

The Future of NPD/Innovation Research

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With innovation becoming even more critical in a time of prolonged economic volatility, there are many issues that likely deserve further research to help organizations improve their innovation capabilities. However, this piece will focus on five topics that I believe warrant an in-depth investigation by academics: service innovation, global innovation, gate reviews, social innovation, and open innovation.

Service Innovation

Roughly 70% of the U.S. economy is service based, yet our research predominantly focuses on products/goods. Also, many offerings today are good/service hybrids, for example, the iPod and iTunes. Yet again, our research neglects to address whether or not what we know about product development and innovation applies readily to services and hybrid offerings. Some questions that need to be answered include:

- How can opportunities in services, good/service hybrids be identified and evaluated?
- What effective practices exist for involving customers and network partners in identifying, creating, and developing services and good/service hybrid innovations?
- What are the successful launch strategies for services and good/service hybrids?
- How can a service firm create a culture of innovation?
- What are the effective strategies and capabilities for corporations moving from a focus on goods to good/service hybrids and service innovation?

Global Innovation

The relationship between national culture and new product development (NPD) is an important area for research; however, it has not been emphasized in the literature (Nakata and Sivakumar, 1996). Current innova-

tion research shows that country effects do exist. But, the majority of this research is based on North American and Western European contexts. It has been argued that in order to develop generalized theories applicable across different nations or cultures, research on innovation and NPD needs to be extended to non-Western contexts (Song, Kawakami, and Stringfellow, 2010; Song and Parry, 1996). With the rise of emerging economies such as Brazil, Russia, India, and China (BRIC nations), there is a need to examine what we know about NPD and innovation and see whether these same principles and best practices work effectively in non-Western and emerging market contexts.

Within the scope of global innovation, recent research has focused on two important issues: reverse innovation and innovation at the bottom-of-the-pyramid (BOP). Though related, these two concepts are different; further examination of both is needed. Several essential questions that need to be resolved include:

- What is the extent of reverse innovation and innovation at the bottom of the pyramid being undertaken by companies? What kinds of companies are undertaking such innovations?
- What are some of the best practice approaches for getting such innovations implemented?
- What is the impact of reverse innovation and innovation at the BOP on firm performance?
- What are the capabilities needed to be successful in these types of strategic innovation approaches?

Gate Reviews

Little research exists on NPD project gate reviews although there have been several useful studies published since 2003. Most recently, Schmidt, Sarangee, and Montoya (2009) provided insight into several important questions on this topic including the number of review points and decision makers, the number of review criteria and proficiency of usage, differences in review practices by innovativeness of the product, and the relationship between review practices and new product performance. Nonetheless, the dearth of research means that little best practice with regard to gate reviews exists. Thus, further research is needed on some fundamental questions:

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- Should gate criteria vary by stage of NPD process?
- Should gate criteria vary by type of innovation (i.e., incremental, really new, radical)?
- Should gate criteria vary for services versus goods versus good/service hybrids? If so, how?
- Should rigorous gate reviews be used for radical innovations? How do gate reviews affect the performance of radical innovations?
- What criteria are best for different types of innovations at each stage of the NPD process?

Social Innovation

Social innovations focus on helping to solve social issues such as health care, natural environment, economy, education, consumer privacy, etc. Interest in social responsibility and activism has increased on college campuses and in communities as evidenced by the dramatic growth experienced by Net Impact, which has 217 student chapters and 57 professional chapters. “Net Impact’s mission is to mobilize a new generation to use their careers to drive transformational change in their workplaces and the world” (<http://netimpact.org/about>).

Given the wide range and seemingly increasing quantity of social problems that exist across the world and the interest of current and future business leaders to develop and implement solutions to these problems, it seems that several elemental questions need exploration:

- How can social innovation opportunities be identified and evaluated?

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Dr. Gloria Barczak is Professor and Chair of the Marketing Group and Director of the Institute for Global Innovation Management in the College of Business Administration at Northeastern University. She has been ranked twice as one of the Top 25 Innovation Management Scholars in the world and was the Robert D. Klein University Lecturer at Northeastern University in 2010. Professor Barczak’s research has been published in a variety of journals including the *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management*, *Industrial Marketing Management*, *Journal of Business Research*, *Research-Technology Management*, and *R&D Management*. She is on the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management*, and *Creativity and Innovation Management*. Professor Barczak is a member of the Product Development & Management Association (PDMA), the American Marketing Association (AMA), and the PDMA Academic Committee. She has served as Co-Chair of the 2011 PDMA Research Forum, Chair of the 2007 PDMA Research Competition, Chair of the 2003 PDMA Research Forum, and Chair of the New Product Development Track at the 2006 AMA Summer Educators’ Conference.

- How much social innovation is being undertaken by organizations, what kind of organizations are the primary drivers of such innovation, and what practices are they using?
- What is the impact of social innovations on firm performance, brand image, etc.? What is the impact of social innovations on the recipients?
- What best practices exist for successful development and implementation of social innovations?
- What are the drivers of/antecedents to social innovation?

Open Innovation

Open innovation “assumes that firms can and should use external ideas as well as internal ideas, and internal and external paths to market, as they look to advance their technology” (Chesbrough, Vanhaverbeke, and West, 2006). Although there are many unanswered questions with regard to open innovation (cf. Chesbrough et al., 2006, chap. 14), some of the issues that I believe are worth pursuing focus on three areas: networks, cocreation, and social media.

Networks

- How can an organization assess the capabilities of the various actors involved in creating, developing, and commercializing innovations?
- What strategies, tools, processes, and practices are most effective for forming and sustaining networks?
- To what extent are networks being used by firms for open innovation? What kinds of networks predominate and are most effective? How do these issues vary by firm, industry, and country?
- What are the effective practices and strategies for dealing with the intellectual property issues brought about by using networks for innovation?

Cocreation

- What tools and processes enable effective cocreation efforts with customers?
- What is the impact of customer cocreation efforts on innovation and firm performance?

Social Media

- What types of firms are using social media for innovation, when are they using it (stages and activities within NPD process), and how are they using it?

- What are the effective strategies for using social media for innovation?
- What types of social media work best for innovation efforts (i.e., incremental, really new, radical)?

Conclusion

The above discussion represents this researcher's perspective on issues and topics that might be interesting and useful for academics to pursue. It should be noted that although the five topics discussed above are presented as mutually exclusive, in reality, they are not. Thus, researchers should also consider integrating two or more of these broad topics when considering future research opportunities. I hope that these thoughts provoke and motivate other academics to undertake research in these areas.

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