

Appendix

From Innovationist to Agent of Innovation

The Seven Exercises

The exercises that follow are meant to be completed after reading the life histories presented in this book. They focus on how people relate to and think about innovation: who agents of innovation are, how they think, what they do, how they do it and the main differences between entrepreneurs, facilitators and intrapreneurs. You should identify three, four or five different characteristics for each of these three categories. The idea is to help you organize your mind so that you can situate yourself more clearly with respect to the category you think suits you best. The exercises will prepare you to become more innovative, and to make better use of yourself and of your capabilities.

Exercise 1: Preliminary Self-Assessment

- (1) What is your favourite category of agent of innovation? Why? Did one of the case studies present a more appropriate role model for you? If so, why?
- (2) Which sectors are more attractive to you? Name three and indicate the one you prefer. Why do you prefer it? Give at least three reasons.
- (3) What kinds of partners would you like to work with? What are your criteria when identifying and selecting potential partners or collaborators?
- (4) What makes you potentially attractive as an agent of innovation for an enterprise?
- (5) What value will you add to society? What will you do to support sustainable development?

Exercise 2: Defining Your Own Creative Model for Innovation

Like many people, you may be unsure of your own innovative potential. Is your creative culture developed enough to support the creation of innovations? Could you become an agent of innovation? If so, what kind? What would your trademark be? What can you do to develop your innovative potential?

- (1) How do you perceive agents of innovation? Describe six of their main characteristics.
- (2) Describe three initiatives or innovations in which you have played a role in the past.
- (3) Describe at least two of the roles you played in these initiatives or innovations. Were you the initiator? Did you manage a group or bring people together? Were you responsible for development or for implementation or for both?
- (4) Why do you want to become an agent of innovation? Describe at least three motivating factors.
- (5) If you are serious about it, list at least three elements you will need to learn to achieve your goal.

Exercise 3: Identifying a Need, Creating an Opportunity, Contributing an Innovation

Agents of innovation are people who innovate – in other words, they are people who do new things that contribute added value. A first step is therefore to identify existing or emerging needs for which opportunities may be created, potentially leading to innovations. For intrapreneurs, the needs in question may be identified within their organizations or from listening to customers. For entrepreneurs, the needs will be identified by acute observation of the marketplace. For facilitators, the needs will mostly be related to their understanding of the requirements for realizing the entrepreneur's vision and projects. Once they have understood the needs they have identified, agents of innovation can then find ways to design responses. These are usually innovations that will address the needs identified.

The following exercise should help you to think about the structure you could develop to move forward in a creative way.

- (1) Which sector is of most interest to you? Why? What are the main changes that have marked this sector in the last 10 years? List at least five.
- (2) What changes do you think will occur in this sector in the next 10 years, and especially in the coming 2 years?
- (3) Identify at least two needs generated by these future changes, along with the potential they offer for innovation.
- (4) Describe an opportunity arising from one of those needs that could become an innovation compatible with your own background and/or motivations.
- (5) Based on your experience and expertise, describe how you could develop and exploit this opportunity. What competitive advantage do you have that will allow you to be successful?

Exercise 4: Defining a Vision

Entrepreneurs and other agents of innovation are explorers, discoverers and conquerors. They like to occupy new territories, and they need tools to do this. One of their most powerful tools is the ability to define and imagine what they want to achieve in the future.

Defining your vision will allow you to establish clearer criteria that you can then use as reference points when choosing activities, resources and people with whom you wish to move forward and work. Your vision will also become a focal point around which you can not only organize your activities but also identify your learning needs to reach the place you wish to occupy in the market.

The following exercise was designed to help you with this process. The innovative craft consists in defining contexts. People who are new to a sector may see things that those with more experience do not see. They may be able to invent new approaches that have previously been overlooked. Be creative in your answers! You should be willing to go beyond existing boundaries!

- (1) Where do you see yourself in 20 years' time? What do you want to become?
- (2) Briefly describe a new element, product, service or ideal organization that you would like to create.
- (3) What will you have to do to convert these dreams into a vision, and then to realize your vision?
- (4) How will you use your main strengths to do this? How will you compensate for your main weaknesses?
- (5) How will this change the way you organize your professional and personal life?

Exercise 5: Internal Ecosystem – Building an Internal Relations System to Support Innovation: Choosing Partners, Collaborators and Facilitators

The number of firms created by teams has increased steadily in most countries. In recent decades, team venture creation has accounted for more than 75% of SMEs and nearly 100% of technology firms. While the main creator is usually involved full-time in the project and then in the firm, this may not be the case for the other partners. Some become part-time collaborators, while others are investors.

Nevertheless, most of these financial and other partners need to understand the logic underlying the firm's activities. Many have expertise and contacts that may be useful to the firm, for example in opportunity creation, strategic positioning, vision design and, not least, implementation.

When some of the entrepreneurs interviewed for my research were asked to give reasons for their business failures, the most common response was: 'I was

surrounded by incompetent people'. When they were asked to give reasons for their successes, the most common response was: 'I'm surrounded by great people and have a very competent team'. Successful entrepreneurs have defined a vision, or at least an embryo of a vision, and have then used it as a criterion for choosing people with complementary competencies with whom they can work to realize that vision.

The following exercise is designed to make you think about how you will choose and recruit the people with whom you will work. Less than 10% of firms achieve growth. It is useful to be aware that growth will not happen unless you learn to communicate and delegate.

- (1) Have you been able to formulate a clear definition of your opportunity, vision and proposed innovation, so that you can use it to establish criteria for choosing and hiring people with characteristics that will help you to move forward with your project? Please list five criteria.
- (2) Do you intend to spend more time working *in* the firm, managing its operations, or working *on* the firm, on its development? The way you intend to work will have an impact on how you build and manage your internal ecosystem. Please describe what you intend to do in this respect.
- (3) Briefly describe the approach you have developed to recruit the people with whom you will work, starting with partners and collaborators. Indicate three elements of the psychological contract you intend to establish with them.
- (4) Describe the main tasks you plan to delegate to close collaborators and other employees after starting the project, in each of the following 3 years.
- (5) A firm is a social system, and two of the factors with the greatest impact on employee motivation and subsequent involvement are fair treatment and fair performance assessment. Name six performance assessment criteria that you intend to use to create a fair, merit-based social system that your collaborators will regard as being legitimate. How do you intend to reward performance? Through bonuses? Through profit-sharing? Through shareholding opportunities? In other ways?

Exercise 6: External Ecosystem – Building an External Relations System to Support Innovation

The expertise available in an external ecosystem can make all the difference in supporting the sometimes-risky decisions or actions involved in product/service development, new venture creation, venture acquisition or sale and other activities undertaken by agents of innovation. An agent of innovation's relations system plays a major supporting role. These relations usually come from the agent's external ecosystem, or the environment within which he or she works.

The synergy generated by a relations system can have some important effects. The more developed your business network is, the more contacts you have and the more antenna you use to obtain information, the easier and quicker it will be for you to achieve goals that would not otherwise be possible. However, successful agents of innovation do not always have a big or extensive external relations network. Family relations can be extremely important. Indeed, most agents of innovation, especially entrepreneurs, will admit that their success is due more to the people around them than to their business networks at large. However, mentors, coaches and advisory committee members can be very useful.

Some people tend to look to the development of weak-tie relationships – in other words, relations you do not usually develop when you work in a given sector. These relations allow them to explore new hunting territories and identify people who will contribute ideas or perspectives that are different from the norm in their sector. For example, Elmar Mock was one of the first watch makers to train in the emerging plastics sector. This led him to create the Swatch, the world's first plastic watch, a totally new and different product for the watch sector.

The following exercise should help you to become aware of the importance of your external ecosystem and the relations you can derive from it. It will encourage you to start thinking about what you can do to build a relations system more tailored to supporting your vision.

- (1) List two strengths and two weaknesses of your current external relations system. Identify at least two new relationship niches that you could explore.
- (2) Present and explain four major relationship needs to support the implementation of the vision you defined in the previous exercise.
- (3) List two problems you face when developing relationships and three improvements you may need to make to develop a broader range of contacts and better relations.
- (4) Describe at least three major characteristics that you would look for in a mentor, in a coach, in members of your advisory board.
- (5) List three advantages that agents of innovation would obtain if they included you in their relations systems.

Exercise 7: Becoming Innovative – Acting as an Agent of Innovation

Many people would like to become more creative and innovative. This leads them to think about the form their innovations could take. Some want to improve their innovative skills while continuing to work within existing organizations, while others are looking for projects to create a business.

Being an entrepreneur means not only designing products or services but also negotiating, selling and implementing an innovation. That implies

managing risk. Being a facilitator means understanding fits between market characteristics and the resources needed to develop the entrepreneur's projects. Being an intrapreneur means being able not only to design innovations but also to negotiate their implementation within an existing organization.

Regardless of the form your innovative skills will take, you must also develop leadership skills that will allow you to communicate, share and convince. This involves generating enthusiasm and creating movements, often forming a dynamic community around a project. In that community, people should enjoy working towards the achievement of shared goals, where they can feel involved and continue to learn and develop. The following questions should help you to start thinking about these aspects.

- (1) What added value can you contribute to increase the level of innovation in a project?
- (2) What motivates you? Mention at least three elements. To what extent are you able to commit? Give two examples.
- (3) How big is your space? What kind of space do you leave for others? To what extent are you willing to become involved? How far are you willing to go? What are you prepared to risk when bringing your ideas to fruition? Are you a tenacious person?
- (4) What are your strengths and weaknesses in terms of bringing people together and forming a team that will work to achieve innovation-focused goals?
- (5) What improvements are needed in your ability to evaluate situations? To judge the right time for action? To become a transformational visionary leader?

Comments on the Exercises

You may have found these exercises difficult. You may feel the task of becoming more innovative is a demanding one. If that is the case, you are correct – it is. It can be very hard to create something from scratch. There are levels in the expression of innovation, and, in addition, the entrepreneurial craft is usually something that is superimposed onto a basic craft. As you learn more about your craft and about the innovative process, you will be better able to innovate at higher levels.

My research into agents of innovation has shown that the innovative process is incremental. People continue to learn and become more innovative as they progress within their chosen sector. If you are going to be innovative, you will need to persevere and be able to connect a lot of dots. When you have done this once, it becomes easier. The first step in this process is to become an *innovatist* – someone with a general interest in innovation. From this stepping stone, you can gradually work towards a role as an *agent of innovation*.