
Editorial

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The aim of this special issue is to provide a common platform for researchers, scholars and practitioners to address those issues relating to perceived gaps between innovation and entrepreneurship. Manuscripts based on entrepreneurship, innovation and/or a mixture of both concepts were deemed particularly suitable for this special issue, which comprises of seven papers (two regional and five country-specific).

In the first paper on strategies for 'expanding the horizons of rural entrepreneurship', Alex Avramenko and Jane Silver address the typical issue of rural entrepreneurship using a case example of the European level 'Passport to Trade' project as an illustration. The authors note that lately, the notion of rural entrepreneurship has been gradually extended to include other challenges, such as increased globalisation and the strong influence of technology, which affects entrepreneurship in a variety of ways. The authors also warn about evidence that shows the inadequacy of existing European level rural entrepreneurship policy in fostering growth and development –arguing that such policies often emphasised the usual suspects – 'market orientation, network incubation, education and training, information and communication' technologies, 'young entrepreneurs' and 'female entrepreneurs' as well as 'ethnic minorities'. This observation is echoed in a report by the Institute for Rural Entrepreneurship (2006) where it was stated that the process was 'uneven, fragmented, under-funded, [and] confusing to the people it's supposed to serve'. To rectify this anomaly, Avramenko and Silver suggest that the 'effectiveness of rural governance could be improved by shifting the emphasis' from improvements of existing, sometimes inadequate, rural entrepreneurship policies towards fostering rural entrepreneurship on a much wider scale, while preserving uniqueness of a local custom, which could be perceived as an added value.

In the second paper, Yazid Abubakar and Jay Mitra highlight those 'factors influencing innovation performance in European regions'. They argue, after undertaking a comparison between the manufacturing and services ICT subsectors – that regional disparities in innovation posed a major policy concern in the European Union, especially since innovation is seen by many economists as a way of boosting economic growth. Yet, although the issue of boosting innovation in European Union regions has been approached to an extent based on regional innovation models, it is not clear what industrial sectors should be prioritised. Having established the regional gaps in the entrepreneurship and innovation misalignment, the remaining four papers take a country specific perspective on how both concepts may become better aligned.

In the third paper for example, Emmanuel Cleeve, in assessing the research into use and development (RIUD) programme in Sierra Leone outlines how potential research into use interventions in the country would be pursued in the period 2008–2011. Its overall purpose, he argues, is to maximise the poverty-reducing impact of renewable natural resources research strategy and thereby increases the understanding of how the promotion and widespread use of research can contribute to poverty reduction and economic growth.

In their paper, the fourth in this special issue, Sarah Kirkeby and Karina Christensen discuss how ‘designing for innovative capability in the structure of organisations’ could foster innovation in the Danish context. This paper, which is based on two Danish ICT firms’ [one small and one large] case studies – demonstrates how SMEs with relatively few resources are able to compete innovatively with their larger counterparts.

In the fifth paper, Irene Fafaliou, Nikolaos Melanitis and Vassilios Tsakalos use the Greek experience to highlight the impact of ‘commercialising research’ in immature technology transfer markets. The authors opined that transnational technology transfer (TTT) was a key mechanism for the exploitation of technological innovation. They detect obstacles in the TTT process in what they described as an ‘immature market such as Greece’ and identify schemes and mechanisms such as ‘spin-off creation, start-up co-location, partnership building abroad, multisource fund raising and effective brokerage services’ that can contribute to the technology transfer market growth and the effectiveness of TTT agreements.

Nnamdi Madichie and Ahmed Saeed, authors of the sixth paper in this special issue, provide some insight into the ‘innovation dilemma facing the Ghanaian textile industry’. They evaluate the degree of entrepreneurship in the Ghanaian textile industry and question the embeddedness of innovation attributes in the entrepreneurial quest of this subsector. The authors’ main objective was to assess any co-existence of entrepreneurship and innovation in the Ghanaian textile industry. This evaluation is undertaken from a longitudinal study of four leading firms in the sector – drawing upon the impact of trade liberalisation as implemented at the country-specific level and its implications for emerging markets. In the end, they observed that Ghana remains uncompetitive in the textile industry largely as a result of a major misalignment between innovation and entrepreneurship in the sector.

In the final paper, Percy Venter and Ekaete Benedict clearly attempted to explain the major reasons for the low levels of entrepreneurial activities in the context of South Africa. Using the GEM study as a reference framework for their theoretical analysis, they raise issues related to ethnicity as a possible ingredient for success as well as the establishment of centres of entrepreneurship within the higher education institutions. More interestingly, they propose that entrepreneurial achievement was not correlated to educational achievement even though entrepreneurship was heavily reliant on innovation processes. One key lesson from their paper was that ‘innovation need not be technical’ and this they argued should enable the South African Government to enhance the entrepreneurial mindsets of its population.

Overall, this ‘special issue’ has demonstrated that ‘true entrepreneurship’ and innovation are mutually reinforcing ingredients for the economic development of markets. Innovation plays an important role in creating an environment for sustainable entrepreneurship. Both concepts foster interactions between the academia and the industry for sharing of ideas and experiences and for developing new technology in order to ensure skills and value transfer to the end-users.

However, while the blend of entrepreneurship and innovation is achievable at both the corporate and small-to-medium enterprise (SME) levels, there are indications that the boundaries have become rather blurred as both concepts have been treated as substitutes rather than compliments with catastrophic consequences. This glaring imbalance is largely based on the recent practices of enterprises' that have opted to sacrifice innovation at the altar of entrepreneurship and vice versa – from the European 'passport to trade' right down to missing innovation ingredient in the entrepreneurial mindsets of South African businesses. The question now is whether the definition of entrepreneurship can ever be complete without reference to innovation – and vice versa.

Notes

- 1 Dr. Nnamdi O. Madichie is currently on leave from the University of East London, UK.