PROMOTING INNOVATION IN CORPORATE PROJECTS THROUGH LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

By

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Certificate of Authorship / Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not been previously submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree.

I also certify that the thesis is written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of this thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of the candidate

_____

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Abstract

Despite innovation being a highly researched topic and organisations embracing innovation as a part of their strategic fabric, achieving or replicating successful innovation remains largely elusive. While the literature on this topic identifies a rich set of factors that aid innovation - outlining successful innovation scenarios in case studies - it also reflects a gap in our understanding of how to replicate successful innovation. In an attempt to bridge this gap, the research outlined in this dissertation focuses on addressing the issue of a firm's capability with respect to continuous innovation, particularly in a project environment. As the knowledge sought is social in nature, the research was located within the constructionist paradigm and utilised an action research methodology. As such, the environment in which innovation is achieved and replicated is assumed to be an inter-subjectively realised social phenomenon.

The research was conducted within the three corporate projects in TNC[1], a hi-tech multinational corporation. In two of these projects successive innovative outcomes were achieved and this was shown to be primarily as a result of particular leadership practices embedded in the project environment. These practices underpinned the creation of a social environment (or project-culture) in which the team members were able to create innovative solutions to challenging assignments. In particular, such practices promoted holistic understanding of issues, encouraged calculated risk, managed delivery pressures, and facilitated cross-functional collaboration. Significantly the cultural *milieu* in which successive innovative project outcomes were achieved was very different to that of the parent organisation. The main conclusion drawn from this research is that the role of 'local leadership' (middle, and project, management) in an organisation's capacity to innovate continuously is more important than is reflected in the literature. In particular, the nature of the leadership practices that inform innovative action within the corporate project environment requires further research and scrutiny.

[1] The code name TNC is used throughout this report to preserve the identity of the actual corporation.