

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Innovation practices of Entrepinays from Camarines Sur

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Abstract: Innovation as an output and as a process is the result of new combinations created by the entrepreneur (Schumpeter, 1934). In this exploratory study, we investigated the case of four women entrepreneurs from Camarines Sur to determine their innovation strategies and their implication to their business performance. We compared the degree by which these Entrepinays implement innovation practices based on the OSLO Innovation Measurement Framework. This framework specifies four types of innovation, namely: product, process, marketing, and organizational innovation. Based on the content analysis of our data gathered from the one-on-one interview, our results revealed that the Bicolana entrepreneurs implemented more of marketing and organizational innovation strategies. Marketing innovation practices are manifested in their active search and introduction of new sales channels, continuing effort to find new ways to promote their goods and services, and the effective use of branding as a differentiation strategy. Organizational innovation practices are evident in the way they establish relationships and collaborate with other people and companies. Within their respective enterprise, these Entrepinays motivate and improve their workers' performance and retain their loyalty through various human resource development practices. Our findings also showed that all the women entrepreneurs are able to pinpoint that their conscious effort to adopt and implement innovative marketing and organizational practices have contributed to the profitability, productivity, and existence of their business in Bicol for years. We proposed that a bigger sample size of respondents and area coverage be undertaken on the innovative practices of other Entrepinays to depict a picture of the innovative landscape of the province which can provide important data for policy-making purposes that can benefit women entrepreneurs at large.

Keywords: innovation strategy, innovation, entrepreneurship, women entrepreneurs

JEL Classifications: L21, L23, L25, L26

Background of the Study

The important contribution of women entrepreneur to the economic growth and development of a country is highly recognized. It is estimated that SMEs with full or partial female ownership represent 31% to 38% (8 to 10 million) of formal SMEs in emerging markets (International Finance Corporation, 2011). In a study of 42 countries, the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) for 2006–2007 noted that the Philippines have the second highest percentage of entrepreneurially active females, after Peru (Madarang & Habito, 2007). In our country, six out of 10 business start-ups were women-owned. However, it was also observed that the ownership changes as the business develops. From an initial 69% ownership for businesses less than 3.5-month-old to 51% business ownership for businesses between 3.5 months to 3.5 years, women ownership drops even further to 44% for businesses that are more than 3.5 years (Castro, 2013).

One of the often-cited definitions of entrepreneurship describes it as “sources of opportunities, the processes of discovery, evaluation, and exploitation of opportunities and the individuals who discover, evaluate, and exploit them” (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000, p. 218). Globally, men maybe more likely to start a business; however, in the Philippines, both men and women are equally likely to start a business. In fact, more than half (51%) of business start-up owners are female, but, established businesses are still mostly male owned at 66%. Nonetheless, this illustrates that Filipina entrepreneurs are highly capable of starting their own business. However, as noted by Edralin (2007), the traditional businesses open to them have become highly competitive characterized by low productivity and often low margins. Despite these constraints, many entrepinays manage to become successful in their respective lines of businesses. Their innovative practices appear to be key drivers of their successful entrepreneurship. Their success could be attributed to the commitment of their management, dedication of their employees, or the availability of resources (Alsaaty, 2011).

Innovation

Innovation is the implementation of a new or significantly improved product; process; new marketing method; or a new organizational method in business practices, workplace organization, or external

relations (OECD & Eurostat, 2005). It includes all scientific, technological, organizational, financial, and commercial steps which actually lead, or are intended to lead, to the implementation of innovations. Some of these activities may be innovative in their own right, while others are not novel but are necessary to implementation (OECD & Eurostat, 2005). For any business, Drucker (1985) observed that innovation is important for introducing changes that can lead to the development of new product/service, process, methods or new management perspectives. It is used by enterprising individuals to exploit an opportunity for a different business or service. However, he emphasized the need for entrepreneurs to constantly search and monitor changes in the environment that will indicate opportunities for successful innovation.

Firms introducing innovative strategy can do so at the product, market, efficiency, quality, process, or organizational levels (OECD & Eurostat, 2005). However, a business who wants to introduce innovation needs to develop visionary leadership, harness employee creativity, and involve the customers, suppliers, and other stakeholders in the proposed interventions (De Geus, 1997, as cited in Dervitsiotis, 2010). The importance of knowledge management, leadership, and relationship quality in the innovation-performance relationship in introducing innovation was emphasized by Overall (2015) while Jang (2014) concluded that proper organizational structure, resources, and an empowered work team who can initiate innovative interventions could facilitate faster market entrance for product-oriented firms. However, Tushman (1997, as cited in Siguaw, Simpson, & Enz, 2006) observed that “the narrow focus on innovations ignores the propensity of an organization to continually innovate as an organizational objective especially since innovations in and of themselves are not necessarily the key to long-term business success” (p 557).

According to the OSLO innovation management framework, innovation is key to the growth of output and productivity. The relationship between innovation and economic development is widely acknowledged. Hence, Siguaw et al. (2006) posited that the sustainability of an enterprise depends on its innovation orientation that emphasizes the development of competencies necessary to produce innovations and less on specific innovations. It is an organization that attempts to embed an innovation

mindset; one where there is systematic monitoring of the sources of innovative opportunity (Drucker, 1985) perceived as vital to long-term business success.

Research Problem and Objectives

Successful entrepreneurs innovate to create new values and make different contributions such as new product and services that are better in quality and lower in price (Drucker, 1985; Gamal, 2011).

It is argued that the sustainable growth of SMEs requires sustainable innovation and the continual acceleration in innovation will sustain revenue growth that can then fuel more innovation. Hence, it is important to identify an enterprises' reasons for innovating to understand the forces that drive innovation activities in an organization. It is within this context that we analyze and evaluate the innovation practices of four entrepreneurs from Camarines Sur and its implications to their business performance. Specifically, we aim to explore the types of innovative practices that the women entrepreneurs implement to ensure the continuity of their business.

Theoretical Framework

Our paper uses the OSLO innovation measurement framework to guide our analysis. This framework emphasizes the product and process innovations as well as the role of linkages with other firms and institutions in the innovation process. The model underscores the important role of linkage as a source of knowledge flows among firms and other organizations for the development and dissemination of innovations. This highlighted the role of organizational structures and practices in an organization to promote the sharing and use of knowledge with other firms and public research institutions. These also include the forming of closer relationships with suppliers and ongoing development of marketing practices to better reach customers. The OSLO framework identifies and differentiates four types of innovations, namely: product innovations, process innovations, marketing innovations, and organizational innovations.

Product innovation. The Oslo Manual (OECD & Eurostat, 2005) defined product innovation as

the introduction of a good or service that is new or significantly improved with respect to its characteristics or intended uses. This includes significant improvements in technical specifications, components and materials, incorporated software, user friendliness or other functional characteristics. Product innovations can utilize new knowledge or technologies, or can be based on new uses or combinations of existing knowledge or technologies. Product innovations refer to the introduction of new goods and services and significant improvements in the functional or user characteristics of existing goods and services. (p. 48)

Process innovation. According to OECD and Eurostat (2005), process innovation is the

implementation of a new or significantly improved production or delivery method. This includes significant changes in techniques, equipment and/or software. Process innovations can be intended to decrease unit costs of production or delivery, to increase quality, or to produce or deliver new or significantly improved products. (p. 49)

Marketing innovation. Market innovation can be defined as the

implementation of a new marketing method involving significant changes in product design or packaging, product placement, product promotion or pricing. Marketing innovations are aimed at better addressing customer needs, opening up new markets, or newly positioning a firm's product on the market, with the objective of increasing the firm's sales. (OECD & Eurostat, 2005, p. 49)

Organizational innovation. Organizational innovation is defined as the

implementation of a new organizational method in the firm's business practices, workplace organization or external relations. Organizational innovations can be intended to increase a firm's performance by reducing administrative costs or transaction costs, improving workplace satisfaction (and thus labour productivity),

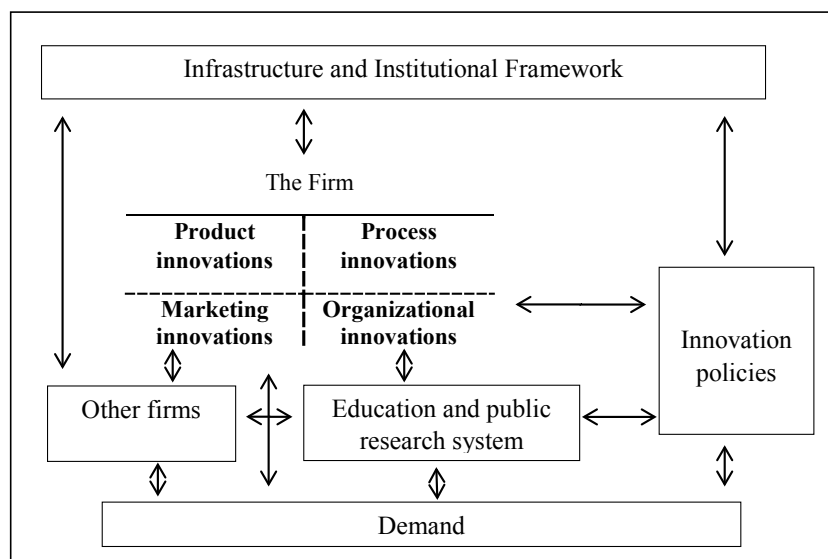


Figure 1. OSLO innovation measurement framework.

gaining access to nontradable assets (such as non-codified external knowledge) or reducing costs of supplies. (OECD & Eurostat, 2005, p. 51)

The measurement framework as shown in Figure 1 illustrates the breadth and variety of firm level innovation management policies and practices that ideally need to be measured. Business firms need to realize that innovation is a dynamic process; it is not a linear activity where resources are channeled at one end, from which emerges a new product or process.

Methodology

Our research used the case study approach to describe and compare the innovation management practices of the four entrepinays from Camarines Sur who are engaged in the food, food processing, agri-tourism, and trading business.

Following the OSLO Manual’s (OECD & Eurostat, 2005) “object” approach to data collection, we gathered data about specific innovations while seeking information about the entrepinays’ businesses. This was done through the case studies we did to better understand complex and multidimensional phenomena, such as the innovation process (Yin, 2003). Hence, for our study, we conducted in-depth individual interviews where we used unstructured or open-ended questions and conducted non-participant observation of the four women entrepreneurs within

their business premises. The enterprise visit allowed us to identify the innovative policies and practices implemented by the entrepinays as well as the degree of its implementation. The degree of implementation is operationally defined as: 1 – not evident, 2 – low evident, 3 – average evident, and 4 – highly evident; following the suggestion of the OSLO Manual that questions on a number of qualitative indicators can use an ordinal scale (OECD & Eurostat, 2005) . In this study, we chose our respondents based on the number of years they have been operating and they should be among the first few and leading women entrepreneurs from the province. Based on the number of years in operation, the women entrepreneurs should have been in business for at least 10 years. Table 1 presents the brief profile of the respondents. It is evident that while the entrepinays are operating in a mature industry, they are able to maintain their competitive edge through their innovative product, process, marketing or organizational strategies.

To protect the identity of our respondents, we called them Entrepreneur Arianna for the entrepinay in the ICT business, Entrepreneur Beth for the food-based entrepreneur, Entrepreneur Carol for the entrepinay in the food processing business, and Entrepreneur Doris for the farm tourism entrepreneur.

The main units of analysis for this study were the key elements of the OSLO framework and the discussion focuses on the product, process, market, and organizational innovation of each enterprise.

Table 1. Profile of the Women Entrepreneurs From Camarines Sur

Characteristics	Entrepreneur Arianna	Entrepreneur Beth	Entrepreneur Carol	Entrepreneur Doris
Size of firm (based on the number of employees)	Small	Small	Small	Small
No of employees	3	44	83	10
Nature of business	ICT	Food	Food processing	Agritourism
Type of Ownership	Sole Proprietorship	Sole Proprietorship	Sole Proprietorship	Sole Proprietorship
Number of years of operation	14	26	23	11
Location of business	Business district of Naga City	Beside residence	Beside residence	The farm is located around 5 km from her residence
Stage of business life cycle	mature	mature	mature	Mature

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the individual case analyses done on the innovation management

practices of the four entrepreneurs. Subsequently, comparison of their innovation practices and strategies was done using the OSLO framework.

Case 1. Entrepreneur Arianna: Up close “the product, marketing and organizational innovator”

“My vision is that of a financially sustainable business through quality service and strong partnership”

Arianna is in the information and communication sector. She is a product innovator who constantly looks for ways to introduce new goods with significant improvements in its technical specifications to her clients. In this, she was fortunate to get support from the Department of Science and Technology that allowed her to purchase upgraded tools and equipment not available to her competitors.

Arianna is also a marketing innovator. As a marketing innovator, she opens up new market and implements strategies to respond to customer needs. She is a hands-on manager who is very much involved in providing the necessary strategic orientation characterized by a strong commitment to innovation, provision of innovative products coupled with a personalized customer service and provision of technical assistance, when necessary. Her exemplary customer service led to word-of-mouth promotion of her products and services. In fact, she has become the preferred service provider of private higher education institutions, government agencies, medical institutions, and other business enterprises within and outside the province.

As an organizational innovator, she has been actively collaborating with government agencies to get information on the latest ICT related trends and product offerings; ensuring that services provided are done in the most efficient and economical manner; making sure that the clients are satisfied as the entrepreneur believe this is one way of getting additional referrals. Moreover, as a manifestation of her social responsibility, she has been accepting student interns and has been providing them with technical trainings on ICT. Eventually, some of her student interns became part of her growing business.

Her more than 10 year in the business meant that she is able to get supplies from reliable sources, enjoy flexible terms with her suppliers that translates to better service to her clients. Being in a mature market, Arianna attends to government invitations to participate in trade exhibits; carefully studies her market and her competitors; ensure strict adherence to product quality and standards; and makes sure that customers are happy.

Case 2. Entrepinay Beth: Up close “the product and marketing innovator”

“I was the first in the city to introduce the native food concept and I successfully used the social media to promote our business.”

Beth owns one of the more popular restaurants serving Filipino and Bicolano dishes along the popular Magsaysay Avenue in Naga City. Back in 1990, Beth started what would become a precursor of business establishments in the area when she introduced the first native food restaurant along the along Magsaysay Avenue. Since then, Mags, as it is popularly known, has become a haven for food enthusiasts.

Beth is a product and marketing innovator. As a product innovator, she changed the entire business model of her restaurant when she gave her children a free hand to experiment with new products that they feel is best suited to the changing market needs and to the new set of customers, the younger market that they want to attract. However, she believes in retaining their classic food offerings for their regular clients. After all, she believes that her regular clients frequently return to her restaurant expecting the same kind of food they were accustomed to.

Beth knows fully well that the food industry is a highly competitive sector. She knows that the market has a fickle taste; hence, they came up with different food combinations to cater to the different market demands. They also had a change in its image from its former “Kamayan Native Restaurant” concept to one with a more modern look. With the change in the business model comes a change in their business name to reflect the image change. The change in their business image was further enhanced by her constant reminder that the staff has to work at satisfying and delighting the customers. Hence, she trained her staff on customer service and the importance of ensuring a happy customer.

Today, her restaurant has maintained its reputation as a family restaurant that serves traditional Bicolano and popular Filipino dishes.

As a marketing innovator, Beth successfully utilized the power of the social media to promote her restaurant. As proof of their social media presence and the quality of their product and service, they were awarded with a Certificate of Excellence by the Trip Advisor in 2014 (www.tripadvisor.com). Moreover, to ensure their online presence, they hired a professional webpage designer to promote their restaurant.

Recently, they opened additional branches in Naga City and in Albay to expand their market base.

Adapted from Caning and Edralin (2016)

Case 3. Entrepinay Carol: Up close “the product, process, marketing, and organizational innovator”

“I introduced new product lines and explored alternative uses for the by-products of pili. I explored other markets and strengthened my value chain through my use of networks.”

Carol is the province’s top exporter of processed pili nut products. Hers is a classic example of a micro entrepreneur, who through hard work and perseverance became one of the leading entrepinays, engaged in the food processing business in the province. In 1994, Carol started on her path as an entrepreneur when she started offering pili nut tarts to her Makati based officemates. Since 1995 and armed with a capital of Php 500, her business has now become a small enterprise with an asset size of Php25 million.

As a product innovator, she has been actively searching for significant improvements to their existing product. Hence, her product line has expanded from the sugar/honey coated kind of pili products to pili tarts, marzipan, and flavored pili, among others. Further, her business is not afraid to explore and find uses for all parts of pili, such as the testa and elemi, and develop value-added products using these different raw materials.

As a process innovator, she introduced the use of modern machines and equipment to prolong the shelf life, improve product quality, and lately, packaging of their products. They have invested in industrial ovens, roasting machine, evaporator machine, and juice extractor to produce high quality innovative pili products. They also invested in vacuum sealers and introduced the use of nitrogen gas for food packaging to prolong the shelf life of their products. As part of her continuing efforts to increase product quality, she ensures hygiene and sanitation in the production areas through the implementation of good manufacturing practices. They also applied for compliance with the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP). Finally, they made that they observe the same handling processes for their processing activities, whether they are producing for the local or the international markets.

As a marketing innovator, she introduced new sales channels such as opening new store outlets in key locations (i.e malls) in Naga City and Albay as well as established pasalubong centers in identified tourist destinations in Camarines Sur. In fact, the business now has seven pasalubong centers in Camarines Sur. Further, she collaborated with some hotels in Naga City for her products to be displayed in the hotel vicinity. Further, to expand her market outlet, she applied for and was given a Halal Product Certification by the Islamic Da’Wah Council of the Philippines, Inc. for their pili products. This effectively means that her products can be purchased by the Muslim buyers anywhere in the world.

As an organizational innovator, Carol invested in equipment and software for the ancillary business support activities. The company uses the POS system and other IT-related systems to enhance their production and management efficiency.

She established collaborations with research organizations and found new methods of integration with suppliers. One of her latest innovative projects is the PILIpinas project. This is part of her efforts to ensure a steady supply and stable price of pili. Under the PILIpinas project, Carol is offering a contract growing partnership with anyone (individual farmers, LGU’s, private organizations, church-based organizations) who has idle lots that they are willing to use for pili farming.

In this project, Carol will provide all the input required and will buy all the pili produced from their contract growers. With this project, she hopes to stabilize the supply of pili nut and at the same time, contribute to the greening of the province.

Adapted from Caning and Edralin (2016)

Case 4. Entrepinay Doris: Up close “the product and marketing innovator

“I am one of the first to introduce the agri-tourism farm in the province and I am a GAP awardee.”

Doris owns and manages a farm destination helpful in transforming a third-class municipality into a cultural, tourist, and food destination. What initially started as a farm for herself, her own playground, became a place where forest, vegetables, and man are present.

Coming home to Bicol after her foreign assignments, Doris thought of developing their 4-hectare family farm to become fruitful and productive. At first, she planted ornamental plants since she planned to go into the landscaping business. With no agriculture background, Doris read and studied landscaping. To further her knowledge, she started attending TESDA sponsored seminars and trainings on landscaping, nursery management, and gardening. Doris then started buying mother plants.

However, when she got invited by the Department of Agriculture to be a demonstration (demo) farm for vegetables, she decided that a portion of her farm would be used as a techno-demo for the hybrid tomato (Diamante variety) of the East-West Seeds company. As it happens, what started as a techno-demo farm has evolved to become a model vegetable farm growing different vegetables such as eggplant, bitter melon, string beans, okra, and squash, depending on the planting season.

She wanted a “pick-your-own vegetable” business model patterned after the US practice. However, the concept has evolved from the original “pick and pay concept” to a farm-to-kitchen concept where what is harvested can be cooked and served for the guests. For her efforts to initiate agricultural production practices that are environmentally sustainable and socially acceptable, she was awarded with a Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) recognition. She is the recipient of the Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) award.

As a product and marketing innovator, Doris started offering bed and breakfast that has no TV and air-conditioning unit because what they offer is a farm, not a resort. She also built Bali-inspired kubo that can serve as training venues for other farmers and women entrepreneurs. Her farm attracts students, other farmers, and tourists who want to enjoy nature, learn about and experience farming. After all, for Doris, her farm is an advocacy for the environment. It is her life, her work, her art, and her way of giving back to the community.

Adapted from Caning and Edralin (2016)

Table 2. *Innovation Practices of the Bicolana Entrepreneurs*

Types of innovation	Measurement Areas	Arianna	Beth	Carol	Doris
Process innovation strategies	Production methods involving techniques, equipment, and software used to produce goods or services.	4	1	4	1
	New or significantly improved techniques, equipment, and software in ancillary support activities such as purchasing, accounting, computing, and maintenance.	4	3	4	2
Product innovation strategies	Development of a new use for a product with only minor changes to its technical specifications.	1	1	3	1
	Significant improvements to existing products can occur through changes in materials, components, and other characteristics that enhance performance.	4	4	4	4
Marketing innovation strategies	Product design changes refer to changes in product form and appearance that do not alter the product's functional or user characteristics.	1	2	2	1
	Changes in the packaging of products such as foods, beverages, and detergents where packaging is the main determinant of the product's appearance.	1	2	2	2
	Introduction of new sales channels.	4	3	4	4
	Use of new concepts for promoting a firm's goods and services.	3	4	4	4
	Branding such as the development and introduction of a fundamentally new brand symbol (as distinguished from a regular update of the brand's appearance), which is intended to position the firm's product on a new market or give the product a new image.	2	2	2	4
	Implementation of new methods for organizing routines and procedures for the conduct of work	4	2	4	4
Organizational innovation strategies	Implementation of practices for employee development and improving worker retention, such as education and training systems.	3	2	2	3
	Implementation of new methods for distributing responsibilities and decision making among employees for the division of work within and between firm activities (and organizational units), as well as new concepts for the structuring of activities, such as the integration of different business activities.	2	3	4	3
	Implementation of new ways of organizing relations with other firms or public institutions, such as the establishment of new types of collaborations with research organizations or customers, new methods of integration with suppliers, and the outsourcing or subcontracting for the first time of business activities in production, procurement, distribution, recruitment, and ancillary services.	4	4	4	4

Note: 1 – Not Evident; 2 – Low Evident; 3 – Average Evident; 4 – Highly Evident

The interview and anecdotal evidences from the four women entrepreneurs as presented in Table 2, shows interesting patterns of innovation practices along the categories developed by the OSLO Model. It is evident that the women entrepreneur, who came from different industry groups, implemented different innovation activities.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The implementation of innovation strategies can provide businesses with a competitive advantage (Bozkurt & Kalkan, 2014; OECD & Eurostat, 2005; Terziovski, 2010). In our study, the four women entrepreneurs maybe engaged differently in their innovation practices, but it is evident from the interview that the women intuitively knew that implementing such practices helps ensure the growth and economic performance of their respective businesses. In all the cases presented and summarized in Table 2, it can be seen that the entrepinays are heavily involved in the implementation of organizational innovation strategies in terms of establishing new ways of organizing relations with other firms or public institutions, establishment of new types of collaborations with organizations or customers and new methods of integration with buyers. Entrepinays Arianna, Carol, and Doris have actively sought partnership with government agencies that allowed them to avail of upgraded facilities and equipments. Further, Carol got into the international market through the support of certain government agencies who helped them improve the product and its packaging. Today, the entrepinays from Camarines Sur are building networks that allow them to access resources and information. That they are at the stage where they are actively establishing relations and networks with their other stakeholders can be explained by the fact that they are already operating for more than 10 years and have already established their products/service niches. However, despite their more than 10 years in their respective businesses, they are still actively introducing process innovation strategies such as the use of IT and software to enable them to speed up their operation and provide them with the needed operational efficiency.

That innovation can help firms play a dominant role in shaping the future of their industries (Lawson & Samson, 2001) is highly obvious in the food processing

industry through the variety of products available in the market, its improved product packaging, expanding market, and adherence to quality standards. In this industry, the entrepinays shows their capacity for innovation by consistently bringing new high quality products to the market faster, more frequently, and at a lower cost than competitors. The four women entrepreneurs are able to effectively use their resources to introduce new products and process innovations important to continuously improve and create value addition to their existing products. They are doing what Jang (2014) recommended that business owners should do—innovate and not just manage. The case of the four entrepinay's underscores the findings of Sung-Sup's (2013) study that says the development of firm-level innovation capability may be crucial, particularly when an enterprise wants to enhance its competitive advantages or core competencies, which can lead to its long-term growth potential. The experience of the entrepinay's emphasizes the need not just to develop their innovative capability but to work at embedding a culture of innovation; whether it is a product, process, marketing or organizational innovation.

Innovators need to build an organizational culture of awareness of their customers, whether it is their internal and external clients (Mazzarol, Clark, & Reboud, 2014) and this is evident in the organizational practices of the women, particularly through the investments they made in the training and development of their employees. Such investment in their employees could only lead to new ideas about goods and services, as well as other organizational innovations. The importance of employees as a source and champion of innovation was posited by Alsaaty (2011) when he said that giving of incentives can encourage employees to actively participate in product ideation and development activities as well as cooperate in the diffusion, and adoption of organizational change brought by innovation.

The four cases illustrate some patterns of innovative practices; undoubtedly influenced by their years in operation as well as factors that are internal and external to the company. Being in business for more than 10 years meant that the entrepreneurs have already significantly found ways to improve their product and service delivery for enhanced customer value.

Rather, at this stage in their business growth cycle, the four women entrepreneurs are working on strengthening their strategic partnerships with key

sectors, private or public. They are actively engaged in research and development initiatives and are using their networks to access the market, resources, and supplier. Moreover, the women entrepreneurs are introducing organizational changes which allow them to delegate responsibilities through their efforts at building a motivated through the provision of incentives and workplace innovations.

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