

Sustainable Innovation 2010

Re-Design of Innovation Processes to Favour Sustainable Innovations

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In order to develop and commercialise sustainable products, companies must re-design their innovation processes. Although strong links to conventional innovation systematic and marketing approaches can be drawn, a special radar for sustainability issues has to be established in order to identify and realize sustainable innovations.

Sustainable innovations are classical innovations with additional environmental and/or societal surplus value. Companies encounter barriers when developing sustainable innovations and bringing them into the market. They are partly internal, partly caused by the market. With a focus on a specific industry – the highly innovative food industry - these barriers are analyzed along the innovation process. Two company types are considered which differ by size and access to sustainability: Some being leading companies in the conventional food sector that increasingly integrates sustainability issues into business, while others are small leaders in the organic food sector with a strong sustainability orientation. Conventional companies realize sustainable innovations selectively for the mass market. They encounter major barriers at the beginning of the innovation process, i.e., in the identification of trends and the development of ideas for sustainable innovations: What are relevant sustainability trends and how can business chances be deduced from them? Small organic food companies generate continuously ideas for sustainable innovations – thanks to the sustainability orientation anchored in the business model – but rarely succeed in bringing these innovations to the mass market. In their innovation processes, focused idea selection and appropriate approaches to market realization must be strengthened in order to commercialise successfully sustainable products. Conventional companies as well as small organic food companies are hindered by the lacking customer knowledge on sustainability when developing sustainable innovations. Departing from this analysis, tools and instruments along the innovation process are developed which favour sustainable innovations within the two company types. To this aim, instruments of classical innovation management are considered and adapted to the sustainability context. Where meaningful, additional tools are developed, e.g., a company's sustainable innovation profile. The presentation "Re-design of innovation processes to favour sustainable innovations" focuses particularly on innovation processes and the relationship between sustainable innovation and products. Major sources for this proposal are a study on the management of sustainable innovations in the food industry for the Schweisfurth foundation, the author's MBA master thesis presented at Leuphana University Centre for Sustainability Management in 2007 and a MBA project on the innovation process of a chemical company. Anke Steinbach finished her MBA in Sustainability Management in summer 2007 as best graduate. She further holds a degree in economics. For 6 years, Anke Steinbach has been working as a sustainability consultant to major corporations from a wide range of industries and to nonprofit organizations. She specializes in strategic management.