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## **OPEN INNOVATION AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISES: INTRODUCING THE 123Go! PROCESS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper explores the characteristics of a distinctive modality for facilitating innovation, Open Innovation, and suggests why and how it can be especially useful for Social Enterprises. The paper begins with a definition of innovation, suggesting that it is a process that transforms opportunities into outputs that can add social, environmental or economic value. The modality of Open Innovation is introduced as, over the past 20 years, it has become increasingly important for organisations to find new and better ways to use external resources, thereby enriching their innovation processes. The paper proposes that there are, in practice, two modalities of Open Innovation, one research and development (R&D) orientated and the other applicable to an organisation as a whole. The second modality, Organisational Open Innovation (OOI) is particularly relevant to Social Enterprises and a four-step approach (123Go!) for facilitating OOI in Social Enterprises is described. 123Go! advocates that OOI should be seen as an instrument for managing innovation to achieve defined ambitions or significant need-areas. The paper concludes by pointing out that Social Enterprises are frequently short of resources but have much goodwill, thereby enabling them to access external sources of help more readily than commercial enterprises. For this reason, OOI is particularly useful for Social Enterprises.

### **KEY WORDS**

Innovation modalities, Open Innovation, Social Enterprises, 123Go!

### **PAPER**

Innovation is the force that drives progress (Tidd & Bessant 2013). It requires creating or finding opportunities that are new to the unit of adoption and transforming opportunities into products or services that add social, environmental and/or economic value (Francis 2000). The process of innovating can be structured in many ways (Jaruzelski et al. 2014) that, for the purposes of this paper, following Lazzarotti and Manzini (2009), will be described as 'modalities'.

There are numerous modalities for facilitating innovation; for example an organisation may (i) hire consultants to advise on ways to incorporate new technologies to improve its process efficiency (External Expertise Driven Innovation) or (ii) set up a team to visit leading organisations to gain ideas about new techniques for process management (Exploratory Learning Driven Innovation) or (ii)

undertake small-scale experiments with process changes in order to learn-by-doing (Prototype Driven Innovation) (Gadrey et al. 1995). Modalities for managing innovation have distinctive strengths and weaknesses. This paper will explore one modality only: Open Innovation. Firstly, the distinctive features of this modality will be described, followed by an assessment of whether Open Innovation could be beneficial for Social Enterprises and the paper concludes with a detailed description of a methodology (123 Go!) that can be used to manage Open Innovation initiatives.

A modality is an instrument for getting things done. Its purpose, or function, is to drive and facilitate action efficiently and effectively. Modalities for innovation management require a coherent and integrated set of principles and related methodologies that are, to the greatest extent possible, evidence-based (Pénin et al. 2011). Once deeply understood, a modality serves as an integrating device for those who use it. Modalities for managing innovation tend to be adopted by many organisations, benefit from multiple improvements, thereby becoming more reliable and efficient. In addition, the impact of modalities can be independently assessed, enabling them to benefit from evidence-based evaluation. If they are to be useful, modalities must be cost-effective, capable of being used, and provide benefits to the wider organisational system.

Closed organisational systems (i.e. those that do not have interactions with the wider world) are less capable of being innovative (Francis 2000)). Open Innovation is an instrument to facilitate organisations operating, at least in part, as open systems. This requires increasing the flow of potentially relevant inputs from outside, thereby enriching innovation management capability. Open Innovation often will be complemented with other modalities of innovation management, such as Research and Development (this point will be discussed further below).

Open Innovation has become increasingly efficacious in our connected, networked, collaborative and internet-based world (Paunov & Rollo 2016). Until recently, it would have been almost impossible for people working in on progressing an innovation initiative to gain easy and fast access to relevant advice, guidance, experience and resources. Now, facilitated by the internet and other forms of digital and open communication, such information flows easily. The reduction of barriers to the sharing of knowledge, combined with access to numerous, easy-to reach, low-cost and often highly-specialised information sources has been a major factor in changing the modalities used manage innovation.

This point is illustrated by observing the radical change in the modalities being used to organise corporate Research & Development (R&D) Departments. Historically, larger technically-orientated companies had R&D departments that invented, often in secret, the next generation of products or services (Miller 1995). More recently, societal changes reduced the ability of in-house R&D departments to deliver competitive advantage. Chesbrough (2003, p.41) drew attention to the need for a different modality and argued that: “today, in many industries, the logic that supports an internally oriented, centralized approach to R&D has become obsolete. Useful knowledge has become widespread and ideas must be used with alacrity. If not, they will be lost. Such factors create a new logic of open innovation that embraces external ideas and knowledge in conjunction with internal R&D”.

Over the past 20 years many companies acted on Chesbrough’s advice and have adopted an open modality for organising their R&D. For example, Proctor & Gamble used Open Innovation to design their Connect and Develop R&D Programme (Dodgson et al. 2006), which led to more than 35% of new products having elements that originated from outside of P&G and 45% of initiatives in the product development portfolio having key elements that had been discovered externally. In a different market LEGO opened their R&D to users in creative ways including using Information

Technology Supported Crowdsourcing that Schlagwein & Bjørn-Andersen (2014, p.771) observed: “allows the organization to learn from non-members and, in this way, the organization “broadens the base of minds” from which it can learn. Second, crowdsourcing, as in the case of LEGO, reveals that IT is crucial for organizational learning”.

Open Innovation, in the way that Chesbrough described it, has provided a new modality for structuring technological innovation, especially in organisations with big R&D budgets. Later investigations found that smaller organisations can also benefit, especially if the definition of Open Innovation is broadened. Brunswicker & Vanhaverbeke (2015, p.1242) observed that Open Innovation is not a single construct as it “differentiates between two concepts... inbound where new ideas flow into an organization and outbound where internally developed technologies and ideas can be acquired by external organizations”. A study of SMEs in the Netherlands (van de Vrande et al. 2009, p.434) found that “open innovation is as relevant for service firms as it is for manufacturing firms”. And, perhaps surprisingly, a study by Usman et al (2018, pp.15–16) found that “the SME context is uniquely suited for cultivating successful OI practices” as their inherent flexibility and the fact that their leaders are frequently entrepreneurial encourages proactivity.

Researchers in CENTRIM<sup>1</sup> are experimenting with broadening the definition of Open Innovation by linking it to two related constructs: namely, Absorptive Capacity (Volberda et al. 2010) and Learning Organisations (Senge 1992). We have found it useful to differentiate between two modalities of Open Innovation, one largely relevant for R&D organisations, that we describe as Technological Open Innovation (TOI). A broader modality that is useful for many types of innovation initiatives that we describe as Organisational Open Innovation (OOI). It is OOI that will be considered further for the remainder of this paper.

OOI is enriched by constructs and research findings from Absorptive Capacity that Easterby-Smith et al (2008, p.483) explained: “refers to the ability to locate new ideas and to incorporate them into an organization’s processes, and this is widely seen as a major contributor to organizational performance”. Hence, absorptive capacity can be seen as providing facilitative mind-sets, processes, skills and resources that, when deployed, result in the beneficial exploitation of many forms of knowledge, including ideas, technologies, requirements, standards, alternatives, factors affecting choices, implementation issues and resource availability. It has been shown that a high level of Absorptive Capacity empowers and assists people to search systematically outside of their organisation, find ideas or other assets that can help them and adopt those that are likely to be beneficial.

The construct of a Learning Organisation is based on a theoretical viewpoint that organisations are more than a collection of individuals: they have a distinctive identity, culture, sets of routines etc (Durkheim 1982). Moreover, organisations can learn and become, in effect, they become teachers using a process that has been called socialisation (Allen & Meyer 1990). The scholar who drew attention to the need for organisational learning to be deliberately developed was Senge (1992, p.174) who wrote that “the discipline of managing mental models—surfacing, testing, and improving our internal pictures of how the world works—promises to be a major breakthrough for building learning organizations.” Later, Thomas and Allen (2006, p.125) explained that: “organisational learning is not a cumulative result of individual learning. Rather, organisations learn when discoveries, evaluations and insights by individuals are successfully embedded in the organisation’s mental models or cognitive systems and memories”. An effective Learning Organisation prioritises the acquisition of collective learning as an organisational asset and develops routines that enable

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different kinds of knowledge to be adopted as upgraded efficiently and effectively, along with effective processes for unlearning (by removing or diminishing dysfunctional mental constructs so that they no longer influence behaviour) (Senge 1992).

## **ORGANISATIONAL OPEN INNOVATION**

As research is ongoing, the content of this section should be considered as speculative. Currently, we consider that OOI has seven distinctive characteristics:

1. OOI is an instrument for facilitating innovation in specific areas of need, or to achieve defined ambitions (this point will be explained further below).
2. OOI is an intentional and structured process for looking outside of an organisation to find new ideas, test and validate possibilities, get help to select innovation proposals that will bring the greatest benefit, organise work programmes to move forward and find ways to gain the greatest advantage from innovation initiatives (Humphreys et al. 2005).
3. OOI looks outwards for multiple forms of input including advice, critique, connections, offers of help, co-development of proposals, insight into stakeholders' viewpoints, cautionary guidance, specialist resources and market intelligence.
4. OOI facilitates assumptions to be tested, new constructs to be explored and experiments to be undertaken. It challenges groupthink (teams coming to see the world in the same way). (Janis 1972)
5. OOI can, and should, be used by everyone in an organisation to drive flows of micro and continuous innovation acts.
6. OOI is effective when it is embedded in an organisation's culture: becoming 'the way that we do things here'.
7. OOI is distinctive as it is functional for all the stages of an innovation process, not only for finding ideas or opportunities. Earlier in this paper it was stated that innovation requires 'finding opportunities that are new to the unit of adoption and transforming these opportunities into products or services that add social, environmental and/or economic value'. For this to happen then those undertaking innovation initiatives will need to (i) look for, or create, opportunities, (ii) evaluate their merits and demerits, (iii) decide which opportunities are 'right for us', (iv) do whatever it is necessary to transform the selected opportunity into something of value and (v) ensure that the maximum benefit is gained from resources expended. Each of these five sets of activities can be helped by obtaining ideas, insights, debates, critiques, challenges, analyses, experience, advice, guidance and evaluations from outside of an organisation. It is this flow of inputs that OOI can facilitate.
8. OOI only becomes effective when it embraces an ethic of 'give and take' between an organisation and the outside world.

OOI can provide faster, cheaper, reliable and more insightful ways to release potential, become empowered, solve problems and capture opportunities. For smaller organisations OOI brings four main benefits: (i) it drives learning; (ii) provides additional resources, (iii) assists progress to be made and (iv) questions extant mind-sets and skill-sets.

## **SOCIAL ENTERPRISES**

Social Enterprises are productive organisations as they produce goods or services but they are distinctive in four main ways: (i) the diversity of their missions is extremely wide, (ii) they are values-driven to a greater extent than are commercial enterprises (Mintzberg & Srinivas 2009), (iii) they frequently depend on goodwill to operate, for example from volunteers or donations, and (iv) financial considerations have a diminished significance in strategic decision-making. As Doherty et al

(2014, p.418) observed: Social Enterprises are “a prime example of a hybrid organizational form... in that, by spanning the boundaries of the private, public and non-profit sectors, they bridge institutional fields... and face conflicting institutional logics”.

There are a wide variety of types of Social Enterprises. These include large international organisations, like the UN’s International Fund for Agricultural Development and one-person-initiatives that organise, for example, a street recycling scheme. Fowler et al (2017) explain that that early research studies focused on understanding social entrepreneurs as individuals. More recently, there has been shift towards examining processes of creating social value and investigating how organisations can be configured to achieve these goals. Currently, social entrepreneurship is being viewed through sociological lenses, investigating networks and ecosystems within which social entrepreneurs generate promising ideas, seek innovative solutions and/or mitigate or eliminate social problems, perhaps by developing innovative interventions.

Young and Lecy (2012, pp.12–13) emphasised that social enterprises are characterised by diversity, writing that “one way... is to conceptualize social enterprise in terms ... of a zoo containing distinctly different types of animals which seek different things, behave in differently from one another, and indeed may (or may not) interact with one another in both competitive and complementary ways. To be sure, we should think of social enterprise as a modern zoo, with expansive open areas for various types of animals to share and interact, but also one which may separate species that are hostile to one another and also a boundary separating the zoo from the economy of public and private organizations at large”.

Despite the fact that all of the animals in Young and Lecy’s zoo are different, they have one thing in common: they are all animals. Social Enterprises share a mission to produce products or services that have social or environmental value and they view economic success as providing an enabling resource. Many Social Enterprises will be short of funds / other resources and must look outwards for an ongoing flow of support. However, a social mission can have moral power, in that it is perceived as a force for good, that attracts benefactors and volunteers. Accordingly, it can be cost-effective for Social Enterprises to gather insights, prototypes, advice, inspiration, resources and capabilities from outside of their own organizational boundaries and they may find that many individuals and organisations are eager to help. For these reasons, Social Enterprises benefit from using OOI, thereby becoming more deeply connected to communities, functioning as change agents (not simply as product suppliers), obtaining voluntary help and supplementing often inadequate internal resources.

### **THE 123 Go! FOCUSED APPROACH TO FACILITATE OOI**

123 Go! was developed in CENTRIM to meet a practical need. This was that organisations, especially those that were small or undertook a diversity of tasks, found it difficult to either understand or to implement a large-scale programme to develop global open innovation capability. They were, however, willing and able to take a focused approach. 123 Go! provided an instrument for facilitating innovation for achieving defined ends.

A 123 Go! approach has three advantages for Social Enterprises: (i) it readily captures the energy and enthusiasm of those involved, (ii) it is less demanding than a major organisational change initiative and (iii) tangible benefits can be achieved quickly. However, it is important to note that the 123 Go! approach only introduces OOI for Social Enterprises and is not a comprehensive toolkit.

123 Go! can be especially helpful when a Social Enterprise has an ambition that it does not know how fulfil. Consider this example. Imagine a Theatre that works currently with children who suffer with moderate mobility problems. The Theatre directors decide that they would like to help children

with even more restrictive medical conditions. In order to do this, they need to gain insight into effective ways of working with children with severe disabilities, acquire additional equipment, understand and limit risks and develop new skills. In this case, a targeted 123 Go! initiative will focus on achieving this specific ambition.

## STEP 1: LOOKING INWARDS

Step 1 has two objectives: (i) to define the aim (either an ambition or a need area) for an OOI initiative and (ii) to collect and organise internal and stakeholder input to clarify and validate the aim and gather existing suggestions as to how it can be achieved.

*Ambition-Led OOI Initiatives:* If the aim of an innovation initiative will be to increase the probability that an ambition can be achieved then those who manage the 123Go! process will to select a date in the future and describe what they consider to be a best-case scenario, after which they will select *one* development requirement where they consider that a 123Go! OOI initiative may be beneficial. A provisional ambition statement should be prepared, and ways need to be found to answer six questions:

1. Whose input might be useful to test our provisional ambition statement?
2. Who do we know who can provide ideas about how we could move forward?
3. Who do we know who can give us ideas about why we have not made progress earlier?
4. How can we collect input, in depth, from all possible informants?
5. What would be the best way to facilitate data collection?
6. How can we make sure that the data that we will collect will be organised in a way that makes it useful for decision-making?

*Need-Led OOI Initiatives:* If the aim of an initiative is to meet an existing need then those who manage the 123Go! process can use the 5Ps approach (outlined below), which uses a model originally developed by Francis and Bessant (2005). The five Ps are:

- P1 - Innovation in *Product* (improving or making new or different outputs);
- P2 - Innovation in *Process*: (improving or finding new or different ways to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of how we get things done);
- P3 - Innovation in *Position*: (improving or finding new or different ways to communicate with users, stakeholders and helpers);
- P4 - Innovation in *Paradigm*: (improving or finding new or different ways to decide on what will be our future priorities);
- P5 - Innovation in *Provisioning*: (improving or finding new or different ways to obtain the financial and other resources that we need).

Those who manage the 123Go! process will need to select one P area and decide whether there is a requirement to 'do better or 'do different'. Then ways need to be found to answer these six questions:

1. Whose input might be useful to test whether the suggested P area is the greatest need area?
2. Who do we know who can provide ideas about how to move forward?
3. Who do we know who can give us ideas about why we have not made progress earlier?
4. How can we collect input, in depth, from all possible informants?
5. What would be the best way to facilitate data collection?
6. How can we make sure that the data that we will collect will be organised in a way that makes it useful for decision-making?



Once a provisional ambition is defined then a survey will need to be undertaken to gather ideas from everyone in the organisation or is in some way connected to it. These ideas should be treated as inputs for a brainstorming process. This will not be a time for judgement or evaluation. The aim is to collect what people are already thinking to enrich understanding of opportunities and how you might move forward. You should strive capture differences between people's views and not attempt to summarise, rather reflect all available viewpoints. Ideas can come from multiple sources, for example, the top or bottom of an organisation, from clients or suppliers, stakeholders, funders, critics etc. (MacLennan 1998).

It may be that, after these data have been collected, then the provisional ambition needs to be reviewed and revised. This should be seen as a constructive step. It is most important that there is a consensus that the ambition is a worthwhile endeavour. Without this, the 123Go! process will not win the energetic commitment of those who need to be involved.

## **STEP 2: LOOKING OUTWARDS**

The objective of this step is to find exemplars – examples of good practice – as these can provide tried-and-tested insights into what can be done. Those who manage the 123Go! process will need to look outwards to study what more advanced organisations are doing.

It is important to note that the exemplars do not have to be other Social Enterprises, indeed there is evidence that creativity will be heightened when dissimilar examples are studied as Enkel & Gassmann (2010, p.267) explained: "Analogical thinking, particularly when applied across industry boundaries, could contribute significantly to the development of highly novel innovations... while simultaneously limiting the risks of uncertainty". Enkel & Gassmann also provide excellent examples of the innovation potential that arises from studying exemplars. The aluminium manufacturer, Alcan, had to develop fraud-resistant packaging for medicine and found inspiration in companies that print banknotes and passport documents. The sport goods provider, the Fischer group, wanted to reduce a ski's vibrations at high speeds and found inspiration from techniques used for building violins that use a special grid to reduce vibrations. Undertaken in cooperation with an acoustician from the Black Forest area of Germany, Fischer developed a ski that gives better control of vibration at high speeds.

In Step Two you will need to find examples of (ideally) three organisations that are closer than you to achieving an ambition that is somewhat like yours. In each case you will need to find out:

1. What they did?
2. What did they not do?
3. What capabilities did they need to acquire?
4. How was their leadership structured?
5. What can you learn from them?

## **STEP 3: LOOKING FORWARDS**

Finding exemplars can bring you up-to-speed with current leaders. But things change quickly. In this step you undertake a future search to consider new opportunities that may be presented by political, social, technological or other changes (Nieminen & Hyytinen 2015). This will be important as developments, often technological, expand your sense of the range of opportunities that are available.

One of the main reasons why future-search facilitates innovation is that it challenges the ways that people see the world. Baškarada et al (2018, pp.417–8) emphasised the creative importance of

testing beliefs, values and assumptions, writing that: “because of human cognitive limitations, mental models (like any models) are never accurate... learning may involve modifications of or additions to mental models”.

In this step you will need to find informed individuals / organisations that are attempting to predict how future changes may affect organisations of your type. If you can, find three experts and ask them:

1. What change drivers might affect your Social Enterprise the most?
2. How might you be able to optimise opportunities and reduce threats?
3. What might be the characteristics of winning enterprises in, say, three years?

## THE GO! STEP

In Step Go! you need to consolidate your learning and choose which innovation initiatives you want to undertake and get organised to make progress. The final step (Go!) enables options to be reviewed, decisions to be taken and development projects to be organised.

1. Describe the ‘mountains that you will need to climb’ (you can use the 7Ss model described below to help you).
2. Identify where you can get the help that you will need.
3. Develop an action plan.
4. If you are a leader or manager decide how your own behaviour needs to change to transform an intention into action in your organisation.

It can be helpful to use the well-known 7Ss model (Waterman Jr. et al. 1980) to structure the Go! step. The model defines a set of interlinked key features of organisations that enable strengths and weaknesses to be identified clearly. Perhaps more importantly, the model provides a framework for managing change.

The model defines seven organisational variables (originally termed ‘levers’) and they all begin with the letter S. These are: structure, strategy, systems, skills, style, staff and shared values. A key benefit of the model is that it enables organisations to determine which ‘levers need to be pulled’ in order to bring about significant organisation development, which often requires coordinated change in several of the S areas. The seven variables can be defined as follows:

*Structure* is how an organisation codifies its allocation of power, responsibilities and facilitates coordination.

*Strategy* is the pattern of commitment decisions that define what an organisation is seeking to achieve and how it is pursuing its aims.

*Systems* are the technologies, routines, processes and procedures adopted within the organisation.

*Staff* relates to the types of people employed or used on an ad hoc basis by the organisation.

*Skills* are capabilities of the staff within the organisation or partnering with the organisation.

*Style* is the way in which power is exercised, especially related to the way that managers choose to treat members of staff.

*Shared Values* refers to the significant meanings or guiding concepts that organisational members share.

These seven variables may be divided into soft and hard components. The hard components are strategy, structure and systems. The remaining four Ss, however, are ‘softer’ as they deal with the



human dimension. However, these are particularly important in examining innovation, which is the most human-centric of all organisational processes.

## USING OOI IN YOUR SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

Social Enterprises much to gain from OOI. Often their resources are limited but, because their mission is humanitarian, there will always be people willing to help. This can make a big difference. An example makes the point. Some years ago, teachers in the USA had become increasingly concerned that rural children were falling behind because their home-work required access to the internet and many homes in the countryside did not have internet connectivity. Teachers reached out to organisations with the technical know-how and the resources to help. In this case, Google volunteered to become involved. They launched pilot projects to transform School Buses into Rolling Study Halls with internet access and an on-board technical adviser. Already, the 'Homework Gap' is narrowing. Without reaching out to find help and encountering Google, an organisation with a commitment to corporate social responsibility, it is likely that the Rolling Study Halls concept would never have developed.

The Rolling Study Halls example demonstrates the potential efficacy of OOI. Using a structured approach, like 123Go!, can help organisations, especially Social Enterprises, to benefit from this powerful modality for facilitating and managing innovation.

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