

**INNOVATION AND BUSINESS SUCCESS IN NIGERIA: FROM INTUITION TO PROCESS  
MANAGEMENT**

**Dugguh, Stephen I.**

Center for Entrepreneurship and Service Learning, Federal University, Nigeria

[sdugguh@yahoo.com](mailto:sdugguh@yahoo.com)

**Abstract**

*Many businesses fail in Nigeria due largely to the inability of the owners to innovate and to shift from intuitive ways of operating a business to process management and business process orientation. That is where the problem of this paper lies. Therefore, the objective of the paper is to give a theoretical exposition of the issues involved in innovation and to determine whether innovation and creativity influence business success, process management and business process orientation. Based on Kline-Linked model, Abrams and Hippel's research findings, relevant literature was reviewed on innovation, business success, intuition, process management and business process orientation. Literature findings indicate that innovation and creativity has the capacity to influence business performance and success especially in a developing economy like Nigeria. The paper recommends improved quality of education at all levels, training in innovation and creativity, adequate funding of research and development programs, conducive environment for innovation, encouraging a culture of innovation and creativity, benchmarking countries that ranked high on Global Innovation Index, building of a strong institutional structure for innovation and so on. By drawing a theoretical causal relationship between innovation, process management and success in the Nigerian business environment, the paper contributes to knowledge.*

*Keywords: Innovation, Business Success, Intuition, Process Management, Nigeria*

**INTRODUCTION**

The basis of all businesses is meeting needs and wants of customers. A business may come up with a wonderful new product, or create a fantastic new service, but if it does not satisfy some real and important need or desire, people will not buy it and subsequently and inevitably, the business will fail. In most cases, business ideas were carried out base on trial and error, incomplete guidelines or rules of thumbs with the hope that they may lead to business performance and success with time if it pleases the ancestors and gods of the land. There is no clear path, since the businessman must create one. Finding an appropriate success path,

according to Keratko, Morris and Collins (2011) is easier if the business manager approaches innovation as a logical process, and then utilizes some of the available innovative problem-solving techniques as he moves through the process.

Recent research studies by Abrams (2012) indicate that the most exciting and often most risky, entrepreneurial companies are innovative in nature. They bring something to the market that either is new or significantly alters and improves on the existing offering. This may require building on an existing product or service or improving on it or finding a new use for it. Research also indicates that of all the elements necessary for a successful business, the individual initiative seems the most critical. Without the visionary leadership and persistence demonstrated by this individual, little would be accomplished. Someone must come up with a concept, vision or dream and the dream must be translated into products and processes within a business context. This concept must be adapted to reflect the realities encountered within the internal and external environment and must persevere in overcoming both the normal and the arbitrary hurdles that are thrown into their paths.

The success stories of global companies and successful entrepreneurs can be traced to their investment in innovation Google's Larry Page and Sergey Brin came up with more effective search engines that researchers found more reliable. Today, Google has become a household name. The iPod has made it possible to walk around with 10,000 songs available at all times. The iPod for example represents a substantially improved, enjoyable, creative and instinctive way to meet a long standing need for music-on-demand. However, in Nigeria, among the factors that contribute to business failures is the inability of Nigerian businessman and entrepreneurs to be innovative, creative and to adapt process management to accomplish goals. All forms of business organisations need innovative and creative ideas to stay in business.

## **OBJECTIVE**

Based on the preceding, the objective of the study is to determine and assess innovation as a prime factor responsible for business success and process management in a competitive business environment and a growing economy like Nigeria. The lack of understanding of the issue involved in innovation, creativity, business success, process management and business process orientation may hinder many businesses from being successful to justify their investments and accomplish the desired business goals.

## **CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVES**

A number of concepts need some clarifications. It includes: Innovation, business success, intuition, process management and business process orientation.

## Innovation

The Latin word 'innovare' meaning 'to make something new' is what is translated to mean innovation. A number of definitions are put forward to explain what innovation means. For example, Drucker (1985) stated that innovation is the specific tool of businessman/entrepreneurs, the means by which they exploit change as an opportunity for a different business or service. It is capable of being learned and capable of being practiced. Branson (1998) considers innovative business as one which lives breathes 'outside the box'. According to him, innovation is not just good ideas. It is a combination of good ideas, motivated staff and an instinctive understanding of what customers of the business want and need. Davila et al (2000) assert that innovation is the application of better solutions that meet new requirements, inarticulate needs, or existing market needs. It can also be defined as something original and as consequence, new that 'breaks into' the market or into society. While something novel is often described as an innovation, in management and other social science-related disciplines, it is generally considered as a process that brings together various novel ideas in a way that they have an impact on society. This is accomplished through more effective products, processes, services, technologies or ideas that are readily available to markets, governments and society.

Innovation differs from invention in that; it refers to the use of better, and as a result, novel idea or method, whereas invention refers more directly to the creation of the idea or method itself. Companies cannot grow through cost reduction and reengineering alone. Innovation is the key in providing aggressive top line growth, and for increasing bottom line results. Therefore, Innovation is more than simply coming up with good ideas. It is the process of growing them into practical use. (Hargadon, 2003). Definitions of innovation may differ in wordings, but they all stress the need to complete the development and exploitation aspects of new knowledge, not just its invention- the first step in widespread and effective use. Further research indicates that innovative programmes are most frequently driven by:

- a. Improved quality
- b. Creation of new markets
- c. Improved production process
- d. Reduced labour costs
- e. Extension of product range
- f. Reduced environmental damage
- g. Replacement of products or services
- h. Reduced energy consumption
- i. Conformance to regulations

## Innovation Process

Innovation as a process requires turning ideas into reality and capturing value from them. Successful process innovation is in four stages. According to Tidd & Bessant (2013), these stages are:

*Search:* This involves finding opportunities for innovation- bringing new ideas to the system. These ideas may come from research and development, copying, market signals, regulations, competitor's behaviour and so on. The main issue here is how to organize an effective search process to ensure a steady flow of genetic variety which gives a better chance of surviving and thriving in business in the face of environmental constraints.

*Select:* Generating variety of ideas is not enough. Managers need to select from a set of opinions the variants most likely to help grow and develop. This requires some form of strategic choice out of all the things the businessman could do, what is going to do and why? This stage takes into account some form of competitive differentiation, that is, which choice may give the best chance of standing out from the crowd and previous capabilities that can be built on.

*Implementation:* Generating ideas and selecting still leaves the problem of actually making it happen. That is, committing scarce resources and energies to doing something different. Implementation involves channelling or converting ideas into reality. It is essentially a task of managing a growing commitment of resources, time, energy, money, materials and mobilizing knowledge of different kinds against the background of uncertainty. Here businesses do take calculated risk rather than random throws of the dice or through intuitive approach with the hope that it will deliver the calculated value which exceeds or at least equals what we put into it.

*Capture:* This stage involves determining how to get the benefits from innovation. The business needs to consider the challenge of capturing value from its innovative efforts- justifying efforts in commercial terms or in terms of creating social value. It also involves the determination of how to protect the gain from appropriation by others, how to learn from the experience and capture useful learning about how to improve the innovation process in the future.

How to make this simple process work has been the concern of entrepreneurs and business practitioners, the world over. And this is particularly disturbing in Nigerian business environment where majority of businesses are managed on trial and error, intuitive methods or rule of thumb approach. Today however, the academic community especially is working on trying to understand in a systematic way about the core process and the conditions under which the innovation process is likely to succeed and thus promote business performance.

## Some important aspects of innovation

A striking point about innovation is its source- what gives it the desired strength. Hippel (1988) through various researches found a number of useful sources of innovation to include users

(customers), suppliers and manufacturers. According to him, this involves categorizing companies and individuals in terms of functional relationship through which they derive benefits from a given product, process or service innovation. Drucker (1985) identified the following seven (7) sources of innovation: the unexpected, incongruities (conflicts between opposing functions, requirements or values), process needs (necessity), industry and market structure, local and global demographics, changes in customer perception and new knowledge. The first four sources lie within the company while the last three lie outside the company and are capable of creating new products and new markets. These factors clearly provide direction for some key changes and awareness that may lead to innovation. For this study, the aspects of innovation explored by Tidd & Bessant (2013) are useful. These are: incremental innovation, platform innovation, discontinuous innovation and component/architecture innovation.

### ***Incremental Innovation***

This involves 'doing what we do but better' and requires increasing the degree of novelty involved in different places across the innovation space. Consider an innovation in a car. It may require updating the styling on the car and not coming up with a completely new one or increasing the speed and accuracy of a lathe instead of replacing it with a computer-controlled laser forming process. There are degrees of novelty in the above examples running from minor incremental improvement through to radical changes which may transform the way we think about and use them. Sometimes these changes are common to a particular sector or activity, but sometimes they are so radical and far-reaching that they change the basis of society. It is a fact that innovation may involve a discontinuous shift, most of the time it takes place in incremental fashion.

Essentially this is a product/process improvement along the lines of 'doing what we do, but better'. Hollander (1965) stated that the cumulative gains in efficiency are often greater over time than those which come from occasional radical changes. After all, 'disruptive or new to the world innovations' constitute only 6 percent to 10 percent of all projects labelled innovation. (Ettlie, 1999). It is on record that the Japanese improvement in quality and productivity over the years is as a result of sustained incremental change or innovation. (Imai, 1987)

### ***Platform Innovation***

One way in which the incremental innovation approach can be harnessed to good effect is through the concept of platforms (families). Platform innovation is one of the fundamental innovations. Such innovations normally are touching pads for a new industry. Platform innovations include personal computers, cell phones, digital printers, data bases, drug delivery

services and so on. Platform innovations launch industries and change ways of life. Platforms and families are powerful ways for companies to recoup their high initial investments in research and development by deploying the technology across a number of markets fields. Hamel (2006) feels that the concept of total quality management is essentially a paradigm innovation which represents concepts which can be shaped and stretched to fit a variety of different contexts that are in line with platform innovations.

### ***Discontinuous Innovation***

The findings of Hippel's research also indicated that most of the time, innovation takes place within a set of rules which are clearly understood, and involves players trying to innovate by doing what they have been doing but better. The rules of the game are accepted and do not change. However, something happens which dislocates this framework and changes the rules of the game. These are not every day events, but have the capacity to redefine the space and boundary conditions thereby opening up new opportunities and challenging existing players to reframe what they are doing in the light of new conditions.

Discontinuous innovation is a central theme in Schumpeter's original theory of innovation which he defined in terms of 'creative destruction'. (Schumpeter, 1950 and Foster & Kaplan, 2002). This type of change can come through the emergence of a new technology or it can come through the emergence of completely new market with new characteristics and expectations. This aspect of innovation can also come about by reforming the way we think about an industry-changing the dominant business model (the rules of the game). The new way of framing the business has the power of opening up new trajectories along which all sorts of innovations begin to occur. Triggers or sources of discontinuous innovation include: the emergence of new markets, technology, political order, deregulation, unthinkable events, business model, architectural designs, shift in techno-economic paradigms and so on.

### ***Component and Architecture Innovation***

Innovation can be viewed from the opportunities that are opened up through the components within the larger systems. In this case, innovations are thought of as changing things at the level of components or those which involve change in a whole system. It should be noted that innovation after all, is about knowledge- creating new possibilities through combining different knowledge sets. Such knowledge may already exist in our experience, result from a process of search or be in explicit form and codified in such a way that others can assess it, discuss it, transfer it, etc or it can be in tacit form. (Polanyi, 1967). It must however be noted that the process of knitting these different knowledge sets together in a successful innovation is one which takes place under highly uncertain business conditions.

Innovation and creativity flourish when they are backed up by the actions and attitudes of the leaders and managers of the business. The actions provide the foundations that enable creative and innovative efforts of employees. Some of these actions according to Fry, Stoner & Hattwick (1998) are:

- a. Encouraging risk and experimentation
- b. Tolerating and learning from mistakes
- c. Embracing diversity and differences
- d. Promoting boundary less behaviour
- e. Maintaining close contact with customers
- f. Investing in training

### **THEORETICAL NEXUS**

Finding an innovative process that would enhance business success requires an effective model or framework. The paper considers the Kline-Linked model (Kline Model) of innovation which places emphasis on potential market needs as drivers of the innovation process and described the complex and often interactive feedback loops between marketing, designs, manufacturing and so on. In this model, Kline (1985) describes the complexities in the innovation process. He acknowledges the fact that new knowledge is not necessarily the driver for innovation. Instead, the process begins with the identification of an unfilled market need. This drives research and design, then redesign and production and finally marketing with complex feedback between all this stages. There are also feedback loops with the organisation's and the world's stored base of knowledge, with basic research conducted or commissioned as necessary to fill in gaps. Caraca, Bengt-Ake & Sandro (2009) corroborate by linking this model to linear theory of innovation when they state that basic research leads to applied development, then engineering, then manufacturing and finally marketing and distribution process.

### **Intuition: Trial and error approach to business**

Business success is not an intuitive activity- using or basing on what one feels to be true even without conscious reasoning. It is the ability to acquire knowledge without reference and/or the use of reason. It is the rule of thumb or intuitive approach to (business) issues or decisions. Intuition is conceived as a kind of inner perception, sometime regarded as real lucidity or understanding. The process of intuition remains largely unknown psychologically, but they are however opposed to the views of rationality. Intuition provides views, understanding, judgments, or beliefs that we cannot in every case empirically verify or rationality justify. Jung



(1971) refers to intuition as 'irrational function' that is, the perception via the unconscious. Therefore, business strategies must be fashioned out rationally based on innovation and managed by a process to accomplish positive results and business success.

### **Business Success in Nigeria**

To be a successful business, all the participants in the business- owners, managers and other stakeholders must have their various needs or claims satisfied. Fry, Stoner & Hattwick (1998) state a number of indicators of success to include financial performance, customer needs and values, quality of products and services, innovation and creativity, and employee commitment. Business success is multidimensional in nature and may take into account several factors.

### ***Factors responsible for business success***

A healthy business, according to Fry, Stoner & Hattwick is the ability of a business to excel over a long period of time. If a business makes a lot of money in the short run but fails far short of its objective later in the course of operation, it is not a successful business. Further a business that makes a lot financial returns but at the expenses of low morale, uncommitted employees, shoddy products, bad services, or unethical behaviour should not be considered a successful business (Dugguh, 2005). Recently Abrams provided the following business success factors for business owners to consider in their business decisions:

*Underserved or new market:* many businesses succeed by bringing a proven product or service to a market for which there is greater demand than competitors can currently satisfy. This is done by establishing a location that has been overlooked by competitors or identifying a market that has not yet been served or dominated by competitors. These can be new markets, insufficient competitors in a new geographical location or when companies abandon or neglect smaller portion of their current customer base. In some cases, an innovative company may lead the way and others follow once the innovator has built or created customer demand. This is often called 'me-too' business that can achieve remarkable success.

*Lower price:* customers are often tempted by lower prices (lower cost options), and being a low-cost leader is a time-honoured strategy for business success. However, this can only be made possible if the business has some strategic advantages like unique production or distribution method, secret supply sources, or arrangements with particular partners that make costs consistently lower. Lower price strategy can only be attained in the short-run. This is because if the only key differentiation is the provision of cheap product or services, another company can also lower prices thereby 'beating you at your own game'.

*Higher quality:* innovation often comes in the form of higher quality. A business may recognize an opportunity because of lack of high quality offerings in a robust market, or may notice



customers expressing dissatisfaction with current options. Under such situation, a business that offers high quality product or service is more likely to succeed than one that offers low quality product or service to customers.

*Service:* a number of highly successful companies seized business opportunities that are made possible by the opportunity in the environment to provide better service than competitors. Better service means giving customers more personal attention: taking care of customers faster, quick response to customer complaints, return policy, dedicated sales staff etc.

*Convenience:* making a product or service in a more convenient way for customers can create a viable business success. Convenience has the potentials to attract and retain more customers. Convenience products are generally small, rather quickly consumed and bought frequently. They are branded, staple in nature, standardized and generally be substituted. Customers expect and demand that convenience products should be nearby and immediate availability heavily influence which brand and businessman and location are chosen. The price per unit of a convenience product is generally low. Examples of convenience products include bread, milk, toothpaste and brush, battery, light bulb, under wears and so on.

*New delivery system or distribution channel:* some successful companies have been founded by creating or using new sales channels. It is on record that Amazon.com pioneered the possibilities of new delivery system and distribution in the internet as a sales channel for books, academic journals etc and today Amazon.com is a successful company in books distribution and is acclaimed the 'world's largest bookstore'.

*Increased integration:* integration is a situation where a company controls more steps in the design, production, and sale of its product or service rather than relying on outside supplies. This can create a competitive advantage because it gives the company more power to oversee the quality at every stage of the production process. To gain competitive advantage based on quality, vertical integration is often advocated.

In addition, businesses are highly successful when they possess the following characteristics: compelling, executable business idea, large market and potential for high or rapid growth, building a business in a growing industry, creating a business and not just a product, building a strong team and having original ideas but not completely new ones. When these factors are linked to innovation, process management and business process orientation, the success of the business is enhanced.

## **Process Management**

Simply put, process management is the application of knowledge, skills, tools, techniques and systems to define, visualize, measure, control, report and improve processes with the goal to

meet customer requirements profitably. The objective of process management is to clearly identify and document all steps and action taken to complete a process or work flow. It involves documenting the current process, evaluating time and level of effort as well as analysis of efficiency, bottlenecks, and overall process costs as opposed to the trial and error approach which does not for example, document any process. The benefits of process management cannot be underestimated. For instance, the ISO 9001 (clause 0.2 of ISO 9001:2000) emphasized that:

process management promotes the adoption of a process approach when developing, implementing and improving the effectiveness of a quality management system, to enhance customer satisfaction by meeting customer requirements.

Closely related to process management is business process orientation. Basing his study on the previous work of researchers like Walton (1986), Drucker (1985), Davenport (1993) on business process orientation, Koblacher (2009) suggests that companies could enhance their overall performance by adopting a 'process view' of the organisation. Empirical study by McCormack (2000) to explore the relationship between business process orientation and enhanced business performance indicated that business process orientation is critical in reducing conflict and encouraging greater connectedness within an organisation while improving business performance. Another study by Kohlacher (2009) reveals that business process orientation is positively associated with customer satisfaction, product quality, delivery speed and time-to-market speed. Building on this concept requires a new approach and a new way of thinking about the organisation which will result in dramatic business performance improvements. Companies that have built or centered on business process orientation like Texas Instruments have reported receiving improved business performance within the organisation. (Hammer, 1999 & 2001)

### **Global Innovation Index**

At this juncture, it is important to acknowledge the top 10 countries that make up the list of the most innovative countries of the world with the hope that other nations would benchmark and benefit from their strategic ideas regarding innovation and creativity. These countries, in a descending order, are: Switzerland, Sweden, U.K, Netherlands, USA, Finland, Hong Kong, Singapore, Denmark and Ireland. The factors used for the ranking include input and output of countries for the ranking.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

There should be improved quality of education at all levels. This will foster education, attract talents and also create talents for innovation and successful business. Other developing

countries like China, Republic of Moldova, Indian, Uganda, Jordan, Malaysia, Senegal, Hungary, Ghana, Costa Rica and so on, have invested in education and today, the quality of education and by extension, innovation has significantly improved for better. With improved education, talents could also be created. In Africa however, only Mauritius (#53), South Africa (#58) and Tunisia (#70) were able to make up the list of 142 countries on Global Innovation Index, 2013. In addition, innovation and creativity training should be given by innovation experts in dynamic workshop settings, laboratories and so on. Currently, Nigeria has 129 universities, 100 polytechnics and 85 colleges of education and many secondary as well as primary schools. However, she spends only 0.85 percent of the Gross National Income on education. This is grossly inadequate to attract innovative talents.

Government, the organised private sector and individuals should provide enough funds for research and development (R&D). Evidence abounds to suggest that developed countries invest more in R&D and are more innovative, creative and competitive globally. Countries like Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRICs) are funding R&D projects with positive results.

A climate of investment around innovation should be nurtured. A culture of venture and risk capital to help local investors should be encouraged. In addition, a culture of 'mindset' or awareness creation on innovation, business success and process management should also be encouraged as well as tackling security challenges like the Boko Haram terrorists, frequent kidnapping of highly placed citizens, unending political upheavals including harassment of opposition parties that are currently going on and so on in some part of Nigeria etc. These challenges militate against creativity and innovation in Nigeria and have adverse effects on business performance and success.

Government should build a strong and dynamic institutional structure of innovation that should not be neglected and discarded. Policies that foster and promote innovation should be made and priority accorded areas that will yield sustainable growth that would address the economic, environmental as well as societal issues that confront the Nigerian nation. Areas of innovation abound in education, the environment, food, health, energy, information technologies and transportation.

## **CONCLUSION**

Given the quality of efficiency, quality of life and productive growth, innovation is a key factor in society and economy. Considering the key factors responsible for business growth like the underserved markets, low price, high quality, service, increased integration and so on, it becomes imperative for businessmen and entrepreneurs to shift from trial and error (the rule of thumb approach) to a more scientific process in business operations. The paper considers in

detail issues that are involved in innovation, drivers of innovation, innovation process, business success factors and indicators, intuitive behaviour and shows how process management and business process performance may contribute to business innovation and creativity in the Nigerian context.

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