smith & Tushman, 2005). What this editorial is aiming to project is that paradoxes are a norm and it is best to be a tourist and a traveller simultaneously (hope you are still following the analogy!). Activating the plurality of tensions encourages balancing of paradoxes through holistic discovery, diagnosis, selection, reinforcement and self-correcting actions (Lewis, 2000). The latter requiring effective processes of managing cognitive conflicts of past experiences vs future thinking, perceptions vs behaviours, often requiring higher levels of collaboration, coordination and knowledge transfer across actors (Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004; Lubatkin, Simsek, Ling, & Veiga, 2006, also see Bloodgood & Chae, 2010 for transcendence of thinking). When firms embrace paradoxical tensions by moving between poles whilst paying attention to momentum, methods and performance, they enhance their ability to cope (Bloodgood & Chae, 2010). Innovating managers should accept the paradoxes, activate them at appropriate stages and constructively reinforce productive cycles (Poole & Van de Ven, 1989) – beyond transactional agency-thinking and towards integrated intentional rationality. In other words, be a tourist and maximise that photo opportunity but develop an itinerary that allows room to experience the environment beyond the camera's lens. For practitioners, this means embracing the global trends of innovation, but avoiding 'pilotitis' (Khan & Joseph, 2013). It means leveraging the structural foundations of the innovation processes (i.e. routines, hierarchy) in the organisation and simultaneously organising flexible project-based teams and partnerships to turn the 'exotic sand' into a 'practical pearl' (Khan & Joseph, 2013).

It is now well known that innovation starts in the minds of those tasked to bring it to life. This process involves a shift in mindset to reframe, reimagine and reconfigure research, development and commercialisation of products and services. Eventually, individuals, teams and firms often find their own way of dealing with paradoxical dissonance, but it starts with recognition and integration of tensions. A traveller may indeed have to be a tourist at times or else it defeats the entire premise of being a "traveller". It is not triumph or fiasco, rather triumph and fiasco. Managerial focus needs to be on what can be learnt from triumph and fiasco alike. Paradoxically, the less managers chase innovation success, the more likely they are to realise creativity and collaborative growth.

Innovatively Yours,

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Editors

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