

WHO IS YOUR CHAMPION? ATTRIBUTES OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHAMPIONS WHO TRANSFORM ORGANIZATIONS THROUGH INNOVATION

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ABSTRACT

Innovation can be used as a tool for competitive advantage within organizations. It is, however, often difficult to gain momentum and support for new innovations. Managers seeking to develop new innovations and to diffuse them through their organization should seek innovation champions to lead their cause. A rapid evidence assessment and synthesis of literature revealed five core attributes that innovation champions must possess before and after the decision stage of Rogers' (1983) Diffusion of Innovations theory. These include: networking and relationship development, persistence, knowledge of champion, political savvy, and enthusiastic support. These attributes are examined and interpreted using a theoretical lens of transformational leadership. Implications to managers from this research are the ability to use the attributes of innovation champions and determine which leaders would be appropriate to champion innovations.

INTRODUCTION

Diffusion of innovations in organizations is a concern for many managers seeking to effectively diffuse new ideas and innovations (Rogers, 2003). Innovation is critical for organizations to remain competitive and productive (Howell, 2005). Adoption of new innovations is often a challenge for organizations, even though that innovation may have obvious advantages (Rogers, 1983). Diffusion of innovation takes time, even years, and so leading the process in the most efficient and effective manner possible is advantageous for organizations. The importance of innovation champions is recognized, yet they have received relatively little systematic attention (Jenssen & Jørgensen, 2004). Managers understand the need for innovation diffusion, however more research is needed to understand the leadership attributes required of champions that will allow them to implement diffusions of innovation (Mansfeld, Holze, & Gemunden, 2010). Champions of innovation diffusion should be purposefully supported as part of the innovation process in order to effectively diffuse innovations (Howell, 2005). Determining the attributes of leaders that champion organizational innovation diffusion will allow managers to effectively recruit the individuals needed to promote innovation.

Innovation champions are managers who lead and sponsor innovation activities in organizations (Schon, 1963). Diffusion of innovations is the process of communicating innovation through certain social channels within an organization (Rogers, 2003). Although some might think that innovations diffuse quickly and on their own, due to their unique nature, innovations often take

time to be implemented and require champions for their diffusion (Rogers, 1983). According to Rogers (1983), opinion leaders and change agents are leaders and members that take on the role of championing diffusion of innovations. The process of diffusion of innovation takes place in various stages, as noted by Rogers (1983). These stages are: (1) Knowledge, (2) Persuasion, (3) Decision, (4) Implementation, and (5) Confirmation. Determining the attributes of leaders who champion innovation diffusion before and after the decision stage will be the focus of this study. The choice to explore attributes of champions before and after the decision stage was because this is the stage of innovation diffusion where the innovation is either adopted or rejected (Rogers, 1983). Therefore, this research attempts to explore the attributes of champions leading to the adoption of an innovation, and the attributes of champions after an innovation has been adopted.

Using a theoretical lens of transformational leadership, this research will explore the attributes of innovation champions in the innovation diffusion process. This research will allow managers to understand the specific leadership attributes that will develop innovation champions who lead effective innovation diffusion. This is relevant to management theory as it expands the literature on transformational leadership and innovation theories. The significance of this research is to managers seeking to diffuse innovation throughout their organizations, so they can determine what attributes of leadership the innovation champion should possess. Knowing these attributes will then allow managers to put the right leaders in place depending on the stage of innovation diffusion.

This research explores the question: What are the attributes of innovation champions before and after the decision stage of innovation diffusion?

LITERATURE BACKGROUND

The following section will offer a background on the literature relevant to the topics central to this paper. First, a review of innovation management will be presented. Next a background on diffusions of innovation theory will be presented. Then, a background on the concept of innovation champions is offered. Finally, a description of the theoretical lens of transformational leadership, through which this research is viewed, is put forward.

Innovation

Innovation is crucial if an organization is to continue to be dynamic and competitive in their industry. Innovation can be considered as the “adoption of an internally generated or purchased device, system, policy, program, process, product, or service that is new to the adopting organization” (Damanpour, 1991, p. 556). Innovation can occur in various aspects of organizational life. This includes innovation that is both “administrative and technical, product and process, and radical and incremental” (Daft, 1978; Uzokurt, Kumar, & Ensari, 2013). Innovation is important to firms seeking to gain an advantage, as well as maintain their creative

edge. For innovations to be brought to life in organizations, innovation champions must be supported and fixed as a part of the organization structure and strategy (Howell, 2005).

Diffusion of innovations

Diffusion of innovations is important to managers because getting a new idea or innovation adopted by an organization can be very difficult (Rogers, 1983). In fact, it can sometimes take years for innovations to be adopted. Diffusion of innovation theory involves the innovation process and diffusion, where “(1) an innovation (2) is communicated through certain channels (3) over time (4) among the members of a social system” (Rogers, 2003, p. 990). The characteristics of innovation determine how quickly innovations are spread and adopted (Rogers, 2003). Therefore, new ideas are diffused through four elements of “(1) innovation, (2) communication channels, (3) time, and (4) the social system” (Rogers, 2003, p. 990). Innovations, by nature, have a certain uncertainty to them, as an employee may express their unsureness and look for support from leadership (Rogers, 2003).

Rogers (1983) defined five stages of innovation diffusion: (1) Knowledge, (2) Persuasion, (3) Decision, (4) Implementation, and (5) Confirmation. The knowledge stage involves exposure and understanding of the innovation (Rogers, 1983). The persuasion stage is where a perception of whether the innovation is favorable or unfavorable is formed (Rogers, 1983). The decision stage is when the choice of whether to adopt or reject the innovation occurs (Rogers, 1983). The implementation stage involves using the innovation. Finally, the confirmation stage is where the leader seeks reinforcement that the decision made was a valid one. For the purpose of this paper, the attributes of innovation champions before and after the decision stage will be explored. This is to be able to determine the attributes of an innovation champion leading to the adoption of an innovation, and the attributes of champions after the adoption of an innovation. Diffusion of innovations theory still gains practical support today for managers (Wonglimpiyarat & Yuberk, 2005).

Innovation champions

Innovation champions are necessary to bring innovations to fruition, and because of this, this important role is one that should be embedded within organizations (Howell, 2005). Champions are people who arise within a firm and make purposeful support to an innovation by eagerly encouraging its development throughout various critical stages (Howell, Shea, & Higgins, 2005). Champions are necessary for innovations to be diffused in organizations, and those champions must be dedicated, determined, and courageous in sponsoring that innovation (Schon, 1963). According to Howell (2005), champions are enthusiastic and excited about innovations, able to gain key support, and endure through hardship. Champions are able to keep the momentum of innovations going and are needed for innovation success (Dougherty & Hardy, 1996). Innovation champions are individuals that are confident regarding the innovation, able to gain support, and determined under conditions of adversity (Howell et al., 2005). These champions are considered

leaders, and a valiant effort should be made to determine how to recruit, define, and place the innovations champions in an organization.

For the purposes of this study, innovation champions are considered leaders, specifically opinion leaders and change agents, as defined by Rogers (1983). Opinion leaders are able to influence others' behaviors and attitudes, in an informal manner (Roger, 1983). These leaders are innovative and able to champion an innovation by influencing attitudes and behaviors. Change agents seek to influence to adoption of new innovations; however, they also will slow the innovation diffusion process if necessary to avoid the adoption of unfavorable innovations (Rogers, 1983). Given these definitions, an innovation champion is a leader who is able to influence the attitudes and behaviors of others to the adoption of new favorable innovation through the five stages of innovation diffusion presented by Rogers (1983).

THEORETICAL LENS

The following section describes the theoretical lens through which this research will be examined—transformational leadership theory. Transformational leadership was chosen as the theoretical lens for this study as innovation champions are defined as a leader who influences attitudes and behaviors of others to adopt a favorable innovation.

Transformational leadership theory

A leader's influence on employees can be tied to their leadership style. Transformational leaders influence employees by taking them from concerns of security and belonging to a higher level of self-actualization (Burns, 1978). This allows followers to not be concerned with themselves, but rather to consider the collective whole, whether that be the group or organization they are a part of (Burns, 1978). "Authentic transformational leaders motivate followers to work for transcendental goals that go beyond immediate self-interests" (Bass, 1997, p. 133). Followers are encouraged to put aside their own self-interests, in support of that of the organization as a whole (Bass, 1997). Transformational leadership moves beyond the approach of leadership as being nothing more than a transactional relationship (Bass, 1997). Instead, it is made up of elements such as idealized influence (charisma), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1997). This is contrary to transactional leadership, which takes a more "carrot or stick approach" (Bass, 1997, p. 133).

The unique nature of transformational leaders to influence followers through inspirational appeal makes it a relevant lens through which to view the innovation champion's attributes in diffusion. Inspirational appeal can be used to influence, and influence is necessary to get organizations to adopt innovative ideas that may be difficult to adapt. Further, this lens is useful, because transformational leaders inspire others to move beyond themselves and focus on the organization as a whole. In diffusion of innovations they can be useful, as it encourages followers to look beyond their own self-interests and adopt innovations that would benefit the organization.

CLAIMS

It is proposed that leadership champions change at the different stages of innovation diffusion. Innovation diffusion, by its nature, requires leadership, but the type of leadership, or the attributes of the leader at various stages of innovation diffusion is still unknown. This research aims to determine the attributes that a champion of innovation possesses before and after the decision stage of the innovation diffusion process. Two propositions (P1; P2) were formed through which this research will be organized.

P1: Champions of innovation utilize attributes of transformational leadership before the decision stage of the innovation diffusion process, thereby facilitating innovation diffusion.

P2: Champions of innovation utilize attributes of transformational leadership after the decision stage of the innovation diffusion process, thereby facilitating innovation diffusion.

METHOD

This research will use a rapid systematic review approach. Rapid evidence assessment is a systematic process that is beneficial for short-turn around evidence assessment (Ganann, Ciliska, & Thomas, 2010). This research needed to be completed in a short frame of time, specifically six weeks. Rapid evidence assessment is appropriate for studies that are six months or less (Ganann et al., 2010). The short time frame in which such an assessment is performed and synthesized offers benefits, such as quicker utilization of the evidence. The performance speed of rapid evidence assessment also presents some limitations, specifically, overlooking important evidence, search bias, lack of rigor, and lack of quality assessment.

The development of the search strategy, PRISMA diagram of the search strategy, summary of research findings, summary of research themes, and the weight of evidence assessment are presented in Appendices A through E. Utilizing the UMUC One Search database, the terms (innovation w/ management) AND (champions) were used to find the relevant literature for this study. The search string revealed 159 articles. "Scholarly peer-reviewed articles" was selected as a limiter, resulting in 102 articles. After duplicates were removed, 44 articles remained. All 44 article abstract and titles were scanned for a relevance assessment, resulting in 17 relevant articles. The resultant 17 articles were analyzed using a Weight of Evidence (WoE) quality assessment as purported by Harden and Gough (2012). The WoE allows the researcher to determine the studies appropriateness to answering the review question (Harden & Gough, 2012, p. 160). The weights used for this assessment are 30% soundness of study, 30% appropriateness of study design for answering the review question, and 40% relevance of the study focus to the review. This quality assessment warrants the dependability of the study and results by ensuring that the literature is systematically reviewed in these three areas (Harden & Gough, 2012, p. 160). A thematic synthesis was used to determine the relevant themes in the literature assessed. The thematic synthesis involved scanning the discussion section of each article to find emerging

themes using Atlas.ti software. A noted limitation to this approach is that the data in the discussion may not reveal the exact findings of the research study.

RESULTS

Below are the most relevant themes that emerged from the literature. These themes are used to address the research question: What are the attributes of innovation champions before and after the decision stage of innovation diffusion?

Networking and Relationship Development

Networking and relationship development were found to be a common theme that emerged from the literature, as 6 out of 17 studies support this theme. According to Howell (2005) one of the determining characteristics of a champion of innovation is how well they are able to manage relationships with others. Champions play the role of marriage broker as they develop relationships in networks across business enterprises (Gupta, Cadeaux, & Dubelaa, 2006). Howell et al. (2005) determined that one of the key characteristics of a champion of innovation is that they are able to get the right people involved in the process. Building and navigating informal networks can help lead champions to new innovations (Howell & Boeis, 2004). Champions must network and gain support from key decision makers in order to make them realize the project is meaningful (Howell et al., 2005; Walter, Parboteeah, Riesenhuber, & Hoegl, 2011). Support from others and networking is crucial to keeping an idea alive (Walter et al., 2011). Managers must maintain good relations with key individuals to gain continued support and resources (Walter et al., 2011). This points to networking and relationship development as vital during stages after the decision-making stage in the innovation diffusion process. Jenssen and Jørgensen (2004) examined the factors that allow corporate champions to promote innovation through a systematic review process. The authors determined that human and social capital and coalition building were important factors for corporate champions to possess (Jenssen & Jørgensen, 2004).

Networking and relationship development are necessary attributes of innovation champions in the stages both prior to the decision-making process and after, therefore, this finding supports P1 and P2. Networking and relationship development allows for innovation champions to develop relationships with suppliers and develop strategy that will lead to implementation and diffusion of a new innovation idea. Using the lens of transformational leadership, the attributes of networking and relationship-building hints at concern for others beyond oneself, as well as moving beyond transactional interactions.

Persistence

Champions of innovation must be able to persevere when facing obstacles and adversity (Howell, 2005). In his seminal work, Schon (1963) states that invention champions often display persistence, and even heroic, courageous characteristics. Champions invite challenge and openly question the status quo (Howell, 2005). According to Jenssen and Jørgensen (2004), persistence is one of the defining characteristics of a champion. The evidence shows that persistence then may allow innovation champions to persevere through the early stages of the innovation diffusion process prior to the decision-making stage. Persistence in the face of adversity was a key behavior measure of champions of innovation (Howell et al., 2005; Lichtenthaler & Ernst, 2009). Walter et al. (2011) states that champions play a vital role in innovation diffusion through organizational stages by persevering and overcoming obstacles. Specifically, champions must persevere through the early stages where they must promote their idea and risk their positions, and even reputations, to work toward success (Walter et al., 2011).

Persistence was found to support P1, in that it was present in the early stages of innovation diffusion before the decision-making stage. Transformational leaders are characterized as charismatic, facing challenges, and able to gain support through inspirational appeal. Persistence is an attribute that would be favorable for transformational leaders seeking to move others beyond their own self-interests, to that of the organization. Similarly, innovation champions persist as they move others beyond their self-interests to adopt an innovation.

Knowledge of champion

Knowledge in various aspects of innovation, as well as organization knowledge is an emergent attribute of innovation champions. According to Gupta et al. (2006), knowledge of champions within organization improves the strategy development of that firm. Howell (2005) states that one of the major characteristics of a champion of innovation is that they have a breadth of knowledge. Similarly, Howell and Boeis (2004) found that employees with relational and strategic knowledge were able to promote innovations more effectively. Beath (1991) found that knowledge of technology was an attribute of innovation champions that was helpful prior to the decision and implementation phase of a new innovation. Day (1994) found that knowledgeable lower level champions can emerge and should be utilized by managers that want to keep radical innovations away from the entrenched power structure of some organizations.

These findings point to knowledge as an attribute necessary for an innovation champion in the early stages of innovation diffusion, supporting P1. Viewed through the transformational leader lens, the champion of innovation must be knowledgeable, just as a transformational leader might use intellectual appeal to influence. Again, this moves the champion beyond being a leader who takes a transactional approach, to a more transformational one.

Political Savvy

Champions influence in a political environment and therefore need to have political skills (Beath, 1991). Champions not only need to know the skills needed to interact in a political environment; they also need political support from management so that they can support innovations (Beath, 1991). If resources are hard to obtain, champions without the political know-how may find it difficult to gain the resources they need (Dougherty & Hardy, 1996). Gaining this support is necessary prior to the decision stage of the innovation diffusion process as well as for continued innovation. Lack of political savvy can leave innovation projects vulnerable and thereby undermine the champion's support (Dougherty & Hardy, 1996). Innovation champions should be politically savvy and able to gain political support (Jenssen & Jørgensen, 2004). Furthermore, champions recognize that there are consequences in the political realm as a result of any failures (Lichtenthaler & Ernst, 2009).

The attribute, political savvy, was found to support both P1 and P2, meaning it was a theme that was recognized both before and after the decision stage of innovation diffusion. Again, the research points to champions needing skills that go beyond a transactional leadership approach. Political savvy can help champions influence and gain organizational support.

Enthusiastic Support

Enthusiastic support for diffusion of innovations is a common theme noted for innovation champions. Enthusiastic support involves leaders who shelter “new ideas from premature evaluation, advocate new ideas, and recognize and reward the production of new ideas” (Howell & Boies, 2004). Champions, compared to non-champions, were found to display more enthusiastic support for new ideas before the decision-making stage of the innovation diffusion process (Howell & Boies, 2004; Howell, 2005; Howell et al., 2005). Expressing enthusiasm and confidence in the early stages of the innovation diffusion process is a critical attribute for champions that are seeking to gain support for the innovation idea (Howell & Boies, 2004; Howell, 2005; Howell et al., 2005). According to Jenssen and Jørgensen (2004), the characteristics of an innovation champion prior to the decision-making stage of innovation diffusion are that they are enthusiastic and able to inspire individuals toward the adaptation of the new innovation idea. Further, employees who are convinced to “buy in” to the innovation idea from the innovation champion are found to be more enthusiastically supportive of the innovation idea during the implementation stage of the innovation diffusion process (Meyer, 2000). Although some authors would state that enthusiastic support is a characteristic of innovation champions through all stages of innovation diffusion implementation, the research revealed evidence primarily for support through the early stages of innovation diffusion prior to the decision-making stage.

Enthusiastic support was found to support P1, as it was a theme noted in the early stages of innovation diffusion, prior to the decision stage. The attribute of enthusiastic support found in innovation champions is similar to the theory of transformational leadership, in that

transformational leaders have inspirational appeal, charisma, and are motivating to their followers.

The results above illustrate the various themes that emerged from the systematic review of literature. Networking and relationship development was found to be the most prominent theme, as it emerged in 6 out of the 17 articles reviewed and is present both prior to the decision stage of innovation diffusion and after the decision stage. Political savvy was also found to be an attribute before and after the decision stage of innovation diffusion. Both networking and relationship development and political savvy support P1 and P2. Persistence, enthusiastic support, and knowledge of the champion were all attributes that were found prior to the decision-making stage, supporting P1. These results, when viewed through the lens of transformational leadership, indicate support of champions of innovation as more than transactional leaders, as they utilize attributes of transformational leaders in the innovation diffusion process.

Shown below in Table 1 is the list of articles, themes, and weight of evidence. As indicated in the findings above, P2 is not supported as strongly by the evidence as P1 is. This is significant in that there is more support for P1, whereby innovation champions may be more likely to possess these attributes in the stages of innovation diffusion prior to the decision-making stage.

TABLE 1: WEIGHT OF EVIDENCE (WOE), ARTICLES, AND THEMES

| Study | Weight of Evidence | Proposition Support | Theme |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| Beath (1991) | 80% | P1 | Vision, Resources, Political Savvy |
| Bstieler et al. (2015) | 100% | P1 | Motivate others toward goals; Develop trust |
| Day (1994) | 100% | P1; P2 | Champions at all levels of management (middle, lower, upper); Trust |
| Dougherty & Hardy (1996) | 80% | P1 | Vision; Resources; Political savvy; Personal power not sustainable; Involve others in strategic process |
| Galbraith et al. (1982) | 70% | P1 | Motivate others toward goals; Need to achieve and take risk |
| Gupta et al. (2006) | 100% | P1 | Networking and relationship development; Knowledge of champion |
| Howell (2005) | 85% | P1 | Networking and relationship development; Knowledge of champion; Persistence; self-monitoring; Flexible role orientation, Enthusiastic support |
| Howell & Boeis (2004) | 100% | P1 | Networking and relationship development; knowledge of champion; Flexible role orientation, Enthusiastic support |
| Howell et al. (2005) | 100% | P1 | Networking and relationship development, Persistence Enthusiastic support |
| Jenssen & Jørgensen, (2004) | 100% | P1; P2 | Networking and relationship development; Motivate others toward goals, Political savvy Persistence, Knowledge of champion; Need to achieve and take risk |
| Kelley & Lee (2010) | 100% | P1 | Empowered, Autonomy and Freedom |
| Lichtenthaler & Ernst (2009) | 80% | P2 | Persistence; Enthusiastic support; Avoid high risk; Political savvy |
| Mansfeld et al. (2010) | 80% | P1 | Empowered, Autonomy and Freedom; Enthusiastic support; Self-monitoring |
| Meyer (2000) | 80% | P1 | Challenge innovation |
| Rese et al. (2013) | 65% | P1 | Flexible role orientation |
| Schon (1963) | 100% | P1 | Need to achieve and take risk; Persistence; Knowledge of champion; Courageous and heroic |
| Walter et al. (2011) | 100% | P2 | Networking and relationship development; Persistence; Heroic and courageous; Over performing |

Table 1. This table illustrates the themes that emerged from thematic synthesis of the literature, as well as the propositions they support. Support for P1 is strong, and, while there is support for P2, it is not as evident as the support for P1.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

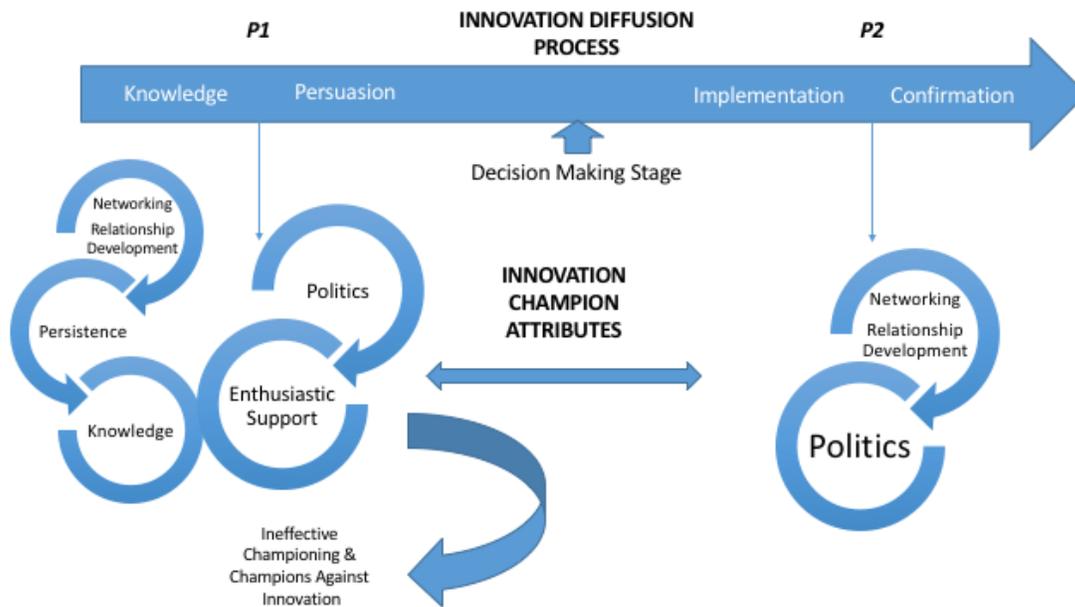


FIGURE 1: CONCEPT MODEL

Figure 1. The concept model presented above illustrates the innovation diffusion process and the attributes of innovation champions that emerged from the research findings. Portrayed within this model are the five stages of innovation diffusion as presented by Rogers (1983). The focus in this conceptual model is on the various attributes that innovation champions possess both before and after the decision-making stage of the innovation process. The attributes that an innovation champion may possess that will lead to successful innovation diffusion prior to the decision-making stage are: networking and relationship development, persistence, knowledge of champion, political savvy, and enthusiastic support. The following attributes were found to be possessed by innovation champions after the decision-making stage: networking and relationship development and political savvy. Ineffective championing and championing against innovation is noted in the diffusion process as restarting the process.

DISCUSSION

The following section will offer a discussion of the conceptual model as well as an interpretation of the findings through a theoretical lens of transformational leadership. Through a synthesis and analysis of the research findings, it was determined that there are various attributes that an innovation champion should possess. According to the definition of innovation champions proposed in this research, champions are leaders within organizations. Therefore, if attributes of champions can be realized, then leaders can be recognized and recruited in organizations to lead innovation diffusion before and after the decision-making stage. Transformational leadership theory shows that transformational leaders are motivational leaders with inspirational appeal, as well as being authentic and motivated beyond their own self-interests (Bass, 1997). The various attributes of innovation champions may lead them to possess characteristics similar to a transformational leader.

Figure 1 above shows the five stages of the innovation diffusion process with a focus on what occurs before and after the decision-making stage. This model was adapted from the five stages of innovation presented by Rogers (1983). The model is centered around the various attributes an innovation champion may possess in order to successfully diffuse innovations throughout and organization. Networking and relationship development, persistence, knowledge, politics, and enthusiastic support were major themes that emerged from the analysis of relevant literature as preferable innovation champion attributes prior to the decision-making stage of the innovation diffusion process. Champions that possess these attributes are more likely to be successful in championing their cause and getting traction with a new innovation idea. Although innovation champions are often thought of in positive light, it should be noted that sometimes innovation champions can prove ineffective or some leaders may potentially champion against or challenge innovation, disrupting the innovation diffusion process (Meyer, 2000). The attributes of innovation champions are organized below according to the proposition for which they are confirmed.

P1: Champions of innovation utilize attributes of transformational leadership before the decision stage of the innovation diffusion process, thereby facilitating innovation diffusion.

Networking and relationship development were found to be important attributes to innovation champions before and after the decision-making stage, once implementation and confirmation of an idea is occurring. This finding of networking and relationship development as an attribute by 6 out of 17 articles supports both P1 and P2. Political savvy was another attribute that was found to benefit champions before and after the decision stage of innovation diffusion. Persistence is an attribute that may be valuable to all leaders, but particularly innovation champions as they need persistence and perseverance to keep pushing their cause, even in the face of adversity (Howell et al., 2005; Lichtenthaler & Ernst, 2009). This is especially important in the early stages of innovation diffusion where the pushback to new ideas may be stronger. Knowledge at various levels of the organization, technical knowledge, and strategic knowledge are attributes that serve an innovation champion well in the early stages of diffusion of innovations (Beath, 1991; Day,

1994; Howell & Boeis, 2004; Howell, 2005). This may be due to the fact that knowledge helps innovation champions to be perceived as experts. Finally, champions should be enthusiastically supportive through the early stages of the innovation diffusion process as this likely offers motivation and inspirational appeal to followers and helps the innovation idea to gain traction (Howell & Boies, 2004; Howell, 2005; Howell et al., 2005).

P2: Champions of innovation utilize attributes of transformational leadership after the decision stage of the innovation diffusion process, thereby facilitating innovation diffusion.

There was less evidence to support the attributes of innovation champions after the decision-making stage. As stated previously, innovation champions, as leaders within organizations, that are seeking to diffuse innovations were found to seek to network and develop relationships prior to and after the decision-making stage of the innovation diffusion process. These network connections will help innovation champions gain support from key decision makers and get the right people involved throughout the process (Howell et al., 2005; Walter, Parboteeah, Riesenhuber, & Hoegl, 2011). Political savvy, again, was found both prior to and after the decision-making stage. Knowing who to gain support and resources from is essential, and champions should be aware of the political ramifications of any failures they may have (Dougherty et al., 1994; Jenssen & Jørgensen, 2004; Lichtenthaler & Ernst, 2009).

IMPACT ON PRACTICE

This research offers several implications for management practice. The synthesis of results reveals five attributes of innovation champions before and after the decision stage of the innovation diffusion process. Organizations that seek innovation for competitive advantage and strategy should seek to identify the innovation champions that may be able to diffuse innovations and gain acceptance of innovations. Managers can find these champions by determining the leaders that possess these five attributes: networking and relationship development, persistence, knowledge of the champion, political savvy, and enthusiastic support. Once these individuals are identified they can be groomed to be innovation champions, who will support new ideas that are presented in the organization.

IMPACT ON THEORY

The synthesis of evidence presented contributes to the literature on innovation champions by revealing the attributes that innovation champions possess as leaders within an organization. Furthermore, these attributes were examined through various stages of innovation diffusion, supporting innovation champions as necessary leaders of innovation throughout organizations. This literature also contributes to the body of knowledge on transformational leadership as the theoretical lens through which the research was viewed. Innovation champions as leaders may

possess qualities of transformational leaders, particularly their relationship development and enthusiastic support of new ideas, which are similar to a transformational leader's inspirational influence and appeal.

LIMITATIONS

Although this study is impactful on both management practice and theory, it is not without its limitations. As mentioned previously, one of the inherent limitations to a rapid evidence assessment is that the fast delivery time in which the review is expected to be performed may sometimes result in search bias and a lack of rigor (Ganann et al., 2010). It should be noted that this study was performed in six-week time frame with only one author, and because of this short time frame, search bias and lack of rigor could be a concern. Sometimes in this process, important evidence can be overlooked and may not be included. Although a thorough search was performed and the methodology presented is transparent and replicable, there may have been further research that could have been included. Another limitation of note is that three of the studies that were heavily used were by the same author: Howell and Boies (2004), Howell et al. (2005), and Howell (2005). However, it should be noted that those studies scored high on the WoE quality assessment. Another limitation to this study is that the majority of the studies pointed to attributes of innovation champions in the stages prior to the decision process, therefore, results concerning innovation champions after the decision process have less evidence to support the claims made. Finally, the thematic review involved scanning the discussion areas of each article. Admittedly, this approach may have left out important data or information from the results.

AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The evidence reviewed has shown that there are significant noted attributes of innovation champions prior to the decision-making stage of innovation diffusion. While some of the evidence does, in fact, point to attributes of champions after the decision-making stage, the weight of evidence was much less. Future research should focus on the attributes of innovation champions in the later stages of innovation diffusion, after the decision-making stage. Enthusiastic support, for instance, was shown to support P1 and the early stages of innovation diffusion. However, it may be needed in all stages of the innovation diffusion process. This is a potential gap in the literature that would warrant a full systematic review.

CONCLUSION

Innovation is a crucial strategy for many organizations seeking to gain a competitive advantage. Diffusion of innovations is an important and necessary process for managers that want to get new innovation ideas accepted. While it is recognized that innovation is important, and

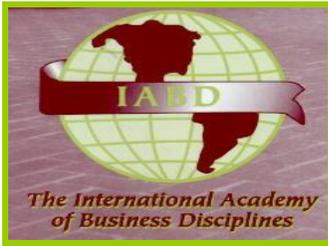
champions can lead those innovations, the leadership attributes those champions have is still being understood. Innovation champions should be sought out, recruited, and be supported within organizations that seek to leverage the strategic advantage that innovation may offer. Although these champions may emerge informally within organizations, managers would do best to seek a strategic approach to define who these individuals are and then support them to champion new ideas. The attributes of innovation champions that emerged from this research are able to help managers take a first step toward identifying who their innovation champions are. Further, they can determine which stage of innovation diffusion is appropriate to utilize those champions. Future research should address the attributes of leaders in the stages after the decision-making stage of innovation diffusion as the evidence mostly pointed to attributes of champions prior to the decision-making stage.

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*Journal of
International Business
Disciplines*



Volume 12, Number 1

May 2017



Published By:

International Academy of Business Disciplines and Frostburg State University

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ISSN 1934-1822

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