

*Research Policy – Special issue call for papers:*  
**STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AND NEW PATHWAYS FOR RADICAL INNOVATIONS**

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**TOPIC BACKGROUND**

Strategic leaders matter for radical innovations in organizations. Innovations comprise the creation, adoption, and diffusion of novel or significantly improved products, technological processes, or organizational practices (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2010). From an organization's perspective, innovations are often labeled radical when they create new markets and/or make previous knowledge redundant (Eggers & Park, 2018; Jansen, Van Den Bosch, & Volberda, 2006; Volberda, Van den Bosch, & Mihalache, 2014). Although radical innovations may come about serendipitously (Yaqub, 2018) or bottom-up (Day, 1994), they also often reflect deliberate attempts of strategic leaders to leapfrog competitors through novel concepts of creating and capturing value (Gerstner, König, Enders, & Hambrick, 2013). Indeed, strategic leadership entails "the functions performed by individuals at the top levels of an organization (CEOs, TMT members, Directors, General Managers) that are intended to have strategic consequences for the firm" (Samimi, Cortes, Anderson, & Herrmann, 2020: 3). To the extent that organizations reflect their strategic leaders (Finkelstein, Hambrick, & Cannella, 2009; Hambrick & Mason, 1984), the heterogeneous ways in which radical innovations are pursued may reflect their attention, resource commitments, strategic choices, and implementation efforts (Eggers & Kaplan, 2009; Kurzhals, Graf-Vlachy, & König, 2020; Sidhu, Heyden, & Volberda, 2020).

There is mounting pressure on strategic leaders to step up and take a central role in prioritizing innovation (Kurzhals et al., 2020). For instance, the President of The European Commission noted upon her appointment that "[f]or years, we have invested less in innovation than our competitors do. This is a huge handicap to our competitiveness and our ability to lead this transformation" (European Commission, 2019), calling for increasing investments in the innovation potential of firms. Although traditionally pressured to deliver short-term results, challenges reshaping the global economy, such as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, have seen strategic leaders scrambling to find differentiated ways of enabling radical innovations (Heyden, Wilden, & Wise, 2020). There is a renewed need, then, for future-focused answers on "how" strategic leaders can and do pursue radical innovations.

The most prominent line of inquiry in the broader literature on strategic leadership and innovation has been on CEOs' innovation appetite, often inferring radical innovation from R&D investments (Barker III & Mueller,

2002; Cho & Kim, 2017; Heij, Volberda, Van den Bosch, & Hollen, 2020; Heyden, Reimer, & Van Doorn, 2017c; Zona, 2016), innovation adoption (Gerstner et al., 2013; König, Kammerlander, & Enders, 2013), or patenting activities (Galasso & Simcoe, 2011; Hirshleifer, Low, & Teoh, 2012). However, strategic leadership is a more comprehensive activity, involving multiple actors beyond the CEO that come together to drive unified outcomes (Bromiley & Rau, 2016; Georgakakis, Heyden, Oehmichen, & Ekanayake, 2019; Heyden et al., 2017c; Li, 2021; Volberda, 2017). Even more importantly perhaps, although this literature is useful for establishing high-level patterns, the predominant focus on aggregate R&D investments and/or outcomes, may mask the myriad of *new* pathways through which strategic leaders can pursue radical innovations.

In turn, innovation scholarship has highlighted creative, exciting, and unconventional new pathways through which radical innovations can be pursued, with a burgeoning literature on the new “hows”. These new pathways have been captured through notions such as open sourcing (Foege, Lauritzen, Tietze, & Salge, 2019; Laursen & Salter, 2014; Poetz & Schreier, 2012; Schemmann, Herrmann, Chappin, & Heimeriks, 2016), platformification (Rietveld, Schilling, & Bellavitis, 2019), advanced manufacturing (Stornelli, Ozcan, & Simms, 2021), gamification (Morschheuser & Hamari, 2019; Vesa & Harviainen, 2018), digital transformation (Nambisan, Wright, & Feldman, 2019; Pershina, Soppe, & Thune, 2019; Teece, 2018; Volberda, Khanagha, Baden-Fuller, Mihalache & Birkinshaw, 2021), agile project management (Annosi, Foss, & Martini, 2020; Khanagha, Volberda, Alexiou & Annosi, 2021), and AI/ML-enabled ecosystems (Hannigan, Briggs, Valadao, Seidel, & Jennings, 2021). Unfortunately, this literature often disregards that organization-wide resources commitments, preferences, and ultimate choices about radical innovations happen within the bounds of strategic considerations outlined at the top of the organization.

Intriguingly, the research stream on strategic leaders and that on radical innovations have struggled to synthesize into a coherent and autonomous research tradition. In the most comprehensive related literature review, Kurzhals et al. (2020) recently identified 158 papers from 1989-2019 that tackled the intersection between strategic leadership and (technological) innovation, finding that close to 40% appeared in the most recent five years sampled. Given the increasing momentum in research interest, the timing is right to consolidate state-of-the-art evidence, insights, and perspectives to inform the future of the critical intersection of these fields. However, the literature lacks a centralized point of reference for scholars, students, practitioners, and policy-makers to understand the future intersection of these two important fields. The special issue aims to tackle this need.

## AIMS AND SCOPE

With this special issue we aim to facilitate, consolidate, and integrate deliberate conversations between innovation scholars and strategic leadership researchers. These two streams of research represent some of the most important topics in broader management, organization theory, strategy, and policy research. The special issue aims to document future-focused evidence, ideas, and perspectives on the role of strategic leaders in new pathways (i.e., “hows”) of pursuing more radical forms of innovation, conventionally referred to across theoretical traditions using labels such as discontinuous innovation, path-breaking innovation, exploratory innovation, disruptive innovation, breakthrough innovation, or ground-breaking invention (e.g., Bahemia, Sillince, & Vanhaverbeke, 2018; Bergek, Berggren, Magnusson, & Hobday, 2013; Godoe, 2000; Khanagha, Ramezan Zadeh, Mihalache, & Volberda, 2018; Klenner, Hüsigg, & Dowling, 2013; Kobarg, Stumpf-Wollersheim, & Welpe, 2019).

This special issue uniquely and ambitiously invites integration of *both* new ways of thinking about the roles of strategic leaders *and* new pathways to radical innovation. We thus raise a dual call, challenging strategic leadership scholars to embrace new pathways for radical innovation (e.g., beyond R&D investments and patenting regimes); while calling on innovation scholars to embrace the enabling and constraining influences of strategic leaders in pursuing radical innovations. Overarchingly, the special issue responds to a call by Kurzhals et al. (2020) to examine the specific new pathways (“hows”) through which strategic leaders’ dispositions become reflected in ultimate radical innovation outcomes.

We invite manuscripts across the whole theoretical and methodological scope of Research Policy: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/journal/research-policy/about/aims-and-scope>. We encourage theoretically-

grounded studies but are open to paradigmatically diverse contributions on the strategic leadership of organizations, paired with creative but robust empirical evidence from different (global) settings, industries, and types of organizations. Studies reflecting creative attempts to integrate the two focal streams are especially encouraged and we expect studies to contribute to *both* strategic leadership and innovation scholarship.

### INDICATIVE TOPICS

The following topics represent a non-exhaustive list of suggested directions.

1. *Paradoxes, synergies, and complementarities in pathways to radical innovation:*

How do strategic leaders reconcile and/or integrate competing pathways to radical innovation, such as organizational structures, boundaries of the firm, and decision-making processes? What are the complementarities sought and the underlying rationales? What are the main synergistic avenues in techno-centric and non-techno-centric pathways to innovation?

2. *Social, cognitive, behavioral, and intrapersonal dispositions of strategic leaders:*

How do social, cognitive, and behavioral factors affect preference and choice towards different pathways? How do strategic leaders conceptualize and think about radical innovation? What are the intrapersonal factors at play? What is the role of personality and leadership style?

3. *Strategic leadership in bottom-up and extra-organizational innovation processes:*

How do strategic leaders engage in filtering, endorsing, and championing ideas for radical innovations? How are radical ideas endogenously generated throughout the organization? How are innovations from outside the organization received or rejected?

4. *Intra/Inter-firm, industry, and societal considerations and implications of different innovation pathways:*

What are the implications of different innovation pathways pursued by strategic leaders? How do successful innovations diffuse? Under what conditions do strategic leaders favor different pathways?

5. *Innovation styles and traditions across different organizational, governance, and ownership forms:*

How do new pathways to radical innovation suit different organizational types and leadership forms (e.g., family firms)? How do different forms of ownership and governance bind the radical innovation choices of strategic leaders?

6. *Structural solutions to formalizing strategic leadership roles and innovation functions in organizations:*

How do organizational arrangements shape the strategic leadership of radical innovation? How do new functional roles, such as Chief Digital Officers, Chief Transformation Officers, and Chief Innovation Officers play a role? How do functional versus intra-personal characteristics shape resource allocation preferences and priorities?

7. *Levels of analysis: Individual, groups, and interfaces of strategic leaders:*

How do different strategic leaders come together to make decisions? Who influences the choice of pathways? How do executives interface with other actors, such as boards of directors, middle managers, and consultants in the radical innovation process?

8. *Personal and career consequences of radical innovation:*

If radical innovation may make legacies and previous knowledge redundant, then how are strategic leaders affected by (the prospect of) radical innovation? Under what conditions are strategic leaders

benefit from radical innovation? How do strategic leaders manage the career risks of successful radical innovation? How do different incentive structures play a role?

9. *Critical perspectives on whether and when strategic leaders help or hurt radical innovation efforts:* How much do strategic leaders actually matter for radical innovation? What are boundary conditions on the influence of strategic leadership (e.g., CEO effect)? Can strategic leaders accurately differentiate between new pathways and managerial fads? What is the role of luck and serendipity?

#### MODE OF SUBMISSION AND EDITORIAL POLICY

Manuscripts will be submitted via established Research Policy protocols through Editorial Manager: <https://www.editorialmanager.com/respol/>. The submission system will open on September 1, 2022 and manuscripts received through November 15, 2022 (Midnight, GMT) will receive full consideration on a rolling basis. When submitting your manuscript, please select Mariano (Pitosh) Heyden as the receiving editor (“SI: Strategic Leadership & Radical Innovation”). Please ensure manuscripts conform to the standard Research Policy Author Guidelines: <https://www.elsevier.com/journals/research-policy/0048-7333/guide-for-authors>.

The tentative publication date will be in 2024. To further ensure timeliness and topicality, submitted manuscripts will be considered against a “1.5 round policy”. Against this policy, we will prioritize submissions deemed sufficiently competitive to be publishable after one major round and one more minor round of feedback. The guest editor team will provide written feedback to manuscripts that will not be further considered for the special issue within four weeks of the submission deadline. Manuscripts that may be promising but may not satisfy the criteria above, may be recommended for submission to a regular issue, as consulted with the Supervising Editor. The pool of reviewers will reflect the diverse global network of established and up-and-coming scholars and may overlap with current members of the Editorial Review Board of Research Policy.

For questions regarding the content of the special issue and prospective fit, please contact the guest editors.

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