



“WINNING AT INNOVATION THE A-TO-F MODEL” BY FERNANDO TRIAS DE BES & PHILIP KOTLER: BOOK REVIEW

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ABSTRACT :

Innovation has become a must priority for all kinds of organizations who want to grow and develop new products, processes and technologies and to stay ahead in today's quick paced competitive market. Companies that cannot innovate will not succeed and will be thrown out of the market. This necessitates every company to have a systematic framework so innovation initiatives can be implemented successfully. Such kind of a framework is the theme of the book “Winning at Innovation”.

KEYWORDS : Innovation Process, Innovation Roles, A-to-F Model.

INTRODUCTION

Despite having a large number of books, ideas and theories, the concept of innovation still remains oblique, where many see it as rigid process and a just responsibility of R&D departments. This gap has been amply filled by the book titled ‘Winning at Innovation The A-to-F Model’, authored by the two of most leading academic figures in the subject of innovation and marketing throughout the world, Philip Kotler and Fernando Trias de Bes. This is really a best handbook on innovation (one of only about 7) bundled with ‘unquestionable truths’ and a very revolutionary framework to make innovation process more effective, more sustainable and more successful. This book will be a handy gift to people with all levels of experience in innovation, willing to transform an organization into an innovative one, be it CEOs, VPs, directors, R&D people, and marketing professionals as well as academicians looking for dynamic approach towards innovation.

Fernando Trias de Bes is an associate professor in Department of Marketing Management at ESADE Business School, Spain. He is the founder of Salvetti Llombart, a consulting firm specialised in innovation and market research. He has published fourteen books of management including ‘The Little Black Book Entrepreneurship Lateral Marketing’. The co-author Philip Kotler, ‘the legend of Marketing’, is S.C. Johnson & Son Distinguished Professor of International Marketing at the Kellogg School of Management, USA. He is a recipient of fourteen honorary degrees from abroad and there are more than fifty books and other publications which made him a true pioneer in Marketing and the worthy of the term ‘guru’. His name itself adds some weights to what Trias De Bes has to tell, and it is what inspired me to review this book.



Innovation is a creative contribution that we put into a discipline. It is pretty clear that innovation is not a linear concern rather it is a step by step approach. Holding this idea, the authors introduce six key roles they assert every

innovative organisation must have in order to innovate. Those six roles, the A-to-F, in the subtitles are activators, browsers, creators, developers, executors and facilitators respectively. The main idea of this concept says that; the phases or stages of an innovation process is the result of interaction of those involved in the innovation processes. In other words it is emerged out of the combined effort of roles performed by individuals. Their continuous interaction throughout the project would make great innovations. As the innovation process is the result of interaction of those roles, priority is given to them. Instead of treating innovation as step-by-step linear sequential process as some of previous books did, they treat it as the result of people interacting in a dynamic, often chaotic, less than orderly fashion. It becomes a collective effort.

The book has been organised into four areas- these four areas are co-related and feed each other. They called it as total innovation system. The first area deals with the strategic planning for innovation where objectives of innovation has been discussed. Innovative strategic plan would lead to innovative projects. An idea is transformed into innovation by the innovation process. Most part of the book deals with that aspect. There are different kinds of innovative processes. The most conventional is the stage gate system. Here they propose a very different idea of innovative process called “A-to-F Model” in a feasible way. The model is applicable to innovation of any type of company, industry and Organization. The large part of the book (Chapters 3 to 8) is dedicated for explaining this model. Innovation result measurement is called the innovation matrix. That is the third component of the total innovation system. These three areas act against a background that is known as creative culture (fourth area).

The key idea behind this book is that the stages or phases of innovation cannot be decided before hand, but must emerge as interaction between individuals performing certain roles and functions of innovation. So, A-to-F model is list of six key roles identified from companies with best innovation practices. Any company willing to innovate must assign these roles to appropriate people and let them interact freely to create their own innovation process. The book includes handy check lists with spending guidelines and expectations about performance and case studies that would help company heads to manage innovation. One thing refreshing in this book was that authors have equated innovation to creativity and not marketing as others did earlier. They have put it beautifully on page 16 *“Creativity requires analogical, not sequential thinking, and so does innovation, which is nothing but creativity applied to a particular discipline. Innovation requires a lot of ‘coming and going,’ returning to the same idea, dismissing it, taking it up again, revising it, looking for more information, designing, realizing that that design is not optimal and that we need to go back to the drawing board”*. Another important feature of the book is, it is more practical than any other business books. Though the examples are drawn from big fortune companies like Apple, 3M, P&G, the ideas are applicable to all macro and micro level organizations. Authors were successful in explaining, how organizations become more innovative, how to search for ideas more systematically, how to convert new ideas into new launches. On the other hand, it serves the academic purposes by including ample information, theories, graphs and diagrams, it seems to be a total framework with guidelines to the concept of innovation and its scope is very large (business model innovation, process innovation, market innovation and product / service innovation).

Two shortcomings are found about this book. Firstly, the design and appearance of the book is very boring. Palgrave could have come up with paper back edition with some attractive designs and could put some colour into it. If the boxes, diagrams, and models have been printed with coloured backgrounds and colour margins, that would make this book interesting like anything else. Second thing is that the description given on the outer sleeve of the book is little misleading as it says this is a just book about marketing and innovation. It is written there “a ground-breaking model for successful marketing advancement”. This is a too limited statement about the scope of the book.

“Winning at Innovation” competes with the best books on innovation such as “Innovation to the Core: Transforming the way your company innovates” by Skarzynski and Gibson (2008), “Where good ideas come from” by Steven Jhonson (2010), and “Innovation” by Bruce and Birchall (2009). The reason why I think this book is worth of your time is because it adopts a well innovative approach to the theme of innovation management. And more over this book is neither burdened with academic terminologies like Nonaka’s book

on innovation "Enabling Knowledge Creation" (OUP 2000) nor restricted to manufacturing field like Jeffrey Liker's book "The Toyota Way to Continuous Improvement" (Mc Graw-Hill 2011). Any average senior manager, director or VP as well as academicians may find this book very useful in their respective domains.

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