



Educating Innovation Managers - The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same

Andres Fortino

Polytechnic University

Book Review: John Ettlie, *Managing Innovation*, Second Edition, Elsevier 2006, and Shlomo Maital and D. V. R. Seshadri, *Innovation Management: Strategies, Concepts & Tools for Growth and Profit*, Sage India 2006.

When a well respected faculty colleague retired recently he bequeathed to me a book by James Bright [1], a Harvard Business School professor. The title made me curious: *Research, Development and Technological Innovation*, and the date was intriguing: 1964. I was surprised (perhaps I should not have been) to see that the very issues we grapple with today in managing innovation have been with us since the dawn of the electronic age. The wonder was that the formulation of the problems and the ways to go about solving them were essentially the same as that tackled by Maital and Ettlie in their more recent books. Although technology is constantly changing, the issues and the underlying principles for managing it do not seem to. I would not be surprised if the prototypical innovator in the Western tradition, Odysseus himself, struggled with these same issues as he went about inventing in the dawn of history.

Bright's reason for writing his book was compelling: "It seemed to me that the business problem was sharply defined: The rate of technological change was accelerating. The impact of technological advances was in many cases extremely severe and disrupting. At the same time it offered major opportunities. Was conventional business school training adequate for this environment? I believed that it was not. One thing we needed, I thought, was an explicit study on the topic of technological change."

Everything changes, everything stays the same. As technology management educators we are confronted with the same issues. And we continue to need good tools to fulfill our educational task. Maital and Eittle take up that challenge today with gusto, and to good effect. They bring us up to date with modern methods and models for managing innovation and solving Bright's and Odysseus age-old challenge.

Maital and his colleague Seshadri have written a multifunction book. It speaks primarily to the students of innovation, but it has enough materials and is an easy read for the practitioner. I particularly enjoyed the reporting style of staking out the field in their first section – the “who”, the “why” and the “how”. It motivates the reader to dig further and proceed into the more arcane sections of the book. The chapters have two excellent vehicles for provoking thoughtful reflection: numerous cases studies and action learning modules. The case studies vary in length. Some are snippets highlighting a thought or an idea, others and more detailed to back up a principle.

The action learning modules are thought provoking. They may be used by educators as assignments, but they are so disguised that the industry reader can muse on the answer without thinking of it is “homework”. A clever approach. I found myself intrigued and following through on the action learning questions in many cases. They make for useful self-reflection.

Another clever construction of Maital’s is the recognition of a product development algebra, found in chapter 3. The use of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division on the set of product features is only missing a formal definition of an associative and a commutative property for their construct to fit the definition of an algebra [2]. Even so it works and is in itself very innovative.

The Maital book also constantly brings the reader back to the purpose of innovation: making the firm profitable and its business sustainable. Although we recognize that enterprises that constantly bring out new products ultimately change the world we live in and benefit humanity, Maital and Seshadri focus on firm performance and leave the rest to the reader.

Ettlie on the other hand takes a more traditional approach. He delivers a book for the student of innovation that is more linear and more structured. The case studies are traditional and come at the end of chapters, a helpful format for educators to pick and choose cases for assignments. The reference lists at the end of each chapter are also extensive and welcomed, especially for graduate students. This book is also very accessible to first time students picking up the subject of innovation. This second book would work better as an undergraduate text than the first.

The more international flavor of Maital’s book reflects the authors’ international backgrounds. It seems to me the Ettlie book was too US centric, and although it would play well with US students, I must agree with Friedman [3] that the world is flat. US students desperately need their dose of globalism, especially in such a vital topic as innovation, to help them compete internationally. Thus Maital’s book is the better choice for students around the world.

I also found that the reader could benefit from a deeper coverage of Schumpeter [4] and the theory of creative destruction that so well describes the process of value creation and destruction. This is specially important since the topic has been further well developed by modern authors such as Christiansen [5] and Moore [6].

Both books are welcomed additions to the tools available to technology management educators needed to cover the timely and important topic of innovation management.

References:

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2. Algebras, Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Algebras#Groups>
3. Friedman, T. L. (2005), *The World is Flat*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
4. Schumpeter, J.A. (1976), *Capitalism Socialism and Democracy*, HarperCollins.
5. Christiansen, C. M., *The Innovator's Dilemma: When New Technologies Cause Great Firms To Fail*. Boston, MA. Harvard Business School Press.
6. Moore, G. (2002), *Crossing the Chasm*, HarperCollins.

