'RUNNING IN PACKS' AND COMMERCIALIZATION OF ECO-INNOVATIONS (INTERACTIVE PAPER)

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Principal Topic
The notion of sustainable development has emerged as the dominant global discourse to adapt
cultures and economies to novel modes of production and consumption in areas such as trans-
port, energy, housing, agriculture and food. This process can be described as a socio-technical
transition, which means that along with the technological development it requires corresponding
changes in markets, user practices, discourses in terms of policy and culture and governing institu-
tions (Geels, Hekkert and Jacobsson, 2008).

Entrepreneurs are considered essential agents of this transition. However, individual entre-
preneurs do not have the ability to produce such change alone. Especially in emerging indus-
tries, entrepreneurs have to interact with skeptical external resource holders (suppliers, creditors,
customers, etc.), while competing with incumbent firms that are committed to, invested in and
advantaged by existing ways of doing things in a particular field (Garud et al. 2007). Therefore,
entrepreneurs have to strive to gain legitimacy with different groups of stakeholders to get access
to resources, markets, etc. as well as to be perceived serious and trustworthy (Aldrich and Fiol,
1994). This paper aims to study how entrepreneurs in the environmental technology sector use
collaborative means to overcome resource, ability and legitimacy constraints in the process of
commercialization of eco-innovations.

Method
The analysis is based on data from interviews conducted with the CEOs of twelve early-stage
SMEs in environmental technology sector in Sweden.

Results and Implications
The collaboration strategies of entrepreneurs depend on the barriers and opportunities per-
ceived by them and thus the aims of the collaboration. In very early development stages, col-
laborations seem to have an important signaling effect that creates legitimacy and can be more
significant than the actual outcomes of the collaboration. Large incumbent firms and financial
actors are perceived to be most important collaboration partners to promote own technology
or product, while “running in packs” with other entrepreneurs is used to affect attitudes, policy-
makers and the governing institutions on a more general level.

This paper contributes to increased understanding of the barriers to commercialization in
emerging industry sectors and collaborations strategies used by entrepreneurs to overcome these
barriers. The results also develop knowledge about possible instruments for strengthening the
ability of entrepreneurs to commercialize eco-innovations.

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