

## **Box-breaking innovation projects: how large incumbent companies can successfully manage the barriers and enablers of radical and disruptive innovative projects**

### **Background:**

Most innovation projects in large companies are incremental and focus on core technology and markets. They cater to existing customers and markets, are aimed at staying competitive in those markets and gaining new customers in the given markets. In addition, there are a few innovation projects that are box-breaking, aiming to open new markets, and/or draw on new technologies. These box-breaking projects differ from incremental innovation projects by often not fitting the company's stage gate process. Further, the companies might not have the necessary capabilities to review those projects or there might be a misfit between the project and the current business model. In addition, these types of projects tend to be based upon novel technologies and markets making it riskier to be successful. If successful, those projects will result in new market shares for the company and a diversified product portfolio as well as a disruption of the company from within. If unsuccessful, companies will have spent ample resources and funding on the project without getting a return on the investment made. Despite the potential risks that such box-breaking innovative projects bring, they seem to be critical to make large incumbent companies take more radical leaps in innovation.

### **Aim:**

The study seeks to improve the understanding of barriers and enablers of large radical and disruptive internal innovation or R&D projects, hence allowing companies to increase the likelihood of success going forward.

### **Draft research questions:**

- What are the key success factors and challenges observed in box-breaking innovation projects?
- How can large incumbent companies use this knowledge to manage their initiatives?

### **Methods:**

The study will use an exploratory multiple case approach to shed light on the question of what the barriers and enablers for box-breaking innovative projects are. Four cases, two old and closed as well as two ongoing cases will be studied. For the old cases, roughly five interviews per case will be conducted to understand what the barriers hindering the success of the projects were. This information will be supplemented with secondary data. An in-depth study will be conducted for the ongoing cases, comprising a minimum of 20 interviews each complemented with secondary data and potentially observations to understand the barriers and enablers that are faced during the project. The semi-structured interviews will last between 45-60 minutes and will be transcribed verbatim. Further, the interviews will be analysed using the thematic analysis approach as described by Braun and Clarke.

### **Theoretical contributions:**

I am at this stage unsure about potential theoretical contributions. Most likely they will be towards the dynamic capabilities literature or strategic management literature.

I hope to gain some clarity on this through the PhD workshop colloquium at SCAIEM.

**Practical/managerial contributions:**

Insights into what barriers prohibit large innovations or R&D projects from succeeding as well as which factors enable the success of those. Additionally, it highlights which factors should be taken into account when making investments in these projects. Further, an overall improved understanding of how to build firm-internal innovative capabilities for large innovation or R&D projects, which – in extension - would allow companies to move along the innovation learning curve and become more innovative.