

Accelerating breakthrough innovation: From creativity to execution

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“Ideas are useless unless used” (Levitt, 1963)

“I was exhibiting Sony technology for the American College of Surgeons in Chicago. One of our other divisions had developed a pan/tilt/zoom camera that looked interesting, so I brought it to show it off. The surgeons came and were amazed at the image quality and ease of use, and I started to think, “How do I bring this into the hospital?”



*managing
surgical
new business
for Sony*

*Evan Krachman,
manager for
products and
development*



**MD2GO Remote
HD IP Camera System**

Some of what we know so far

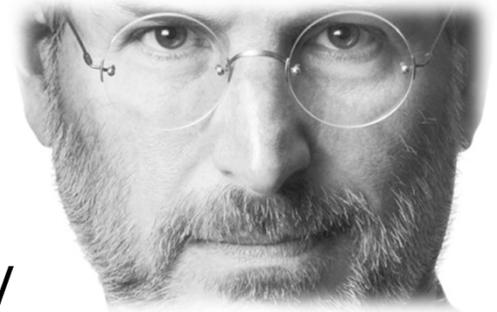
- ▶ Generation and execution seem to be positively related (Axtell et al., 2000; Frese et al., 1999) but focus has been on quantity of ideas, not their creativity
- ▶ Network features that drive idea initiation, refinement, and development are now being uncovered (Burt 2004; Kijkuit & van den Ende, 2010; Perry-Smith, 2006) but individual agency has been neglected
- ▶ Issue selling to top management important to affect change (Dutton et al., 2001) but little is known about the success rate of certain behaviors and tactics

So it is not clear...

- ▶ Whether the creativity of an idea impacts its execution—are more creative ideas more or less likely to be implemented?
- ▶ What individual dispositions/abilities along with social network features improve odds of breakthrough ideas being implemented?
- ▶ How these factors combine to jointly shape execution?

Executing on breakthrough ideas

- ▶ Steve Jobs once said the secret to innovation is “saying no to 1,000 things.”
- ▶ It appears that it is often easier to say no to ideas that dramatically deviate from status quo
- ▶ Breakthrough ideas tend to create uncertainty and conflict and often challenge established power structures (Frost & Egri, 1991; Green et al., 2003)
- ▶ Just because an idea is great does not mean it will be adopted (Kanter, 1988) ... but then what



Motivation is one key

- ▶ Motivation propels actors to take risks (and executing on something new and unproven is pretty risky after all)
- ▶ Motivation propels actors to mobilize sponsorship and obtain advocacy to sway resource allocation decisions
- ▶ Both intrinsic motivation (sense of accomplishment, acquiring new knowledge) and extrinsic motivation (bonus/promotion, reputation) are important to sustain effort



Networking ability is other key

- ▶ Mobilizing others and obtaining their sponsorship requires the cultivation of the types of social relationships that provide access to this asset
- ▶ Sponsorship is rooted in close connections to trusted friends and allies—often in high places (Coleman, 1988; Granovetter, 1973; Obstfeld, 2005)
- ▶ Networking ability (Ferris et al., 2005; 2007) to cultivate strong buy-in ties to high status contacts inside the firm



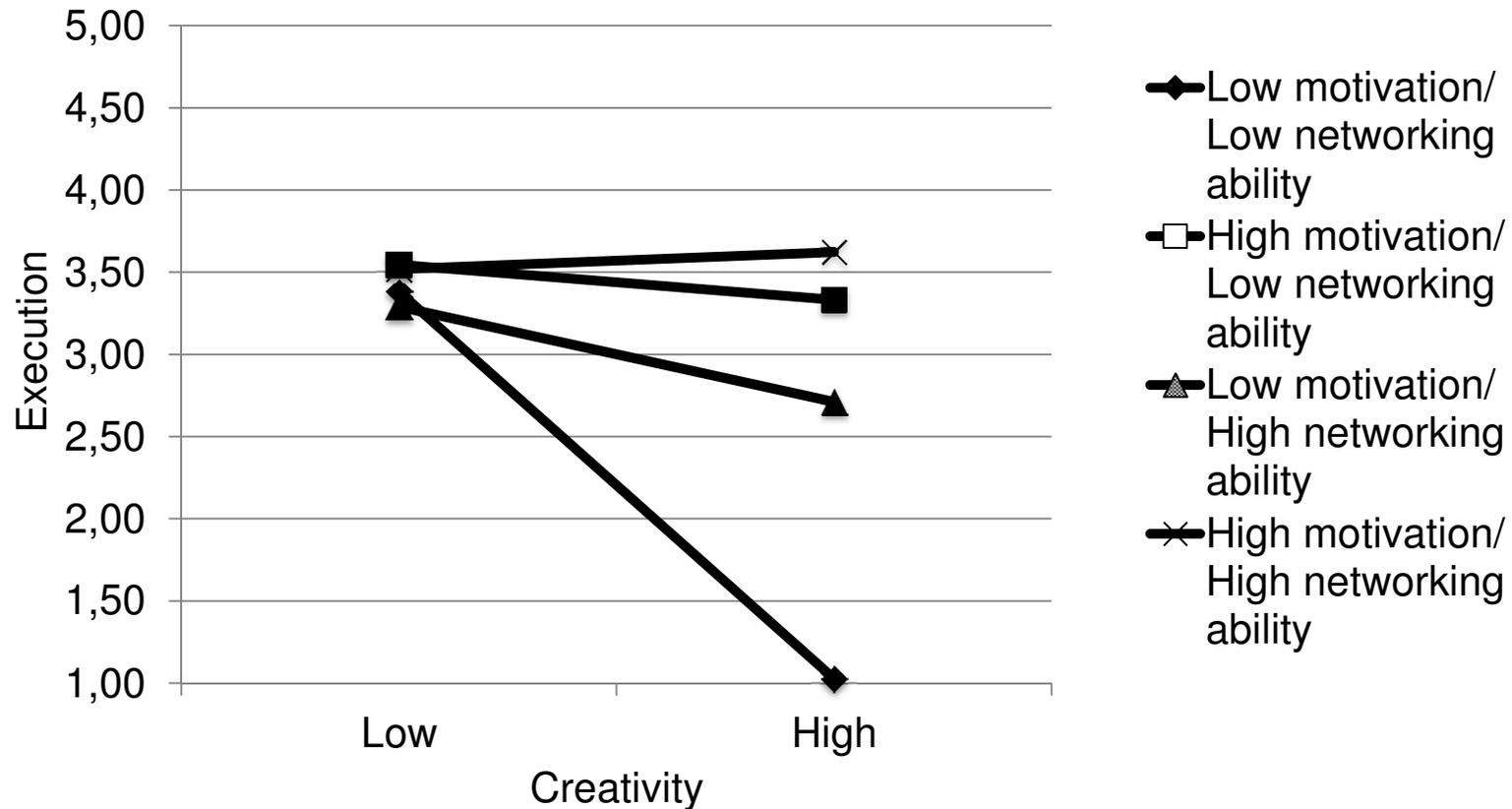
Research context

- ▶ Fortune 50 company; food production
- ▶ 80 billion in revenue
- ▶ 531 employees & 111 supervisors across 12 different locations (final sample 216)

Some insights

- ▶ Idea quantity relates positively to execution—the more ideas, the more likely it is that some get implemented
- ▶ Execution is independent of creativity
- ▶ Breakthrough ideas are unlikely to get implemented unless actors are driven to implement and savvy networkers
- ▶ Networking skill only matters because it allows actors to build relationships that matter—strong buy-in ties
- ▶ Status of sponsors does not seem to matter--what seems to matter is that actors have a handful of allies dispersed across different parts of the organization

Some insights



Creative spark execution

vs.

Contacts that ignite ideas

Large networks (but
diminishing/negative returns of size)

Weak ties to facilitate search

Strong ties to facilitate transfer

Reaching wide range of internal and
external constituents

Tendency to seek out varied
experiences, curiosity

Ability to associate

Intrinsic motivation

Contacts that provide sponsorship

Smaller networks

Strong ties to facilitate trust

Reaching select number of internal
supporters in different areas of the
firm

Tendency to take initiative

Ability to network and build alliances

Intrinsic & extrinsic motivation

Some advice

- ▶ Always network
 - Go deep: develop personal, long-lasting relationships
 - Go broad: favor positions with external exposure (marketing, sales)
- ▶ Learn from the best: sustain a couple of key mentors
- ▶ Build a strong foundation of varied experiences:
 - Carry a bag (sell)
 - Launch a product
 - Manage a dozen (or more) people
- ▶ Take risks ... “ask for forgiveness rather than permission”