

## COLLABORATION FOR SUSTAINABLE INNOVATION

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### Summary

“Sustainable development” is now a global objective. To achieve this goal, the process of innovation -- the source and origin of development -- must also be sustainable. In this chapter we consider the concept of ‘sustainable innovation’ and propose the need for ‘champions of collaboration’ who can foster collaboration for sustainable innovation.

### 1. Introduction

Sustainable development and competitive advantage are important but potentially contradictory goals for market driven organizations and nations. We know that sustainable development is important because our future as a species depends upon it. Competitive advantage is important because in a market society the firms who will carry out that development must be competitive in order to survive. A recent Canadian study indicates that firms are the primary engines of sustainable development as they have the financial resources, technical knowledge, and institutional capacity to implement sustainable development (Crabbe 1997).

The difficulty arises because the two objectives have different skill demands. Sustainable development requires a *breadth* of skills that consider ecosystem implications in all of its richness and nuance. Competitive advantage, on the other hand, requires the *depth* of skills that can create winning new products for a global marketplace.

Simultaneously managing breadth and depth is a challenge that has eluded many. One solution is to work with partners. In recent years this has led firms to seek inter-organizational linkages in the innovation process. These linkages are also known as “technological collaboration.” Mark Dodgson’s description of the aims of technological collaboration include: 1) improving the development process; 2) enhancing efficiency in the production chain; 3) merging previously discrete technologies and disciplines; 4)

learning through information exchange; 5) corporate strategies; and 6) public policies (Dodgson, 1993). Many of these activities increase an organization's capabilities for managing breadth and depth and thereby contribute to sustainable innovation.

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