



# Six Fields for Innovation to Learn from Fiction Writing

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This article develops a paradigm for innovation to learn from fiction writing meaningfully. Using a method of participant observation, the author engaged in the creative activities in the two streams over the years. The paper points out six disparities by comparing the two novelty-centered domains. The article further frames practical channels for innovation to learn from its counterpart. At the same time, measures for improving innovation education and research are suggested. The research findings help expand the frontiers of business innovation.

**Keywords:** *Innovation, fiction writing, participant observation, disparity induced learning, and frontiers of innovation research*

## I. Introduction

Innovation and fiction writing are two streams of creation. They nurse, enrich, and grow human society at an accelerating rate. While innovation ceaselessly materializes the advancement of science and technology and creates physical wealth, fiction writing produces characters and events and augments spiritual wealth. Scrutinizing the efforts for bridging fiction and management, a bifurcation can be observed in both scholarship and practice. One branch is to use fiction as a canvas for accommodating, mixing, and presenting educational materials. For example, Brawer (1998) prizes fiction and regards them as the best management books. His argument centers on the complexity of protagonists in great novels, which differs from management books, showing faceless people with a simplified cure-all solution for management problems. Martin, Edwards and Sayers (2018) display the unique role of women's literary fiction in developing more gender-aware leadership learners. Phillips and Knowles (2012) demonstrate the dual function of 'do' and 'undo' gender and business ownership through protagonists in certain novels. Many researchers find the advantages of using fiction in teaching business because fiction provides rich contexts, stimulates learners' learning enthusiasm and emotions (Mar et al. 2011) and shows a tremendous power for illustrating ethical dilemmas in business (Greenwood 2000, Kennedy and Lawton 1992).

The other branch of the bifurcation is to use fiction as a pair of scissors for interestingly cutting the educational materials. Building on the narratives of stories, scholars and practitioners developed different senses, approaches, and media to enrich the pedagogy of management education. For example, Fraiberg (2010) observed that scholars turned to literary theory and the humanities for new means of addressing the ineffable, aesthetic aspects of human activity and for leadership inquiry and pedagogy. Cohen (1998) reports his practices in using a 'literary criticism' approach with students to develop their 'common-sense' model of reading. Mayfield (2019) further demonstrates the effectiveness of software based on interactive fiction. Finally, Ritenour (2015) consolidates several scholars' research and draws the following conclusion. Suppose business and economics professors pay attention to how various economic and business-related messages are crafted in literature and cinema. In that case, they can engage students to view the world of business, commerce, and corporate culture with both positive and negative perspectives of free markets and profit-seeking enterprise.

However, when the focus is on using fiction in innovation education and research, a missing gap or "virgin island" emerges—few studies have explored how innovation can learn from fiction's creating process. Scholars concern mainly about how the contents, particularly from science fiction, inspire innovation. They highlight the usage of reading fiction for understanding the fragile of the status quo and the malleable of future (Peper 2017), getting stimulus from imaginary technical devices and machinery (Fritzsche and Dürbeck 2020), facilitating prototyping (Popper 2015), and developing insights about possible futures and the changes of techno-economic paradigms (Steinmueller 2017). However, few studies have addressed facilitating innovation by examining the process of fiction writing. This article aims to fill the gap and build another connection between fiction and innovation.

As we know that fiction is originated from cavemen or nomads' storytelling (Lamb 2008). Although it has experienced media change, fiction writing sticks to the rule of thousands of years' old storytelling—lifelike and novelty (Cassill 1975, Peck 1980, Koontz 1981, Stein 1995, Cron 2012, Burroway 2015). In its domain, cliché is a taboo. Writers are tirelessly competing with living writers and ceased ancestors for new expression in contents, settings, structures, and characters (Phillips 1984, Card 1988, King 2001). With the internet and self-publication, more and more people are engaged in literature creation (Clark and Phillips 2019).

Innovation, propelled by inventions and commercialization (Schumpeter 1939), started with the elite's endeavors. Then, it shifted to instituted efforts (Drucker 1985). Currently, it forms a torrent of mass creation (Chesbrough 2003, Lan 2019). As a result, more people are engaged in the game, more resources are channeled into the process, and more attention is put into the development of



the ecosystem. Globally, the issues of innovation—including creating innovative ideas, realizing the ideas, protecting the ideas, and maintaining the sustainability of the creative chain—become the agenda of companies, governments, and international organizations (Pisano 2015, Lan 2019, Rothaermel 2019).

The common root of fiction and innovation is a novelty. In innovation, novelty is reflected in obtaining an original and practical utility of a product, a process, a method, or a relationship. In literature creation, novelty is reflected in having a new and striking expression of a plot, a character, and a scene. People behind the two streams are curious and imaginative (Dyer et al. 2011, Burroway 2015). They are all looking for new ways of making sense of a complex world. They are keen to obtain groundbreaking ideas, new products, new methods, and new inspirations.

Sharing the same root does not lead to a flourish in research on the mutual learning of the two streams. What are the similarities and disparities between the two creating processes? Does the curriculum of innovation education need to be changed based on the differences? How can the frontier of innovation research be expanded by learning from fiction creation? All those questions are required to be addressed.

This paper is organized into the following sections. Section two deals with research methodology. It introduces a six-component framework for comparing two creative streams. At the same time, it discusses the methods for comparing, particularly participant observation. Section three reveals the comparison results by pointing out six channels for innovation learn from fiction writing. The last section summarizes the research and mentions the avenue for future studies.

## **II. Research Framework**

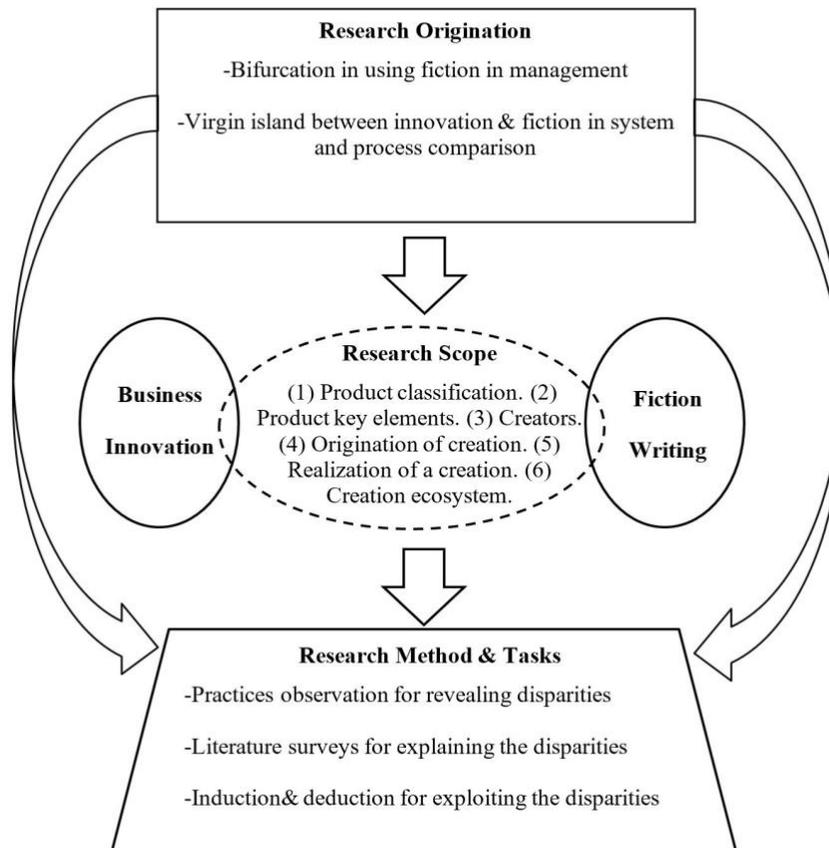
This paper uses a method of participant observation to conduct a systematical comparison between the two domains and point out several areas for expanding innovation frontiers. This study intends to be a one-way drive. It focuses only on exploring the learning opportunities for innovation. It will be the topic of another paper for discussing what literature creation can learn from innovation. To fulfil the task, this section discusses several issues related to the research methodology, including scope, procedures, and research methods.

Both innovation and literature creation contain many branches. In the domain of innovation, there are business innovation, government innovation, and social innovation. Government innovation helps public services better serve citizens. Social innovation focuses on introducing effective social practices and strengthening civil society. Business innovation has the wildest application. It

focuses on expanding the utility of productive factors and creating new economic wealth (Schumpeter 1939). In literary creation, there are also subfields, including fiction, non-fiction, poems, drama, etc. While non-fiction concerns prose writing and centers on facts, actual events, and real people, fiction writing describes imaginary events and people (Burroway 2015). This research will limit the comparison between business innovation and fiction writing to simplify the comparison. Firstly, they are both the main components of the two domains. Secondly, they possess the "man-made" nature—they are all results of human imaginations.

Based on the similarities of business innovation and fiction writing, the author uses a framework to research, as shown in diagram 1. The framework embeds such a concept that disparities induce learning and catching up in similar man-made systems.

**Diagram 1. Overall Research Framework**



Determination of the research scope is related to comparing the two domains. Three subjects are selected based on the logical structure of a creative system. They are product, producer, and production. Product or output-oriented analyses are downstream examinations. Producer-oriented analyses are upstream exploration. Production-oriented analyses serve as midstream assessments.



In each subject, two issues are further identified. Putting them together, six channels constitute the domain of this research.

To display the existing disparities in the two streams, this research involves peeling off three layers:

1. It decodes operational practices. While identifying the common roots, highlights the unique customs.
2. It deciphers the theoretical explanations for compiling and consolidating the disparity in each channel.
3. It ponders the deep root of individuality in each stream.

Given the overall design, the research was carried out using literature surveys and participant observations. The former is crucial to get overall coverage. The latter is essential to dig deep for sense-making. As Cooper and Schindler (2013) mentioned that participant observations are ideal for qualitative research.

The author is a veteran of innovation. In addition to teaching courses on entrepreneurship and innovation, the author has researched varied topics such as innovation structure, innovation dynamics, the origination of innovative ideas, and mass innovation. The author has created and managed a successful innovation for over a decade, which helps to nurse a robust innovation community. The author is also engaged in fiction writing for years. In addition to composing poems for decades, the author drafted fiction from short stories to novella to long novels, crossing different fiction genres. The engagement in both creative streams offers the author a unique angle and the firsthand experiences to compare the two domains.

### III. Six Fields for Innovation to Learn from Fiction Writing

To implement the working framework, the author keeps practicing in the two areas with a clear mission and obtains current research findings, as shown in Diagram 2.

**Diagram 2. Six Areas for Innovation to Learn from Fiction Writing**

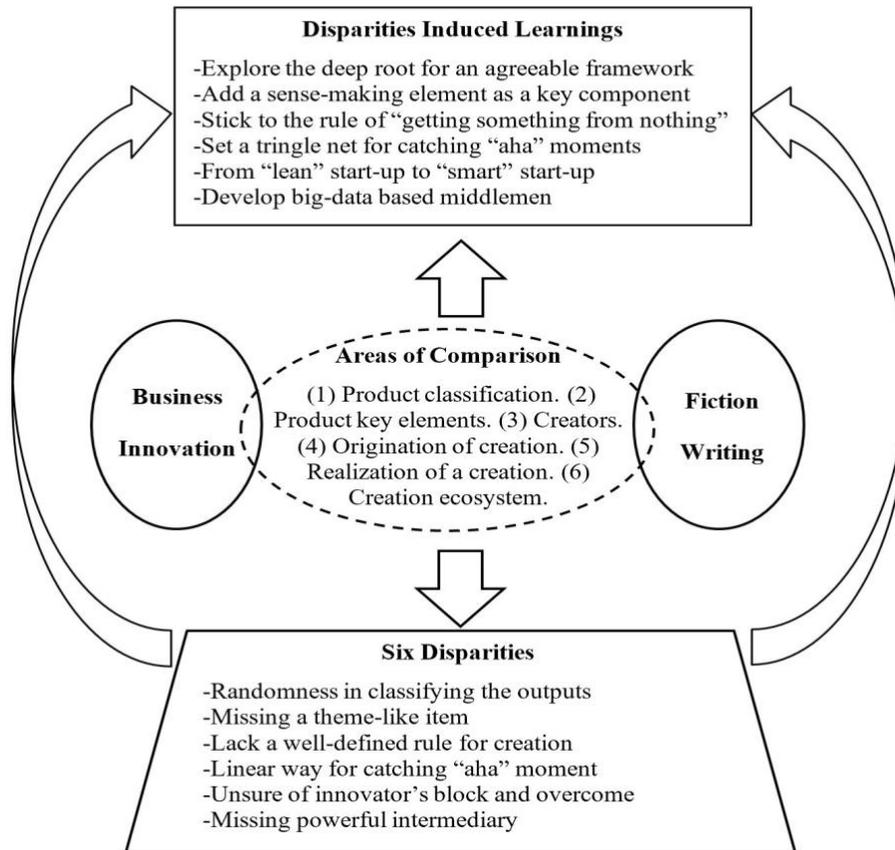


Diagram 2 highlights six differences between business innovation and fiction writing obtained through participant observation. It also points out the six areas that innovation can expand, resulting from disparity-induced learning opportunities.

#### 1 Develop an agreeable framework for recognizing the core of innovation

The first disparity revealed in the research is a high randomness shown in business innovation for recognizing creative outputs. The output for fiction writing is straightforward, a novel. For business innovation, the output is a little bit complex. It can be an enterprise based on either a tangible product such as a new airplane, or an intangible service such as a new way of touring a site. To recognize the diversity of its products, each stream uses different methods.



In fiction creation, "genre" is used as a basic unit to distinguish the novels according to the similarities in form, style, or subject matter. Although different authors or critics have different opinions on the division of novels, there is no substantial difference between them. For example, Nancy Lamb (2008) offer an excellent classification for the clarity and comprehension. According to her, there are nine genres containing sixty-five sub-genres or categories.

The classification of innovation is evolving. However, it shows great ambiguity. Conducting a simple Google search using "types of innovation" as keywords, many articles with different opinions can be obtained. The numbers of innovation types range from two to over twenty. Limiting the search to scholarly research does not reduce the uncertainty. Starting with a dichotomy, popular ones are radical innovation versus incremental innovation (Schumpeter 1939), product versus process innovation (Abernathy and Utterback, 1978), architectural versus modular innovation (Henderson and Clark, 1990), technology versus market innovation (Leonard-Barton, 1998), disruptive versus sustainable innovation (Christensen, 1997), and open versus closed innovation (Chesbrough 2003). Moving on to a tripartite, Lan et al (2007) proposes a model called innovation trinity. They put the coexistence of functionality, efficiency, and relationship innovation as the common denominator of innovation. Quadrant configuration is another popular identification of innovation, giving the different combinations of varied dichotomy structures. The 4Ps model, a product-process division crossing an architectural-modular division, is an example (Tidd and Bessant 2013). By combining different features of innovation, some studies identify multi-type innovations. For example, Sawhney et al. (2006) regard innovation as a "radar" consisting twelve types of innovation.

The randomness in classifying outputs indicates the flexibility of innovation scholars in selecting analyzing methods at the surface. However, the increasing randomness shows the deficiency in the theoretical exploration and particularly indicates the lack of a core in innovation studies. In fiction writing, using a genre system as the core, stakeholders have clear ideas on what to expect from an output, although there may be some gray areas for the mixture of different genres. Writers know where to get their benchmarks and what to write. Readers know where to find their favorites and how to compare different products. Agents know the expectations and responses of a selected niche market. In short, people involved in fiction writing are, more or less, on the same page.

The high randomness—numerous methods for slicing innovation—points out a weakness i.e. the vagueness in innovation, although innovation has become a buzz word in the world. The vagueness suggests the lack of an agreeable framework for identifying the core of innovation, and accommodating different elements of innovation. It also exhibits the preliminary stage of theoretic exploration. The weakness may result from the comparatively short history of innovation—it is



less than a century since Schumpeter coined the term of innovation. It may signal the direction for constructing the edifice of the discipline.

To learn from fiction writing and develop a genre-like system for defining the branches of innovation, scholars in innovation study have to face the tasks for consolidating previous researches. Each method mentioned above has revealed certain facts on innovation. However, the deep root of innovation or the core of innovation still needs to be dug out. Without a solid foundation, innovation edifice is difficult to be built, and stakeholders in innovation would hard to get a consensus on define, measure, and assess an innovation.

It is debatable how to consolidate the previous research and advance a more accommodative innovation framework. However, moving towards the goal is unavoidable. The randomness in recognizing innovation outputs displays the urgency for resolving the problem.

## **2 Add a sense-making element into the innovation elements model**

Another variance between the two creative streams is the missing of a theme-like item within innovation. It means that inside business innovations, a broad sense-making element is not built-in, and measuring and enhancing the broad responsibility of an innovation are not taken seriously.

During the research, the author scrutinizes the models of product elements, which dissect a single output and look into the internal structure of a final product. Based on the scrutinization, the business plan canvas (Osterwalder et al. 2005) and a seven-narrative-elements (Anonymous 2018) are used for further comparison, which examines individual elements in respective models, with a particular reference to the dominant component.

In the model of narrative elements in fiction writing, there are seven components: plot, setting, characters, point of view, theme, symbolism, and conflict. Among them, conflict serves as the dominant element. Summarizing varied discussions, plot is simply defined as the arrangement of events. It is often designed in the format of two dogs fighting for one bone (Peck 1980). Setting establishes the time and the place, whether a familiar universe or a strange world. In the setting, main characters or narrator exist, grow, and experience challenges. Characters are persons or personalized creatures, who interact with each other or with an environment in facing certain barriers. Point of view is regarded as a technical element (King 2001). It determines who is the teller of a story, and how conflicts are peeled off at a certain angle. Theme is an idea that recurs in or is shown in a novel. It is usually a basic, moral reinforcing, and inspiring concept. Symbolism provides memorable symbols to readers and layers the meaning of a subject. A good symbol always gives clues for understanding the plot and unearthing the roots of struggles. Conflict is a



serious disagreeable arguments or actions between protagonists and antagonists. Being a centerpiece of a fiction, conflict can happen among human beings or between human beings and the environment. It motivates characters, affects the plot, and dictates the theme of a narrative. While arousing readers, painting the color of a setting, and giving the meaning to a symbol, conflict displays the scope and depth of each element in the fiction. As Koontz (1981) and Burroway (2015) mentioned that without a well-defined and fully-developed conflict, a fiction novel is impossible to be attractive. In fiction writing, many simple and practical toolkits such as narrative arc (Koontz 1981, Lamb 2008), Freytag Pyramid (Kercheval 1997), or inverted checkmark (Vandenburg 2010) are developed for authors to deal with conflicts.

In the model of innovation output, nine elements are identified (Osterwalder et al. 2005). 1) Value proposition defines the overall utility or function of a new business being offered to customers. 2) Key activities are the crucial endeavors that the new business executes its value proposition. 3) Key resources are the most necessary resources that the business needs to secure. 4) Partner network is a buyer-supplier relationship for forging and defending the core activity. 5) Customer is a niche that the new business tries to serve. 6) Channels are means that the new business delivers its usage to targeted customers and obtain a fast, efficient, and cost-effective delivery. 7) Customer relationships design a sustainable relationship between the new business and its customer segments. 8) Cost structure reflects the input requirements for creating and delivering the key utility and their monetary consequences. 9) Revenue streams indicate ways for the new business to generate revenue from each customer segment.

Comparing the two output element models, the prominent difference is the missing of a theme-like element in business innovation. Although business plan canvas specifies an innovation's expectations, defines tasks, focuses on producing outputs, and establishes a solid anchor for creators to hold on, there is not an element which goes beyond the profitability. There is not a theme-like element taking care of the responsibility of an innovation. Therefore, adding a sense-making element into the innovation elements model makes a sense.

Adding a sense-making element into the innovation elements model seems simple and is only a transplant-type learning. What it involves is to put on a filter for protecting innovation from meaningless. In fact, this job is not so straightforward and requires more studies. Firstly, it needs to find out what the sense-making element is. In conventional innovation model, profit often sounds louder. On the surface, it is shown as a startup offers a useful product/service, and somebody is willing to pay for this product/service. However, the deep or broad implications of the offering/purchasing relationship are ignored. The introductions of indigestible plastic products serve as examples. In those cases, individual innovation possesses a profitable value proposition.



Aggregately, they constitute a disaster to human society and natural environment. Such cases indicate that the sense-making element in innovation should go beyond profitability.

Secondly, the linkage between the proposed theme-like item and the concept of “triple bottom” needs to be pinned. The movement emphasizes the coexistence of three factors. It states that the successful operations of a business rely on having three bottom lines—creating economic value, taking social responsibility, and maintaining the sustainability of our planet (Rothaermel 2019). However, the “triple bottom” are the “post innovation” concerns. Comparing to the sense-making element, they are exogenous. How to embed the exogenous requirement into innovation component structure is an interesting topic.

Thirdly, adding a sense-making element may offer help for dealing with the centerpiece in the innovation model—value proposition. The comparison shows that value proposition is still a confusing concept and lack a straightforward toolkit to bridge the domains of products and customers. Different people tend to interpret it in different ways. The ambiguity is reinforced by varied tools used in measuring different proxies of a value proposition (Burns 2018). The exploration on a broad sense-making element for the innovation element model is possible to harvest a by-product, and make the core—value proposition—more approachable, such as Freytag Pyramid making conflicts design visualizable.

### **3 Refine the curriculum of early education on innovation with emphasizing the rule of “getting something from nothing”**

The very basic foundation for creation is that creators can imagine. They have the motives and capabilities to pursue their creative thinking (Ruggiero 1984). However, the comparison between the two creative streams on creators reveals another gap—the insufficient early education, which fails to instill a clear-cut rule for conducting innovation. Therefore, refining the curriculum of innovation education becomes another part of induced learning.

In the research, the author selects two start points from innovation side: innovator's DNA (Dyer et al. 2011) and innovator's traits (Sniderman, 2012, Chamorro-Premuzic 2013, Bagly 2014) and two start points from fiction writing side: writers' skillsets (King 2001) and writers' personal traits (Gardner 1984, Burroway 2015). The examinations uncover similarities and differences between the two types of creators. The largest variation points to creators' early education.

Scrutinizing fiction writers, the majority of them are either egotists (Kercheval 1997) or humanness-seekers (Gardner 1984). In persistently pursuing their own combination of egotism and humanness, writers demonstrate certain skills. Interestingly, most writers can trace their



achievements back to their early education (Phillips 1984). For example, the basic rule of narrative—show not tell—is a key component in everyone’s early curriculum. Based on it, writers develop their creative capability by adding life experiences, sharpening distinguished personality, exploiting unique imagination, enriching implicated sentiments, and stimulating deep thinking.

Scrutinizing innovators, it is not difficult to find out that they possess certain skills and personalities. They tend to be perfectionists and workaholics, most likely because it takes an incredible amount of dedication, time, and hard work to push through an idea or initiative that hasn’t yet caught on. They take great pride in their achievements, but they also enjoy sharing their expertise with others. They are feels passionate about what they do (Sniderman, 2012, Chamorro-Premuzic 2013, Bagly 2014). They are strong in mastering associating, questioning, observing, networking, and experimenting skills (Dyer et al. 2011). However, they are less contributing their success to their early education.

Several factors may explain the weak linkage between innovators achievements and their early education. First, there is not a simple rule, as clear-cut as “show not tell” in fiction writing, being embedded in their trainings. Secondly, the amount of innovation education is insufficient. Thirdly, the overall curriculum of early education has the tendency of standardization.

Given the fact that students are high imaginative in their school years, scholars in innovation study have to consider how to develop a different education component for innovation in the early curriculum, although refining the overall curriculum of early education needs efforts from scholars in a wide spectrum. In forging the special education component, the author suggests emphasizing “getting something from nothing or next to nothing.” It should become the basic rule for training potential innovators.

One may argue that innovation is very expensive and carry out an innovation project involves expenditure on materials, human capital, and equipment, etc. It is true. Innovation always ties to investment, or huge investment (Chesbrough 2003, Rothaermel 2019). However, innovations root in the soil of transformation, in which “something”—tangible products, equipment, or materials, and intangible organization or relationships—are transformed from “nothing”—people’s novel ideas. The development of an innovation is always reflected in the process of ideas hardening from imaginations into feasible designs and finally into useful outputs. The real cost of getting a novel design from tacit ideas, in fact, is low. The power of innovation lies in the “nothing to something” transformation. Within this transformation, brain powers replace existing equipment, materials, method, organizations, and relationships. The “idea to novel design” becomes the backbone of “getting something from nothing or next to nothing.” In the innovation formula, “nothing”

transforming to “something,” and “less valuable” converting to “high valuable” continuously take place. Otherwise, innovation will be confined to only wealthy entities.

“Getting something from nothing or next to nothing” can be expanded both vertically and horizontally. In the horizontal expansion, different types of replacement such as novel design for materials, for tools, for organization, for controls, and for other tangible or intangible entities can be added one by one. In the vertical expansion, the hardening process of ideas to final outputs can be traced from one state to another state, from one link to multiple links, and from an individual level to the whole chain. Combining them, the transition from “nothing” to “something” can be examined from varied angles with different levels of complexity. Students who learn the rule will get a simple and specific handle. While they are exposed to more innovation trainings, they would gradually master the art. The learning at an early stage can have a lasting effect.

#### **4 Weave a tringle for catching the innovation “aha” moments**

It is apparent that creators can think. It is also full of mystery in looking into this process. In exploring how creators get their “aha” moments in the two creative streams, similarities and differences emerge. The commonness centers at the role of dreaming in interpreting uncertainty and randomness for reaching an “aha” moment. The disparity centers at the method used. While innovation study tends to employing a linear method to examine isolated factors, fiction authors tend to using a two-dimension cross for reaching and locking the breaking-through ideas. Given the gap, innovation can learn from its counterpart in improving its toolkit, so that innovation “aha” moments can be better understood and reached.

In business innovation, many studies adopt a simple method to deal with the complexity of obtaining “aha” moments. The linear single-factor analysis aims to establish a linkage between the origination of new ideas and individual factors. For example, Kawasaki (2013) checks innovation sparking factors and constitutes such a chain. 34.3% of all surveyed innovations from sudden insight or pure chance, 23.5% from a passion, 11.8% from suggestion or collaboration, 11.8% from existing products or services, 10.8%, from market, and the rest 7.8% from others.

Contrasting to the ruler used in innovation studies, fiction authors usually target their writing object with a cross. The horizontal line in the cross is authors’ life experiences. One end is authors’ direct life experience. The other end is their indirect life experiences. They obtain them through reading or extensive reading (King 2001, Prose 2006, Lamb 2008). The vertical line in the cross is the judgement of writers towards the reality with varied degrees of sentiments. Projecting the light of judgment, authors expose, review, analyze, criticize, or make sense what their own life experiences or other’s life experiences are. To grow sentiments, authors identify the texture, endurance,



replaceability, and ignition of different actions. When the two lines cross, the pendulum of judgement and sentiment swing between one life and another life, internal world and external world, and tangible reality and virtual reality. It is easy to set linkage between passions and facts, connects a familiar and an unknown world, and catalyzes the conversion between a plot and a soul (Kercheval 1997, Jacobson 2010). The crossing of the two lines also forms a high voltage. When a writer applies the cross on to a selected object, it would spark creative ideas in a traceable way.

Given the disparity, the author suggests to develop a triangle net with three corners: a frustrated passion, an experimenting imitation, and a harmful problem. The frustrated passion means a strong desire or a strong affection was disturbed or blocked by an event, particularly in a fashion of suddenly disruption. In this case, the frustrated passion becomes a compressed spring, and it tends to bouncing back to the original state or even going beyond. The experimenting imitation is copying existing action with different orientation for trial and error. In this case, the imitation tends to be very sensitive to any implied enlightenment obtained from known doctrines and new practices. The harmful problem is a worsening, dangerous, or crucial happening which causes doubts, difficulties, and trade-offs. In this case, the harmful problem tends to drawing an automatic reaction from innovators. The authors experiences show that all three situations are effective ignitors of innovation (Lan 2019).

To glue the three corners together as a net, three idea ignition mechanisms and their interactions have to be dealt with carefully. One mechanism “what if” is tied to the frustrated passion. It forms a focus suddenly and deepens the linkage between two matters. Another mechanism “why not” is associated to the experimenting imitation, which enables the jump of thoughts between different domains. The third mechanism “it may work” is related to the harmful problem. It functions like a shotgun, spreading a bunch of solutions. The interactions between them offer more opportunities to spark innovations.

With the three-starting corners and the three-igniting mechanism, more factors involved in sparking innovation could be brought in to the toolkit forming the net. The horizontal thread can be the supply-side factors such as governments’ incentives, networking externality, research advancements, etc. The vertical thread can be the demand-side factors including customers’ demands, partners’ spillovers, industrial integration, etc. The combination of the threads provides place for coordinating varied innovation efforts and catching the “aha” moments.

## **5 From “lean startup” to “smart startup” in realizing innovation**

Tangibilizing the intangible ideas is a process for realizing creations. It is crucial for both business innovation and fiction writing. However, disparities exist in recognizing the main barrier and



addressing it. The gaps indicate another opportunity for business innovation to learn from fiction writing—the shifting of a “lean startup” movement to a “smart startup” paradigm.

In fiction creation, the originator and producer of a novel are usually the same person, although the cases of co-author or multi-author exist. Since writing fiction is a solitary art (Card 1999), writers are usually all-around doers. They shoulder the entire responsibility for imagining and realizing the scenes, characters, and events through their own senses. They bear the pain and joy of production solely in the long process of creation, particularly at the stage of drafting a fiction. In this lone process, a common hurdle appears sooner or later, one time or repeatedly. The hurdle is called “writer block,” which refers to a situation in which an author loses the ability to produce a new work, or experiences a creative slowdown. The situation happens to nearly all writers, no matter they are beginners or veterans (Butler 2010).

The perversity of the writer block and the nature of solitary art determine the countless efforts for fighting the primary hurdle (Gardner 1984, King 2001, Lamb 2008). The following endeavors are prominent. Externally, fiction writers often rely on a small critic group constituted by peer authors. Through sharing their writings and their experiences, honing basic or intricate skills, and scrutinizing the contents and expressions of the contents, writers nurse each other and message each other’s creations. Overtime, they develop not only a better understanding of their talents and limitations, but also a fashion for sharpening their creative styles and for maintaining their production (King 2001). Internally, fiction writers use different methods to improve their psychological and intellectual resilience. Hemingway pioneered a simple approach. Whenever facing a writer block, he would write down a straightforward declaration sentence about his novel or his creation. By focusing on the fact-based declaration, he built up confidence and power to break the bottleneck. The story then would flow out by itself from the declaration (Phillips 1984). Now this method has become a popular solution to overcome the writer block (Butler 2010).

In business innovation, situations are more complex. Idea originators are often different from the idea executors, and entrepreneurs are usually the persons to realize a new idea. Also, innovators tend to work as a team, although solo play exists. To reduce the high costs incurred in realizing an innovation, arrangement of tasks in sequential and parallel becomes a fashion in an open innovation environment (Chesbrough 2003, Tidd and Bessant 2013), and delegating tasks to others is often considered as a key skill that innovators have to learn (Burns 2018). Furthermore, the means for realizing creative ideas are multiple, differing from fiction writing in which words are the only medium (Kercheval 1997, Cron 2012). The media for business innovation can be text-based, such as coding software, or physical-oriented such as having new or refined materials and equipment, or intangible-oriented such as adjusting human relationships or operational models



(Lan 2013). The judgment for the success of a creation, therefore, is often environment specified and stage specified (Tidd and Bessant 2013, Burns 2018).

Given the complexity, it is understandable that innovation scholars and practitioners identify many barriers in carrying out an innovation such as mismanagement, insufficient technical expertise, difficulty in securing financial resources, poor intellectual property protection, etc. However, there is not a ubiquitous problem, such as the “writer block” for fiction writing, being identified. The proxy to the “writer block” is the high failure rate among startups, ranging from over 70% to 90% dependent on different statistics (Blank 2013).

To deal with the problems in innovation, varied means are used. A recent popular one is the “lean startup” movement suggested by Steve Blank (2005). The lean startup employs a group of methods including business-hypothesis-driven experimentation, iterative product releases, and validated learning. Its purpose is to shorten product development cycles, reduce the overall costs, and standardize the operations of startups. Undoubtedly, the lean startup movement is helpful for decoding and rationalizing the management of startups, particularly for technology-based new ventures. However, the premise of “lean startup” is obviously focusing on reducing costs and increasing efficiency.

Given the fact that innovation study has not gotten a conscious on the main barrier of realizing an innovation, and the current efforts are cost oriented, a shift from “lean startup” to “smart startup” can be pointed out. The “smart startup” is an expansion of the “lean startup.” It not only includes the “lean” portion of realizing innovation, but also the “sensing making” portion in the overall process. If the “lean startup” emphasizes on “doing things right,” then the “smart startup” emphasizes on “doing right things.” In specific, the “smart startup” should consist of the following elements: a writer-block-like common innovator barrier, a declaration-sentence-like sense-making mechanism, and a lean-operation oriented process.

To recognize a writer-block-like common innovator barrier, scholars need to start from the very basic—innovators’ capacity in “getting something from nothing or next to nothing,” i.e. the replacement of existing materials, products, or solutions by new ideas. From innovators’ performances in creating, locating, and evaluating the replacement, scholars could identify the ubiquitous barrier resulting in the insufficiency or reduction of creativity.

To develop a sense-making mechanism, two aspect should be considered. Firstly, it involves separating replacement projects from transitional projects. The former reflects the replacement embedded in innovation, i.e. getting something from nothing or next nothing. The latter has little replacement effect. What it reflects are transplanting production factors from one state into another



one. Those projects may work at a micro level, but they offer little help or waste more resources judging at a macro level. As novelist John Irving pointed out that failures of some fictions are attributed to the language problems, and some are attributed to the worthiness of a story (Lamb 2008). Therefore, a sense-making mechanism in “smart startup” is to filter out such penny wise and dollar fool projects. Secondly, develop a “declaration sentence” type tool to support innovators to carry on their replacement game. This tool could internally begin with a declaration of utility and replacement. This tool could also subject to an external review by a critic-group-like voluntary peer group. By sticking to right direction and right practices, business innovation can obtain a high level of smartness and reduce the rate of failure. In short, the concept of a “smart startup” points a direction for examining the process of realizing innovation in a new way: from measuring the successful rate externally to looking into and dealing with the basic bottleneck internally.

## **6 Burgeon the role of innovation middlemen**

The prominent role of the two creative streams in the modern society suggests that both of them have formed a functional ecosystem, which connects the creation and consumption of novel outputs (Burroway 2015, Burns 2018). After examining the channels for creators to reach users, the features of the supporting community, and the functions of key enablers, this research reveals the lack of brokers in the innovation ecosystem. It suggests that burgeoning middleman can be another area for innovation to learn from its counterpart.

How creators reach end-users is an important node within a creative ecosystem. The comparison found that both business innovation and fiction writing had dual-track channels. In fiction writing, the traditional channel—book publishing through varied publishing houses—parallels a self-publishing. The former is consolidated through small publishing houses' bankruptcy or being bought out. The latter prospers along with the appearance of online platforms such as Amazon.com, and authors are responsible for all activities (Clark and Phillips 2019). In business innovation, one channel is venturing—innovators establish a new enterprise and gain rewards through producing or providing particular utility directly (Burns 2018). The other channel is licensing—innovators sell or rent out their creations to others and gain financial rewards without their hands dirty (Key 2011). With the development of information technology and the shift of the innovation paradigm from the close to open innovation, both routines are growing (Chesbrough 2003, Lan 2013, Rothaermel 2019).

Supporters in each ecosystem are multiple, and their endeavors are diversified. Varied activities can be observed from professional critics, book clubs, innovation forums, free stuff distribution, and social media promotions. A striking feature in book consumption is the boosting role of movie and other visual media. One fiction can become a huge business empire with those supports. A



striking feature in innovation is that governments play an active role. More and more governments get involved in innovation endeavors, and public funds are at an unimageable scale flowing into the domain of innovation.

In each ecosystem, there are certain stakeholders who play crucial roles in maintaining the system and become key enablers. In fiction writing, publishers, literary agents, and editors are enablers to connect authors and readers in the traditional book publication. While publishers control the resources and editors maintain the quality bar, agents play multiple roles: being devoted representatives for authors, free purchasing scouts for publishers, and volunteering doorkeepers for editors, although they are paid by the seller side. Generally speaking, agents are scouts for finding a potential star, test drivers for new products, doorkeepers for maintain the quality bar of production, flag signalers for a niche market, and mentors, friends and cheerleaders of represented authors. They help making the win-win-win-win situation among publishers, readers, authors, and themselves. Since the major publishing house does not accept unsolicited submissions, agents become brokers with certain monopoly. They are a remarkable landscape in the publishing industry (Simmons 2010). In business innovation, there is not an equaling enabler as literary agents, although venture capitalists, innovation consultants, and crowdsourcing platforms' contribution are observed (Burns 2018).

It is apparent that a powerful innovation broker, as literary agents in fiction writing, does not exist in the domain of innovation. Therefore, innovation ecosystem has the room to burgeon such a unique intermediary. It is not a simple task, because there is not a publisher-like centralized innovation owning segment. However, it is possible to ferment a new innovation intermediary by alliancing with varied forces, including large innovative companies, government agents, and industry associations.

Differing from the traditional consulting services, the proposed innovation broker will work in a large scale and provide more useful and effective help to innovators. To have such an intermediary, following steps can be considered. Firstly, establish a unique infrastructure, which consists of three components: patent-associated data, market-associated data, and replacement-associated data. The patent-associated data displays what new utilities are generated. The market-associated data indicates how functionalities are required in different places. The replacement-associated data specializes in displaying the effectiveness of X replacing Y in typical ways. The three types of data mentioned above currently exist but scatter in different resources. Based on the advancement of information technology, particularly artificial intelligence, it is possible to compile data and update them.



Secondly, train competitive innovation brokers. Based on the development of the unique innovation infrastructure, a new profession can emerge. The people work in the professional will specialize in using the innovation infrastructure, mining various data, anticipating the results of major replacing, presenting the results of innovation to needed parties, and handling the possible loopholes in the process. To train such interdisciplinary people, the reform of the current education programs has to be undertaken.

Thirdly, explore the possibility to establish an “idea market” and update innovation-related laws and regulations. The current patent system is burdened with minor improvement and ineffective processing. Along with the establishment of the innovation infrastructure, the commercialization of innovation may take a short-cut and ferment a market for trading high-efficient “replacing idea.” In this case, related laws and regulations are needed. The quality professionals for appraisal, insurance, and arbitration are also needed.

#### **IV Conclusion**

Summarizing the above sections, this paper has been engaged in selecting six comparison channels, identifying six disparities between innovation and fiction writing, and suggesting six solutions for advancing innovation.

The six channels are bridges connecting the two creative domains. They are aggregated into three areas: creators and their ways for obtaining creative ideas, the horizontal and the vertical recognition of the out-puts family, and the features of realizing creations at micro and macro levels. Through examining the theoretical discussions and operational practices, six prominent differences, with a particular reference to the weakness of innovation, are revealed. They range from high randomness in classifying the outputs family, the missing of a sense-making component in the output element model, the confusion on instilling the basic rule into innovators, and ineffective linear method for tracing and catching the "aha" moments of idea generation, the lack of recognition for the innovators' barrier, to without a powerful broker for gluing stakeholders. Based on those gaps or "low hanging fruits," the paper provides ammunition for advancing innovation. They include developing an agreeable framework to recognize the core of innovation, having a sense-making element as an integrate part of innovation, refining the curriculum of early education on innovation with emphasizing the rule of "getting something from nothing," weaving a tringle net for reaching & catching innovation "aha" moments, moving from "lean start-up" to "smart start-up," and burgeoning the role of innovation middleman in the innovation community.

To the author's knowledge, this research is a pioneer work in bridging the two main creative streams in the context of novelty generation. The value of the study lies in signaling the direction



for connecting the two streams and showcasing the workable measures for benefiting each other. For example, as the driving engine for modern society, innovation needs fuels to maintain its running and new designs to enlarge its power and increase its efficiency. On the other hand, as another novelty-oriented endeavor of human beings, fiction writing is undoubtedly valuable for expanding the frontiers of innovation study or retooling associated toolkits. Therefore, the variations revealed in the research and the suggestions formulated in the paper can be treated as opportunities for understanding the frontiers of innovation theoretically and improving the practices of innovation practically.

The pioneering nature of the research indicates that limitations are unavoidable, which suggests following-up research can be carried out further:

1. The comparison framework can be further refined, and more important issues can be revealed because both streams are very complicated.
2. Quantitative analysis can be employed. Given that the current research is a purely qualitative analysis, the diversification of research methods and expanding research scope can better address varied issues.
3. The six suggestions formulated in the last section are rough. They need to be further developed.

Carrying out those tasks requires more inquisitive explorations and testing implementations. As creative-centric activities, innovation and fiction writing are both evolving. Understanding their dynamics and facilitating their interaction would provide more nutrition to each other. Viewing from the side of innovation, learning from fiction writing will not be a one-time deal. History has proved that hybridizing traditional unrelated subjects and fields would keep generating a hybrid vigor.



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