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Intrapreneurial management profiles of Chief Executive Officers in SMEs

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Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are considered to be the power houses of European businesses. For these SMEs, an innovation culture that can be attained through intrapreneurial initiatives can add significant competitive advantages to their organizational framework especially in the current economic environment which is getting progressively more competitive, demanding and challenging. Intrapreneurship as an organizational concept has evolved substantially over the years and although it is frequently compared with entrepreneurship, its position as a distinct concept applicable in any firm regardless of their size or age has been established in recent literature. However, one of the key research gaps here is the role of a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) in the process of guiding, facilitating and managing intrapreneurial initiatives in SMEs. There are no clear researches that identify any distinctive profiles of a CEO in the process of intrapreneurship management. This paper specifically addresses this gap and explores different intrapreneurial management profiles of CEOs in SMEs and how the adoption of these profiles can influence the innovation dynamics of the overall organization.

Based on literature review and our earlier detailed study on CEOs from intrapreneurial firms, we identified three key management profiles. We observed that CEOs in some organizations act as the facilitator of intrapreneurship providing different intrapreneurs the support, guidance, resources and an environment to innovate. In cases where entrepreneurs start their own organization, they usually act as the CEO and in such circumstances they dominate as the lead innovator strategizing all the major innovation decisions themselves. In other cases, CEOs tend to have a combination of these two distinct profiles, shuffling in and out of their roles as a facilitator and an innovator based on situational demands. As evidence this paper presents case studies of three successful SMEs from the UK and highlights these varying profiles of their CEOs. Using the qualitative methodology of in-depth interviews, the research sheds light on this unexplored area and the results show the importance of an intrapreneurial culture and how prioritizing it in organizational strategies can help in building and escalating innovation in SMEs. Understanding these distinctive management roles will benefit both CEOs and different organizations in practising intrapreneurial initiatives in an effective manner.

Keywords

Intrapreneurship, Intrapreneurs, Innovation, CEO, Organizational management, SMEs

1. Introduction

Intrapreneurship in simple terms can be defined as the innovative initiatives undertaken by employees inside an organization to perform new business activities [1]. Intrapreneurs within

these firms act as the smart innovators who work on the design and creation of new ideas, products, ventures and business models. Lankinen et al [2] observe that intrapreneurs have the potential to find new combinations of resources that helps in attaining a competitive advantage. According to Seshadri and Tripathy [3] intrapreneurship makes it possible to tap the entrepreneurial potential inherent among different employees and thereby unleashing their passion to generate new avenues for business growth or identify radical business alternatives. Mohanty [4] believes that the concept of intrapreneurship provides an approach that can be systematically adopted in an attempt to define specific strategies and action plans that can help in order to incorporate significant employee contributions. When the concept of intrapreneurship first arose, some authors did not realize or acknowledge its potential. For instance, Duncan et al [5] called intrapreneurs the '*latest figment of journalist's imagination*'. They strongly believed that the conventional corporation will not be able to supply and cope with the needs and requirements of intrapreneurs. However, authors such as Silva et al [6], Jong and Wennekers [7] and Camelo-ordaz et al [8] have observed a strong relationship between intrapreneurship and technological innovations and therefore intrapreneurship today is considered to be a characteristic of successful organizations [9]. The term 'intrapreneurship' was first coined by Gifford and Elizabeth Pinchot in 1978 [10]. Miller [11] gave new insights to the field of intrapreneurial research by highlighting the concept of entrepreneurship at the enterprise level. However, initial research on intrapreneurship was mostly focused on large firms as seen in the prominent works of Schollhammer [12], Norburn et al [13], Pinchot [10] and Rule and Irwin [14]. New light was shed on the intrapreneurial dynamics of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) by Carrie [15] who highlighted the differences in terms of characteristics between SMEs and large firms. Antoncic and Hisrich [16-17] then gave significant evidence to demonstrate that intrapreneurship has substantial impact on organizational and economic development regardless of the size of an enterprise.

2. Prospects of intrapreneurship in SMEs

SMEs are considered to be the power houses or shining stars of European businesses. However, Narula [18] claims that although SMEs continue to have the advantages of flexibility and rapid response, the traditional disadvantages due to size limitations still exist. Now with the current economic environment which is getting progressively more competitive, demanding and challenging, organizations especially SMEs are struggling with the management of certain complexities. The traits of modern society such as extensive globalization, revolutionary changes in technologies and standard of living act as catalysts in enhancing such complexities. For SMEs, there are the challenges of keeping up with a balance of innovation dynamics and efficient resource management as per market competition and then there is the need for creating an interesting and creative working environment. Managing this innovation challenge can be complex and iterative but it can be subsequently dealt with via prioritized vision and support from top-management leaders. For Hambrick and Mason [19] organizations are a reflection of their top managers and therefore Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) can address these organizational complexities in SMEs with the right strategies and approaches.

Rosenbusch et al [20] propose that developing and embracing an innovation orientation can help SMEs lead towards more ambitious goals, allocate resources in areas that can create more value and inspire a challenging firm culture. Intrapreneurship is one of the effective strategies for promoting efficient innovation orientation and thereby addressing the organizational complexities [21]. For SMEs, an innovation culture that can be attained through intrapreneurial initiatives can add significant competitive advantage to their organizational framework especially in the current economic environment where the demand for multiple technological competences and increased competition otherwise might make innovation quite challenging to keep up with.

3. Purpose of this research study

One of the key research gaps in the intrapreneurship literature is the role of a CEO in the process of managing intrapreneurial initiatives in SMEs. The intrapreneurial spirit of employees can be disoriented and damaged if there are any inconsistencies, sporadic enthusiasm or lack of commitment of the top management [3]. However, there are no substantial researches that clearly identify any distinctive profiles of a CEO in the process of intrapreneurship management. Therefore, it is difficult to assess the influence CEOs have in the process of initiating and developing intrapreneurship and intrapreneurs. This paper specifically addresses this gap and explores different management profiles of CEOs in SMEs and how the adoption of these profiles can influence the innovation dynamics of the overall organization. Identifying these distinctive profiles will help organizations understand and address different strategies for successful innovation practice and can serve as guidelines for different CEOs in implementing their management roles and in promoting, facilitating and leading innovations.

4. Research methodology

As part of our PhD research, we conducted an earlier study where we interviewed eleven CEOs from different industrial backgrounds in the UK. We utilized a qualitative investigation through semi-structured interviews with these CEOs and our results illustrated the significant role they play in the process of initiating, nurturing and managing various aspects of intrapreneurship. Our findings also indicated some distinct and consistent management approaches that CEOs tend to adopt while managing intrapreneurship and intrapreneurs and these profiles tend to vary from being an innovation facilitator to acting as the innovator themselves. This particular study is aiming to illustrate these intrapreneurial management profiles of CEOs from SMEs. Using our earlier study as a framework [22], we are now utilizing a case study methodology to illustrate different intrapreneurial management profiles of CEOs in SMEs. We are presenting three cases of successful intrapreneurship management which have been constructed from data derived from semi-structured interviews with the CEOs and different employees from these SMEs, website information, annual reports and site visits.

5. Intrapreneurial management profiles of CEOs

As discussed earlier, intrapreneurship adds a competitive advantage for SMEs to manage organizational complexities. However, the learning aspects of an intrapreneurial environment are influenced by the structure of the organization according to Lankinen et al [2] and intrapreneurs learn by significantly engaging with it and seeking information. The roles played by CEOs in any organization are vast in terms of their involvement with creativity and innovation and their influence in shaping this intrapreneurial environment. They can utilize their management strategies to create the right opportunities within this organizational environment for developing intrapreneurs and their ideas. Parker [23] questions if organizations can strategically groom prospective and future intrapreneurs. Facilitating and grooming intrapreneurs in any organization can be a challenging task for CEOs and one of the challenges pointed out by Pinchot [10] is that there are no set formulas for determining in advance who can or cannot be an intrapreneur. Every business needs the right people in the right jobs and successful ideas within an organization occur due to the tireless persistence and practical imagination of the intrapreneur [24]. Based on the organizational framework and innovation requirement, the management profiles of CEOs tend to vary. There are cases when the CEOs have to lead the innovations playing a dominant role as a leading intrapreneur and in other cases they guide the innovation process acting more as facilitators

for different intrapreneurs. In some cases, they tend to shuffle in and out of these roles. Carrie [15] supports this by indicating that in SMEs the owner-managers themselves can be the main inhibitors or best catalyst for intrapreneurship progression. Based on our investigation, we hereby propose three management profiles of CEOs associated with intrapreneurial activities in SMEs:

- Profile 1- The Facilitator
- Profile 2- The innovator
- Profile 3- The facilitator and innovator- a combination profile

CEOs occupy the most powerful position in a corporation adopting different management profiles but as Calabria [25] says becoming and staying powerful is no easy task. Yadav et al [26] argue that innovation is more than just product development and that CEOs in different firms must first learn to detect technological opportunities and then proceed towards refining and extending these products for deployment. Charan [27] believes that CEOs must have the capability to link business needs with different intrapreneur's natural talent. One of the benefits in SMEs according to Carrie [15] is that intrapreneurs have easier access to the top management and if the CEOs are acting as facilitators then this can be used as an efficient opportunity to identify their specific needs and aspirations and thereby motivating and guiding them. Mohanty [4] found intrapreneurship to be successful only when intrapreneurs are motivated to take action and value an innovation policy projecting the organization's culture and operating principles. Tappin and Cave [28] believe that CEOs are far-sighted leaders who have the ability to paint a sophisticated and compelling picture of the future for their employees, customers and shareholders.

5.1 The Facilitator

The first intrapreneurial management profile is that of a facilitator and CEOs with this profile are largely focused on creating an innovative environment to give intrapreneurs the right opportunities and platform to be creative. Although the CEO might participate with innovation their role predominantly is that of supervising innovators. Tappin and Cave [28] highlight that the best CEOs have the ability to simplify and prioritize different strategies thereby giving their teams and business an efficient clarity and this is something the facilitator specializes in. They have the capabilities to efficiently lead teams, build projects, divide tasks and facilitate the innovation. It must be noted that without the right people in the right jobs, a company cannot grow and thrive. For instance, Charan [27] highlights that if the person making crucial organizational decisions is not suited to the job, the quality of the decisions will be poor thereby leading the whole company to suffer. CEOs as influential facilitators will therefore use their time and efforts to place different intrapreneurs where their strengths can have the most impact within the innovation framework of the company.

As intrapreneurship facilitators, these CEOs will emphasize on building an organizational culture to allow and appreciate failures for encouraging intrapreneurs. They will make a conscious effort to reduce negative consequences of failure in intrapreneurial activities. CEOs with this management profile tend to be very approachable and encouraging. They have good communication skills which makes intrapreneurs trust them and confide in them with their ideas or projects. They have a certain degree of credibility which makes them efficient with networking and associating with other colleagues, employees or organizations.

5.1.1 Case profile of a Facilitator: Professor Nicola Spence, Chief Executive, Science City York

Science City York is a leading provider of business and innovation services with a successful history of over 14 years specializing in developing SMEs and new infrastructure to support the region's growth sectors, facilitating early stage businesses, helping them reach their

goals and leading events to support business and innovation. '*Creating value through innovation*' is their vision and true to this statement, Science City York led by Professor Nicola Spence as CEO has been transforming the innovation framework of several businesses. Prof Spence says "*There is a massive opportunity for York to be a city that leads Europe in certain technologies and certain business clusters*". With an exceptionally talented intrapreneurial team, this organization has utilized an innovative mentoring scheme to help several successful SMEs like Shakespeare Hydraulics Ltd, Kiroco, Comfizz, Uniqua, Little Barn bakery, Gordon Rhodes or Chillipeeps to name a few.

5.1.2 Prof Spence as the Facilitator- management profiled CEO

Prof Spence points out that as a small company everything they do is very visible and open and therefore she tries to lead by example through her commitments and priorities. She says "*innovation has always been a part of our priorities in terms of how we are doing things differently*". She feels that employees won't be encouraged to be innovative unless they see it as a priority and therefore as CEO she believes in encouraging innovation and rewarding and promoting its credentials and impact. She emphasizes this by saying "*You have to be focused on higher vision of what you are doing and then organize yourself so that you got people who are focused on delivering those things*". She found creative intrapreneurs to be chaotic with their innovation approach and delivery and getting them to change these approaches will only result in the loss of their creativity and originality. So as mentor she accepts their chaotic approach by managing their creative skills within a team. She adds "*You got to give the innovators the tools, technologies, gizmos or apparatus and whatever it is they need and you have to trust them.... ..and they got to deliver and once you are confident that they will deliver, you have to keep on giving them the state of the art equipments...then they will deliver tremendous value*". She highlights that her job as a leader here is also to challenge these innovators to deliver and a lot of it involves "*brokering the expectations of an innovator with the needs of a business*". She says "*We are very problem driven and opportunity driven*". She brings together small group of people with different skills to try and tackle a problem or innovation and instead of allocating specific roles, she encourages people to identify themselves as being interested in that team/project or any specific roles. This approach she confirms has worked quite well so far which is why they are quite committed to it.

Science City York is working across different sectors such as energy, health, environment, gaming and education but as a small company Prof Spence points out that they may not have all the skills and insights to solve different problems. Therefore with her unique mentoring approach she brings in a lot of external talents and specialist expertise to enhance their innovation process and thereby be transformative. As a facilitator, she adopts this open innovation scheme where she believes that innovative ideas can come from anywhere citing examples where crucial innovations in Science City York have actually sprung from ideas developed by their administration team. She is currently mentoring an open innovation forum in their website where they post different challenges and anybody can participate to put forward their innovative solutions. Prof Spence also helps in setting up different innovation training workshops to up-skill City of York Council, SMEs, universities and Third Sector organisations. Apart from running different yearly events to promote innovation and networking such as APptitude, Venturefest Yorkshire and Innovation Showcase, Prof Spence is also managing several projects to encourage innovative companies: SMEs or micro-businesses to gain investments for development and growth. '*Innovate York*' is one such example which collaborates with the City of York Council to create a catalyst of innovative changes in the city and thereby strengthens and enriches the whole York community. Three of her intrapreneurial team members are now participating in this particular project as key catalysts to deliver innovative services and instead of working with just the council employees, Prof Spence also tries to involve the whole community to break down barriers that traditionally hold back progress.

5.1.3 Adopting this management profile

Within an organization, Prof Spence believe that a CEO has to be someone that people would want to follow and go on a journey with and therefore her priorities are dedicated towards creating, supporting and driving a culture which will make people contribute to the common goals and mission of the organization. She believes that a CEO has to be authentic in terms of who they really are otherwise people won't believe and follow their credibility. She has wide experience in academia for over 20 years with an MSc and a PhD. This academic career she reveals had given her tremendous creative opportunities to design experiments or projects. Before Science City York, Prof Spence worked primarily as the chief scientist at the Food and Environment Research Agency (FERA) in Sand Hutton. Here as a leading researcher, she got several opportunities to manage scientific projects, programs and other scientists putting together multi disciplinary teams for delivering scientific solutions. Nicola credits her academic background with giving her some basic skills and experiences to understand many issues relevant to business. She feels that these experiences have given her good intuition to identify people who have the credibility to generate ideas and turn them into practical solutions and what technique or approach motivates these intrapreneurs. She adds *"You take with you all sort of skills and experiences while along the way.....now I can stand back and understand things from a technical, political and economic perspective and I wouldn't be able to do that if I hadn't actually had that experience"*.

5.2 The innovator

The second intrapreneurial management profile is that of a CEO who acts as a key innovator within the organization. The definition of an entrepreneur is someone who *"is an undertaker who notices and seizes opportunities; converts those opportunities into commercial ideas; adds value via processes, effort, capital, or capabilities; and confronts the risks of the competitive market to apply those ideas"* [29]. There are several organizations where an entrepreneur starts their own company and then takes the overall charge as the CEO with thorough knowledge of their business metrics. As Pinchot [10] says, people seem to become intrapreneurs when circumstances drive them to an act of will and decide to make a new business concept into a reality within their company. So, CEOs with this management profile act predominantly as the intrapreneur innovating for their company. Charan [27] strongly believes that because a CEO has the insights of how the organization really works and how to link people's actions and decisions to the right priorities and strategies, their active participation with innovation will add significant advantage to progress the level of intrapreneurship. So, the innovator here is highly active in leading the innovations, spotting break through opportunities and usually share many characteristics as that of an intrapreneur.

5.2.1 Case profile of an innovator: Christopher Ian Wilson, Chief Executive, Bransby Wilson Parking solutions

Bransby Wilson Parking solutions has for over 23 years specialized in car park management. Mr Christopher Ian Wilson is leading the innovation framework of this business as the Chief Executive. What is unique about their approach is that they deliver a personal service to every customer and as Mr Wilson says, *"We take a creative and entirely bespoke approach to every customer requirement - because every car park is different"*. Their approach involves helping customers plan, build, run and improve their car parks by considering layout, pricing structure or parking behaviour patterns. Bransby Wilson Parking solutions also provide technological solutions such as the installation of high quality Pay & Display machines, ANPR (Automatic Number Plate Recognition) technology, Pay on foot machines, Keyboard entry registration systems, pay by phone systems or Vehicle Registration Systems

(VRS). They also provide control and enforcement services via their associate company-Minster Baywatch. With their practice having a national coverage in the UK, Bransby Wilson Parking solutions is one of the leading businesses in its niche market with a range of loyal customers that involves organizations such as the NHS, the Rank group, W Boyes and Co Ltd to name a few.

5.2.2 Mr Wilson as the innovator- management profiled CEO

Mr Wilson has been leading the innovation for the company all these years bringing together people who need car park spaces with people who have spare places. The great thing about their business as Mr Wilson admits is that it is a new concept and after 23 years, there are still no set criteria to run it. He observes that they follow a flexible approach and says *“whatever the client wants, whatever the market wants, we could supply.....so, it is about changing our product around”*. For over 9 years he remarkably worked alone as the sole employee in his company doing everything in terms of marketing, sales, finance and innovation. As a small company he says growing, restructuring and prioritizing innovation can be a big challenge especially as they have no R&D team. He says *“Innovation has to be worked.....why we succeeded I believe is actually getting the right idea and it worked...It was the right research and straight away you got a great product, a great service that is different and people take notice of”*. He believes that innovation spread around individuals and the business as a whole. As a CEO what really excites Mr Wilson is new ways of doing things and having proactive consideration of what the market might require in 2 or 3 years time. Now as the leading innovator in the SME he reveals that he has to wear different hats several times a day signifying the management of different organizational roles. Mr Wilson uses his expertise and experience to individually review car parking operations and policies for his clients and in implementing appropriate car park management, space optimisation and revenue generation systems. His role as the CEO also involves auditing, designing and installing new signs, marketing and management of monthly permit systems. He also leads the process of designing and installing of Vehicle Registration Systems, Pay & Display machines and providing patrolled enforcement and control services.

5.2.3 Adopting this management profile

This company was established in 1991 by Mr Wilson when he saw an opportunity after finishing his university studies in Physical education and sport studies from York St John University. He says starting a company was never a plan but this business concept occurred when he observed car parking spaces being left vacant in different locations in York whereas there were other people desperately looking for parking spaces. He was quick to identify this niche market 23 years ago and embark on a sole trading business. Mr Wilson reveals that because the concept was so new and unique in the early 90s, he had a hard time convincing people about it. He adds, *“The concept was very different, not something easy for people to get their head around...If you say you are an accountant or a builder, people will know what you are but if you say you let parking spaces or you are a space manager, it was very difficult to explain to people”*. The initial phase he says wasn't easy as a novice entrepreneur as he faced a lot of challenges mostly due to his lack of business knowledge and expertise. He believes that as the business progresses, the CEO will eventually have the strength, knowledge and experiences which will count a lot in progressing the innovation track of the company. However, he feels that expecting the staff to have the same motivation and interest in the business as him is very rare as he feels that his connection with the company is very deep, having established and worked on its every aspect and dynamics for over 23 years now.

5.3 The Facilitator and innovator- a combination profile

The final management profile is a combination of a facilitator and innovator. CEOs with these profiles find a good balance with characteristics associated with facilitation of innovation and leading innovation. They have the capabilities and talent to adapt in this dynamically changing environment responding efficiently to the market and customer demands along with the needs of the business, adopting the appropriate role.

5.3.1 Case of a combined management profile-Facilitator and innovator: Methven Forbes, Chief Executive, Robin Lane Medical Centre

Methven Forbes, the Chief Executive from Robin Lane Medical Centre has been associated with this health firm for over 10 years. This organization has transformed from a small practice to an innovative health firm delivering services fit for modern 21st century lifestyles and Mr Forbes has played a pivotal role in shaping and facilitating this entire developmental process. As a medical centre, their vision isn't restricted to a traditional health and wellbeing approach but it also incorporates delivering proactive education programmes led by clinicians to prevent and delay the development of health conditions. Over the years he has managed to bring in several innovative services that breaks the traditional norms of an appointment based health service and this includes a smart phone app, an Urgent Care walk-In service, the Pudsey Wellbeing Centre, a community newspaper and a café house called 'CafeLux'. Mr Forbes tries to bind this health centre with different community projects and charitable trust events in order to promote a platform for wider innovation. With over 55 employees and more than 40 volunteers, this health centre situated in Pudsey, a small town of Leeds has made a remarkable name in the field of health innovation which is why it has recently been awarded the GP enterprise award 2013 for outstanding practice and for improving quality and production in health innovation.

5.3.2 Mr Forbes as the combined management profiled CEO

Being an innovative leader and facilitator can be a challenge and Mr Forbes feels that a CEO shouldn't be the only one doing all the creative thinking themselves but they must also ensure that there is enough capacity within an organization to innovate and implement different ideas. People within an organization can come up with different ideas but the role of an innovative CEO according to Mr Forbes is to facilitate genuine and practical ideas that will make a difference in the firm. He adds, "*I won't encourage everyone to be innovative ... I would encourage everyone to be participative and that's the critical thing*". He suggests that an organization should not be utterly wired only with creativity and innovation as nothing will get done and there is a risk that the organization and talent within will get fatigued and therefore collapse. Mr Forbes says, "*It is really important that people are encouraged to innovate and come up with new ways of doing things and it is equally important to give them the opportunity to implement them without any fear of punishment if it doesn't work....Failure is a good thing if it is within the right framework...that's how people learn*". As a facilitator, Mr Forbes applies a unique strategy of creating an eco-system that offers enough guidance, framework and security to develop ideas. Emphasizing this he adds, "*You can't prescribe innovation but you can prescribe an eco-system that allows innovation*". Within this eco-system he found that one can harness the natural strengths of everyone. He points out how by bringing stakeholders, health members, volunteers and community members together in the same innovation platform, binding and creating a strong network of talent has empowered their organization to explore new ideas and deliver extensive innovation services thereby enhancing overall performance and growth. According to him, CEOs who are doing the innovation have very strong personalities and as they are shakers and movers, they tend not to play by the rules. In Robin Lane medical Centre, Mr Forbes as an innovator has

helped the organization evolve and grow. For instance, he has utilized his visionary leadership skills and global perspectives to create a smart phone app that allows patients to book appointments, order prescriptions, send secure text messages to clinicians and set appointment reminders. He also initiated the development of a café house and local community newspaper which he believes is the heart and soul of the well being centre.

5.3.3 Adopting this management profile

Mr Forbes highlights that building a management profile is a gradual process of learning from different experiences and creating a mental portfolio with information of what works and what doesn't. He firmly believes that CEOs who have experiences with different positions and roles are much more accommodating and challenging in terms of transformation and thinking differently. Reflecting on his background, Mr Forbes emphasizes how his upbringing in an impoverished city of Dundee, amidst a family of labourers, tradesmen, carpenters and bakers had a major influence on his work ethics now. Mr Forbes admits that he has never been quite bright at school with no consistent record of good grades. However, when he was 17 he got an opportunity to work for a fading memorabilia shop that was on the verge of collapse with the owner having run out of options for creativity and new innovative ideas. Mr Forbes used this opportunity to bring in several new innovative changes in terms of stock control, merchandising and design and it transformed the entire business around in just over a year impressively paving way for further business expansion. Mr Forbes then moved to Cornwall where he worked for a bus company mostly in the administration aspects adding creative elements to the operational designs and here he was supervised and trained by a national award winning Director which again had a massive impact on his personality. He then worked for the NHS as a practice manager in a small rural health centre in Cornwall and this is where he credits to have got managerial opportunities to build up his executive profile characteristics. Working with different teams, national leaders, politicians or stakeholder organizations Mr Forbes gradually developed those practical skills required in an Executive role such as pitching for finances, planning and designing projects or managing staff.

6. Conclusion

Intrapreneurship in today's economic environment can be used as an effective organizational strategy to enhance the innovation progression in any organization regardless of their size. It is an established field of organizational management research with an impressive history of around 25 years. Although it is frequently compared with entrepreneurship, its position as a distinct organizational concept is clearly documented in literature. This paper explores one of the key research gaps, the intrapreneurial management profiles of CEOs from SMEs and their impact in the organizational innovation dynamics. The management profile of a CEO tends to be either that of a lead innovator or the facilitator of intrapreneurship and in some cases, a combination of both. This paper presents case studies of three successful SMEs from the UK and highlights their varying CEO profiles. The benefits that firms can derive from intrapreneurship are tremendous and especially in a competitive and challenging economic environment, the adoption and practice of intrapreneurial initiatives should be highly encouraged by CEOs today to attain a competitive advantage.

Disclaimer

All participants in this research signed a document confirming that they understood the objectives of the research and that information gained from the interviews could be used for any publications.

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