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Investigating the Role of Customers and Other External Influencers in Radical New Product Development – a Network Approach

Richard Joseph


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Abstract

The broad objective of this thesis is to extend our understanding of radical new product development (NPD) beyond degree of customer orientation (CO) by assessing the role and influence of both customers and other external influencers (OEIs). While a number of studies have investigated the relationship between CO and NPD outcomes, such studies typically focus on incremental NPD. The role of customers is also typically investigated using numerical scales to understand degree of CO, and fails to consider the important implementation issues of which, when and how customers are involved through the NPD process. In addition to customers, other external influencers (OEIs) such as investors, suppliers, distributors, competitors, universities and advisors are also increasingly involved in radical NPD, but the roles and actual influence of these different groups is unclear. To address these gaps in the literature this thesis adopts a network approach to investigate the role of customers and OEIs in the development of six radical new products. Six retrospective case studies are conducted, all involving the development of radical ICT products targeted at industrial markets. To provide further insight, three of these cases involve successful new products while the remaining three involve unsuccessful products. Analysis of case data involves qualitative and quantitative network analysis as well as thematic analysis of interview transcripts. Clear differences are found between the ways in which the successful and unsuccessful cases involve customers and OEIs. For example, firms developing successful products focus on existing customers with whom they have strong previous relationships, while developers of unsuccessful products do not. Furthermore, the successful cases all involve customers actively as co-developers of the product, while none of the unsuccessful cases take this approach. These findings are presented in detail and discussed in relation to the existing literature. A set of empirically-based propositions are outlined as a foundation for future research.
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Thank you to the ten managers in the six case firms for being so generous with your time. I enjoyed your company and your great stories, and I found your interest in this study extremely encouraging. I hope that you find the results of the study beneficial as you undertake future NPD projects.

When presenting my doctoral proposal the common feedback I received was that it would be difficult (or impossible) to recruit six radical NPD cases, especially three ‘unsuccessful’ cases. For some reason I ignored this advice and I found case recruitment one of the most difficult challenges in this research process. It is therefore important that I acknowledge the many people who assisted with my search for cases. While the leads you provided did not always result in suitable cases, your interest in the project was much appreciated. Many thanks therefore to Sandy Bulmer, Margo Buchanan-Oliver, Vicki Little, Sussie Morrish, Mike Lee, Geoff Whitcher, Andy Hamilton, Dave Wrathall, Monique van Piere, Melanie Farrant, Simon Martin, Melissa Yiannoutsos, Jane Smallfield, Kip Hanna and various others who I may have forgotten.

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