Innovation and Innovative Solutions Through Partnerships

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1. INTRODUCTION

There is a general understanding that real value in the sciences, arts, and commerce comes largely from the process of collaboration. Collaboration is the process of shared creation. It is about collective intelligence. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Success through collaboration is far from inevitable. The underlying assumption is that once the benefits of collaboration are apparent to relationship participants, there is "smooth sailing" for collaborating organizations (Levitt, 1986).

Leading and managing strategic partnerships is not new. For years, companies have merged or been acquired for the purpose of delivering increased value to their customers. Reasons include reducing total capital investment, faster market access and payback, technology exchange, joint research and production (Contractor and Lorange, 1988). However, as globalisation, highly diverse workforces and new ways of competing reshape the business landscape (Naylor, 2004), there is growing evidence to suggest that using collaborative networks to leverage all elements of a firm's intellectual capital is not simply a business advantage, it is a business imperative (Drucker, 1999).

It has frequently been argued that technology exchange is prompting cooperation between companies (Horton and Richey, 1996). As technology life cycles become shorter and shorter, it is becoming increasingly difficult for firms to maintain excellence in all product lines (Bleeke and Ernst, 1991; Business International Corporation, 1987; Jorde and Teece, 1989; Ohmae, 1989). By pooling complementary technologies, firms can gain necessary technologies that will enable them to produce more sophisticated products at a much faster rate than could be achieved by "going-it-alone." Moreover, the risk of investing in a project can be minimized through collaborations (Business International Corporation, 1987; Contractor and Lorange, 1988; Horton and Richey, 1996). The world is becoming more interconnected and organizations that want to succeed in this new environment need to become more connected as well. This is not simply an information technology (IT) architecture issue, but a challenge to individuals, teams, businesses, and the wider world: How can we work together better? How can we pool our knowledge to improve results? How can we make processes more efficient, while delivering personal care and service when it matters most? How can we manage the flood of information that's overflowing our inboxes, our mobile phones, and our lives? Microsoft believes that the critical factor for organizational success is empowering people: specifically, those people who create, analyze, distribute or consume information as part of their jobs – the information workers. In a time of rapid change, agility depends on the ability to adapt and align quickly. Rigid, centrally-managed systems can't do that. Neither can organizations running yesterday's technology as if it were "good enough" for today's challenges. But give information workers powerful tools that put them in control of their business environment, tools that make working together as natural as working alone, and as familiar as the basic applications they already know – then you have the kind of *agility at the point of contact* to drive innovation, drive insight, and drive success.

2. AN OVERVIEW ON COLLABORATION:

To sustain and accelerate our environmental progress, we must constantly search for better ways of solving environmental challenges. Innovative collaboration is one of the ways to solve such problems. Collaboration with innovative strategies keeps the world turning. Better, faster, more sustainable results are only achieved through collaboration. But effective collaboration is not that straightforward.

Technically, collaboration is a process of participation through which people, groups, and organizations work together to achieve desired results. Collaboration can occur among individuals, groups, or organizations at the same time (synchronous) or with a time delay (asynchronous). Collaboration can also occur between people located in the same place or separated by physical distance. The participants of the collaboration believe that by bringing together diverse interests, skills, resources and sensitivities, there will be a greater ability to understand the problem before them, and a more effective solution is likely to emerge than that which any of them could develop alone.

Collaboration occurs at various levels:

- ***Informal Collaboration*** - This is the simplest level of collaboration, involving activities which are unstructured and informal. Examples of this level of collaboration would include one-to-one communication, discussion groups, and one-off meetings.
- ***Process / Project Collaboration*** - The next level of collaboration comprises of processes that are more structured in nature, which have defined start and end points, as well as a defined flow of events between the two. Examples of these activities would include sale order, purchasing requisition, and claims settlement processes.

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- ***Extended Collaboration*** - The third level of collaboration involves activities that extend beyond the enterprise to include customers, partners, and vendors. Activities in this category would include interaction with customer focus groups, product design sessions with vendors, and delivery of services or products by partners.

The facilitation of global expansion frequently motivates collaboration among firms. Alliances not only allow firms to overcome a country's protectionist measures (Contractor and Lorange, 1988), but they also allow firms to gain knowledge of unfamiliar business areas (Harrigan, 1984). In fact, recent events occurring in Western Europe provided a motivation for collaborative alliance formation. As the countries in Europe continued their move toward economic integration, firms, fearing increased protectionism, scrambled to establish themselves as insiders. A common means of entry has been through collaborative alliances (Delachaux, 1990; Lei, 1990; Lynch, 1990; Magee, 1989). It has been argued that the accomplishment of quasi vertical integration may be a rationale for forming alliances (Contractor and Lorange, 1988). Quasi vertical integration may represent the most desirable strategy for firms as opposed to complete integration or complete non-integration. An alliance can enable firms to experience the benefits of internalization, without incurring cost of integration, nor the strategic inflexibility it implies. Further, a firm can reduce its fixed costs by sharing through a collaborative alliance (Bleeke and Ernst, 1991; Crouse, 1991; Ohmae, 1989). It has been suggested that the convergence and sophistication of consumer tastes are also providing a rationale for collaboration (Gynes, 1991; Ohmae, 1989). Ohmae suggests that consumers in the Triad countries have access to the same information and are seeking similar products and lifestyles. Alliances can allow a company to market a full range of products to consumers around the world, without incurring the expense, both monetary and time, of "going-it-alone." Thus, firms, in their effort to maximize profits, are being forced to develop new strategies to fit the rapid changes in the global business arena. Collaborative alliances offer companies numerous advantages as they operate within the changing environment. Collaboration provides a means of minimizing risk, of overcoming protectionism, of sharing fixed costs, of meeting consumers' increasingly sophisticated and similar needs, and of accessing new technologies and marketing systems.

2.1 INTERSECTORAL PARTNERSHIP: A FORM OF COLLABORATION

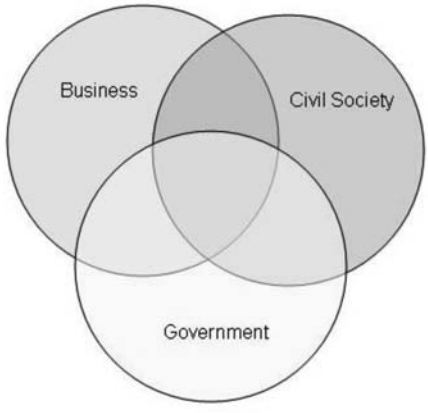
Intersectoral partnering is the process of creating joint inter-organizational initiatives across two or three sectors. This strategy generates sustainable solutions to development challenges by combining the distinct interests and resources of different actors. The three sectors of society are:

Business: private, for-profit entities that produce private goods and services.

Civil Society: private, nonprofit organizations that express community beliefs and values through service provision and advocacy, and contribute to collective goods and services.

Government: general and specialized governance institutions at the local, national, and international levels. ISPs are usually formed with representatives from local democratic governance institutions.

Chart: 1 Intersectoral Partnership



Social sector, or cross sector partnerships, by contrast, are formed explicitly to address societal issues of mutual concern to the parties involved (Waddock, 1991), although a firm's decision to enter into a social partnership may be prompted by stakeholder demands for business accountability and/or for instrumental considerations, because the company perceives competitive advantage from the initiative (Selsky and Parker, 2005).

A key hurdle to cross-sector relationships is overcoming the different backgrounds and values of the partners that can make knowledge exchange especially difficult (London et al., 2005). Alliances with nonprofit organizations can provide a challenge to managers who often underestimate the complexity of dealing with such groups (Hall and Vredenburg, 2005). Nonprofits have different concerns and cultures that business managers need to appreciate if they are to derive value from the relationship (Yaziji, 2004). However, companies that are open to engaging with nonprofit stakeholders, have the communication skills to do so, and can assimilate the information received (Clarke and Roome, 1999), can gain competitive advantage from the acquisition and utilization of new knowledge they have accessed through the engagement (Sharma and Vredenburg, 1998).

Example - Philippines: **A Bisectoral Partnership:** As a result of a major power crisis in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Philippine government sought private sector support in the form of a partnership. The private sector was needed to provide capital for additional power capacity, assistance in achieving project development and implementation of goals more rapidly, and training and technical assistance to local government units and implementing agencies. The government provided fiscal incentives, such as tax breaks and access to free land and fuel, and cost-sharing of those projects deemed the most difficult to finance. These provisions enabled private sector firms interested in investing in the electric power infrastructure sector the

opportunity to do so under attractive commercial and financial terms. Thus, such a partnership produced results consistent with both the investors' financial and commercial objectives and met the government's main need: additional power capacity. Today, the private sector has a significant role in the Philippines electric power infrastructure sector (Marks et al. 1997).
Intersectoral partnering is both a process and a result. Partnerships in themselves are a valuable result since they provide a strong foundation for future collaborations.

3. INNOVATION: AN OUTCOME OF COLLABORATION

Not that long ago, most executives viewed innovation as a matter of coming up with new products or services, which was primarily the job of the company's R&D department. If pressed, they would have likely maintained that breakthrough innovations – innovations that significantly change customer expectations, the basis for competitive advantage, or industry economics – were either the result of dumb luck, or originated with a visionary leader like Steve Jobs, Richard Branson or Akio Morita. But such views of innovation have become obsolete. Drivers such as globalization, the blurring of industry boundaries, the explosion in the availability and accessibility of information, the increasing dispersion of knowledge, and the growing use of alliances and partnerships have dramatically shifted the landscape of innovation. As a result, it is urgent that companies reexamine their assumptions about innovation and purge three common obsolete ideas:
Innovation is all about coming up with new products and services. New products and services are vital to growth. But there are several other ways in which companies can innovate. In particular, leaders need to ask themselves what new customers they might serve and what these customers need, how they might configure their value chain differently, and what alternative economic model they might use. Innovation is solely the job of the R&D department. "Research" and "development" are always important in innovation. But every group inside the company and beyond it – such as partners, customers and suppliers – need to be involved as well if you want to find opportunities to innovate that will produce competitive advantage.
Breakthrough innovation occurs only through luck or a "stroke of genius" from a visionary leader. Yes, luck is good and having an innovative genius leading your company is wonderful. But the majority of companies can't rely on either. So they need to design and implement a systematic innovation process to maximize the chances that they will identify and take to market new profitable opportunities time and time again.
Few examples have been quoted to have an inside about innovative collaboration:
1**. Capgemini** believes collaborative working is perhaps the single most important factor in achieving competitive advantage and long-term success for organizations.
2. **IBM and Nortel** have formed an alliance to promote collaborative innovation between the companies and to aid carriers in meeting the opportunities and challenges of next generation services.
Turning to the innovation field, studies consistently illustrate the importance of external linkages on innovative performance (Faems et al., 2005; Goes and Park, 1997; Laursen and Salter, 2006), and report increased collaborative ties between organizations (Freeman, 1991). A firm's position within its network and its experience of collaborative relationships are also key determinants of innovation (Powell et al., 1996). Authors have considered the particular role of boundary spanners who can act as information gatekeepers (Conway, 1995). External environments are viewed as sources of information (Koberg et al., 2000) and being open to the new ideas that these knowledge flows provide is a key predictor of firm innovative performance (Fey and Birkinshaw, 2005). Key managerial attributes for fostering innovation include having a wide range of interests that facilitate environmental scanning, and an internal locus of control that enable managers to frame ideas as opportunities (Howell and Shea, 2001). However, despite the focus on inter-organizational ties within this literature genre, relations with nonprofit organizations have not been considered as a potential source of innovation.

3.1 NEED FOR INNOVATIVE COLLABORATION

Collaboration is also a key factor in innovation and creativity in organizations, something that most organizations are concerned about and interested in stimulating as a tool for competitive advantage and differentiation. Effective collaboration can reduce elapsed time in situations where a large number of partners are involved, and the power of collaboration allows small work teams to resolve issues quickly and accelerate delivery. Collaboration is the life-blood that guides the flow of conversation and creation of meaning in human systems.
Moreover, partners engage in collaboration activity for a variety of reasons, and normally to achieve varied goals. Collaboration must also be something an organisation needs and wants, the worth of which it can define. In fact, collaboration between government agencies, between subdivisions of government entities, between government and businesses, and between individuals and their government, is not new. This collaboration can lead to better service from government for its citizens, better decision-making, and improved government processes, as well as the generation of an effective co-operation between government and private sector.
Today's global economy is presenting organizations of all sizes with new challenges:

- **Global permanently-connected** customers, partners, and suppliers that are continuously driving the need for continued agility in processes and people.

- **Increasingly mobile** global project teams, those are capable of working in multiple locations, time zones, and across organizational boundaries.
- Pressures to become **more transparent** (to government, to customers, suppliers, and partners), yet at the same time reducing information risk.
- A global **competition for talent** as today's workforce ages and the millennial generation arrives with its own values and expectations.
- Ongoing **technological innovation** and the accompanying challenges of integrating useful new capabilities smoothly with existing systems and practices.

Organizations need strong, secure networks that extend across their enterprise and beyond, while workers must manage constant demands on their attention, master new skills, and find new ways to be productive in a more deeply connected, transparent workplace.

In the New World of Work, organizations that can work together effectively will enjoy competitive advantages in a number of areas. Those who sell information or expertise can draw on a wider pool of human talent and data to generate new insights and new innovations, and bring them to market more quickly. Those whose businesses are built around fixed processes – manufacturing, distribution, resource extraction – can discover and drive new efficiencies that bring down costs. Those who rely on expertise can cast a wider net for talent, seamlessly extending rich capabilities and access to remote and mobile users.

For information workers, the New World of Work means new opportunities to add value, and a global marketplace in which to offer their skills and expertise. Better collaboration tools can connect them easily with colleagues, managers and customers, minimize the time spent on low-value administrative activities, gather resources from disparate systems and applications together in one productive environment, and reduce the burdens of "information overload."

3.2 BUSINESS MODEL INNOVATION

There was a time, not so long ago, when "innovation" meant that companies needed to invest in extensive internal research laboratories, hire the most brilliant people they could find, and then wait patiently for novel products to emerge. Not anymore. The costs of creating, developing, and then shipping these novel products have risen tremendously (think of the cost of developing a new drug, or building a new semiconductor fabrication facility, or launching a new product into a crowded distribution channel). Worse, shortening product lives means that even great technologies no longer can be relied upon to earn a satisfactory profit before they become commoditized. Today, innovation must include business models, rather than just technology and R&D. Business models matter. A better business model often will beat a better idea or technology. Consider Wal-Mart in retailing, Dell in PCs, or Southwest Airlines. But business models are not all the same. To innovate your business model, you must first understand what it is, and then examine what paths exist for you to improve upon it.

Innovations that involve more than one element of the business model have a much better chance of being truly differentiating and sustainable. Commerce Bank is an example of a company which competes in an industry (retail banking) whose services are widely viewed as commodities, so advantage is generally believed to be driven primarily by scale economies. Going its own way, Commerce Bank has innovated along all business model dimensions and has generated the growth and returns to show for it.

- **Value Proposition**: The GE Aircraft engines unit crafted an innovative value proposition when they shifted from selling airlines jet engines to selling them flight hours. This shifted the risk of downtime from the airline customer to GE, and enabled GE to establish a very profitable service operation.
- **Target Market:** Ryanair, a growing European discount airline, innovated a different target market by going after leisure travelers, instead of the usual business travelers.
- **Value Chain:** Wal-Mart (which targeted an innovative market by going after underserved rural communities in its early days) is celebrated for its management of its supply chain.
- **Revenue Mechanism(s):** Xerox got its start in the copier business by leasing its copiers, instead of selling them. Air Products gets paid for the delivery of its industrial gases right to the manufacturing station inside the plant, instead of by the box car.
- **Value Network or Ecosystem**: Ryanair again innovated here, by striking novel arrangements with underutilized regional airports. Ryanair gets a percentage of concession sales at these airports, and in some circumstances even gets paid for landing passengers at the airports.
- **Competitive Strategy**: One interesting aspect of business models is how difficult it is for others to imitate them. Many airlines have tried to emulate Southwest's low cost approach. Most of their attempts have not fared well. Copying the Southwest model apparently creates too many conflicts with the airlines' established business model.

Global connectivity (created through telecommunications, IT infrastructure and open standards) makes new skills and partners accessible is practical to employ and enables entirely new forms of collaboration, and, thus, new business models. Of course, the same global connectivity also exposes firms to new competitors with very different business models and cost bases, which in turn, can force business model innovation.

Major strategic partnerships and organization structure changes topped the list of most significant business model innovations. One CEO explained that the success of strategic partnerships depends heavily on combining each company's strengths in an economic model that benefits all parties.

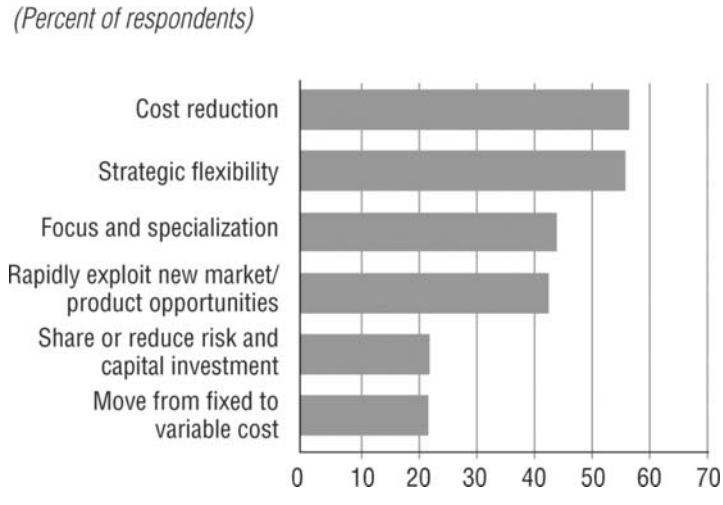
As global connectivity reduces collaboration and transaction costs, companies are taking advantage of the expertise and scale that lies hidden in their own organizations and across the globe. They are assembling a business model fashioned from groups of "specialized" capabilities – combining internal expertise and scale through shared service centers with the capabilities of specialized partners to create truly differentiating business designs. Partners can be instrumental in establishing new business models.

3.2.1 RESULTS OF BUSINESS MODEL INNOVATION

Cost reduction and strategic flexibility were considered top benefits from business model innovation – reported by over half of all business model innovators (Exhibit). Business model innovation allows companies to specialize and move more quickly to seize growth opportunities as they emerge. Overall, CEOs' rankings suggest that business model innovation is helping their organizations become more nimble and responsive, while, at the same time, lowering costs.

There are other very positive implications of business model innovation that differentiated it from the other two types of innovation CEOs have as a focus – products/services/markets and operations. The business model innovators were growing was operating margins faster than those concentrating on other types of innovation. Companies innovating through strategic partnerships had enjoyed the highest operating margin growth.

Exhibit 1: Benefits cited by business model innovators



Put in context, companies focusing on business model innovation have enjoyed significant operating margin growth, while those using products/services/markets and operational innovation continues (or intensifies), it could become the relentless battleground where operational and products/services/markets innovation compete today. Innovations have sustained their margins over time.

3.3 SUCCESS FACTORS FOR INNOVATIVE COLLABORATION:

- **Target and Create Value:** Know exactly what you want to achieve and then establish targets all along the path your project will take.
- **Align the Organization:** Match your program to the needs of your larger enterprise all along its life cycle and help bring managers and staff aboard.
- **Mitigate and Manage Risk:** Anticipate and overcome the risks that are inherent to complex programs.
- **Optimize Capabilities:** Understand what each partner contributes, improve performance in a lasting way, and ultimately transfer knowledge for long-term advantage.

4. CONCLUSION:

It is essential for the established supplier companies to prepare themselves for a future that brings with it immense competition, globalization, new product development and generation of an environment that insists business innovation. They should respond by adopting a new approach to strategy – one that combines speed, openness, flexibility, and forward-focused thinking. It is an era of new opportunities and regeneration especially for executives who realize the importance of change and innovation, for mature companies, which acknowledge that the time for slow change is over and it is important to accept changes in their own best interest. To survive it is essential that companies must be able to adapt and evolve. Businesses operate with the knowledge that their competitors will inevitably come to the market with a product that changes the basis of competition, the ability to change and adapt is fundamental to survival (Trott, 2005). Christiansen (2000) states that specific innovation management systems such as idea generation methods, funding systems and project management methods also have a profound impact on the performance of innovation and innovative ideas and not to forget the final intervention of the senior management in specific projects. Required are flexible companies and mindsets, which can accept failures before they look out for results and a clear definition for innovation. To innovate is a mindset, as earlier stated it's not a one-time event; innovation should be incorporated as a daily schedule of each employee. If we fail to innovate, we fail to move forwards and to accept any barriers to the movement of the innovation frontier within the business process is unacceptable (Pitt, 2005).

The business environment today is one of intense global competition, rapid technological change and demanding consumers. Firms operating in this environment are challenged by consumers to rapidly develop wider and innovative product lines, that encompass greater technological sophistication and quality, yet are low priced. At the same time, global competition has forced corporations to seek new markets, which in turn has speeded up this cycle of product development, innovation and simultaneously created "world" markets. However, firms are finding that the costs of increased research and development and entry into new markets are formidable. Today's corporations are realizing that the days of large, vertically integrated businesses are rapidly vanishing, that one firm can no longer afford (monetarily and/or organizationally) to maintain sophistication in all levels of technology, develop distribution channels in multiple countries or develop new markets. Rather, as a means of meeting the combined challenges of entering or maintaining markets with new, better products, many firms are realizing that they must find outside partners to share the risks and, hence, are forming collaborative alliances.

The Buddhist principle of "dependent co-arising" states that every recognizable entity on every scale of existence participates in the universal exchange of energies, supporting and being supported by the existence of others. Future trends suggest that the kinds of interdependent communities described in this paper will play an increasing role in a company's ability to keep pace with the level of complexity in its world and the amount of innovation required to compete. As global corporations continue to grow significantly, covering more countries, employing more people and addressing more market sectors, the knowledge pool is growing while the organization's capability to leverage that knowledge is effectively decreasing. As the demands of customers become ever more sophisticated and change more rapidly, old organizational cultures become barriers to keeping up with demand, and responding with innovative products and solutions.

To manage external partnerships, managers must continually assess when experimentation is moving away from the guiding values and core mission of the company. Such a balance between adaptation and innovation is essential if knowledge generation is to continue to feed the strategic aspirations of the firm while ensuring the basics are taken care of.

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