University of Technology, Sydney

Research Thesis

Leadership Practices for Innovation In High-Technology Organisations

By

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

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

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

Signature of Student:

Date: 12 September 2014

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Abstract

Organisations the world over are constantly striving to innovate in order to survive and thrive in the current dynamic and challenging global economy. The strategic intent to innovate is, however, very difficult to execute, especially in large enterprises.

This research set out to explore the leadership dynamics of innovation within an iconic global high-technology organisation. In particular, the intention was to understand the dynamics of those practices that facilitated the conversion of creative ideas into innovative new technical products and services in a sustained, repeatable manner. To achieve this, it was recognised that the study of these 'social practices' necessitated the location of this research within the social constructionist research paradigm. This led to the adoption of an Action Research methodology as the most appropriate method through which to address the research question.

Over the course of two years, two separate sets of Action Research cycles were conducted by two groups of co-researchers employed within this high-technology organisation. This Action Research delivered several novel insights into the nature of the leadership practices adopted by the members of these two groups in delivering, in particular, four break-through technical innovations. Together, these leadership practices transformed the social dynamics (and particularly the power relations) within the two groups, making possible the collaborative endeavour that led to the company-lauded technical innovations. The principal finding of the research - that *social innovation precedes technical innovation* – highlights the role of leadership in the realisation of innovation within enterprises. Furthermore the explicit articulation of four specific leadership practices that facilitated the conversion of creative ideas into the innovative new technical products and services achieved through this research, contributes significantly to the body of knowledge on innovation. In addition, this research raises questions about the appropriateness of the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpin traditional, positivist research, with respect to investigating the social underpinnings of technical innovation. By locating this research in the social constructionist paradigm, and adopting an Action Research methodology, the socially constructed realities of organisational life – and, in particular, the political basis of these realities - were explored fruitfully with respect to their impact upon an organisation's capability to innovate.