

## Section 3

# Life Stories of Intrapreneurs

Intrapreneurs are employees who are extremely committed to what they do and are willing to circumvent the rules in order to implement improvements that will better serve the organization's clients.

Intrapreneurship is an ideal way to learn about innovative practice, especially as the risk is lower than for entrepreneurship. However, it is not risk-free. Many intrapreneurs define themselves as 'employees who go to work knowing they could be fired at any time'.

Intrapreneurs can benefit from the resources, support and advice of experienced people who work in the same organization.

I have studied many intrapreneurs over the years and have identified five main characteristics.

First, intrapreneurs are usually highly competent in their respective trades or professions to such an extent that they are prepared to break through the barriers of what is normally done and open up new paths.

Second, they are usually more familiar than other employees with the resources of the organization for which they work. They know about the production facilities and may have identified equipment or materials that could be put to better use. They have spoken to people outside their own department and have identified others both inside and outside the organization who have expertise that could potentially be useful to the enterprise. Their internal and external relations networks are usually more highly developed than those of other employees in similar positions.

Third, they have spoken in depth with the people who have been with the organization the longest, to see what is or is not possible. A typical comment would be: 'I need to know how far I can stretch things. I do this by consulting people with many years of experience in the firm'.

Fourth, the intrapreneur's work is often made possible by the support of someone in a senior position, be it a manager or a vice president, or sometimes the CEO. The two intrapreneurs whose life stories are presented in this book owe their survival to the leaders of their respective firms, whose support became a key element in carrying the success of their projects.

Fifth, intrapreneurs are people who perform innovative tasks within organizations but have no control over the resources. Some go on to become entrepreneurs – in other words, they become self-employed extrapreneurs and continue to do what they used to do as intrapreneurs, this time for themselves.

Innovative practice is similar in many respects regardless of which agent of innovation applies it. For example, many entrepreneurs started out as intrapreneurs or facilitators, while others, after selling their firms or retiring, become external facilitators or even intrapreneurs. Both the intrapreneurs presented in the following pages have played all these roles.

Many intrapreneurs carry out incremental innovations. However, some go further and engage in radical innovation. This is the case for the two intrapreneurs whose stories are presented here. Each in their own way became the instigators of veritable revolutions in their respective sectors.

## **Elmar Mock**

Elmar Mock often visited my classes in Canada and in Switzerland, where he was kind enough to host students in his company on several occasions. Each time, he was able to convey his enthusiasm for innovation. When you meet him, you quickly realize that nothing will ever be the same after he has worked on it.

He started out as an inventor and intrapreneur, and ultimately became an entrepreneur, launching an external facilitation business to support the creation and application of radical innovations. He has given countless inspiring speeches at international forums and serves as a real-life example of everything that is best about creative thinking.

## **Emerson de Almeida**

Emerson de Almeida is an idealist who has always wanted to change the world. As a young journalist, he worked hard to raise social awareness, a path that almost cost him his life when the military junta running his country placed strict controls on the media.

He found a way to support the development of his country by setting up a business education organization that helped thousands of Brazilian enterprise leaders to manage more innovatively so that their firms would perform better in Brazil and on international markets. The management institution he founded is now classified among the best in its field.