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ON INTRAPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM

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Abstract
In recent years, research related to ecosystems in business and entrepreneurship has attracted intense attention. Similar to natural ecosystems, business ecosystems and entrepreneurship ecosystems are crucial for understanding the dynamics of the modern economic environment. The purpose of the study is to analyze state-of-the-art in entrepreneurial ecosystems studies and models and based on this to present a conceptual framework of an intrapreneurial ecosystem. The methodology used is content analysis, which allows for insight into the essence and content of both the system as a whole and its constituent elements and the relevant connections and interactions between them.
The implementation of intrapreneurial processes is associated with synchronizing the efforts of multiple individuals and structures in the company, so that existing development opportunities are realized in profitable realities. The focus in building the overall intrapreneurial ecosystem is on creating a functioning environment for entrepreneurial activities within the organization with the aim of a flexible and innovative work environment, generating constant new solutions, products and services in unison with the strategic goals of the company. Such an ecosystem is characterized by a supportive culture, resources, and structures that allow employees to generate innovations and stimulate new initiatives, similar to the way entrepreneurs work in an external environment. An intrapreneurial ecosystem is a complex structure that combines different elements to stimulate and support innovation and growth in an organization. They interact with each other, creating a favourable environment for the development of new ideas and projects. In published research, the models that visualize and prove the connections and interdependencies within intrapreneurial ecosystems are not many and often focus on a specific type of intrapreneurship. A view of the conceptual framework of the intrapreneurial ecosystem is presented, based on one of the most commonly used models in this direction, developed by Isenberg (2011). The elements of the ecosystem are examined through the prism of the intrapreneurial concept.
Keywords: *entrepreneurship; ecosystems; intrapreneurship; intrapreneurial ecosystem elements.*
JEL Classification: L260; M140; M100

1. NATURE OF ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEMS

In recent years, research related to ecosystems in business and entrepreneurship has attracted intense attention. The concept is borrowed from biology, where an ecosystem is understood as “a single natural complex, including living organisms and the environment in which they live (atmosphere, soil, water bodies), between which there is a constant interdependence due to the continuous exchange of substances and energy" (Dictionary of the Bulgarian Language). Ecosystems function through complex relationships that facilitate the flow of energy and the cycling of nutrients, which are essential for maintaining ecological balance and sustaining life (Idowu *et al.,* 2019). The interactions in an ecosystem are of different nature and concern both its overall functioning and the maintenance of stability in it. The functioning of the ecosystem is influenced by the diversity of different life forms present in a given ecosystem and is critical for the processes occurring in it, as different species contribute to the implementation of unique functions that increase resilience and stability. Understanding these relationships is crucial for the management of ecosystems in conditions of dynamic environments and for optimizing the benefits that ecosystems provide to humanity.

Similar to natural ecosystems, business ecosystems and entrepreneurship ecosystems are crucial for understanding the dynamics of the modern economic environment. Although there are certain similarities between them, they serve different purposes and are characterized by different structures and functions.

A business ecosystem is defined as a network of interdependent, dynamic, and interacting entities that collaborate and compete. These interconnected organizations include suppliers, distributors, customers, and competitors who deliver value to each other and thus create new sustainable value. Business ecosystem theory bridges the natural and social sciences, offering a novel business perspective: companies should be viewed not as isolated members of an industry, but as part of an interconnected, cross-industry business ecosystem (Moore, 1993). Moore's work outlines the evolutionary stages of business ecosystem development: emergence, expansion, leadership, and self-renewal, and provides a framework for bridging the gap between reality and theoretical understanding of the ecosystem. The potential of business ecosystems as a new direction for research and practice, however, was established almost 20 years later, through research by Iansity and Levien; and Adner (Iansiti and Levien, 2004, Adner, 2006). It is currently a preferred topic for research with many branches in different areas of economic science, case studies analysis and a field for future research.

Promoting entrepreneurship has become an essential component of the economic development of cities, regions and countries around the world, and in recent years we have increasingly associated it with the construction, successful functioning and measurement of entrepreneurial ecosystems. Many authors argue that in the modern global economy, every community has the real opportunity to become a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem, and there are already enough examples in this direction. The concept of "entrepreneurial ecosystem" consists of two parts. The first part - "entrepreneurial", refers to micro, small and medium-sized companies, which are primarily at the start-up stage of their activities in a specific region. The second part of the concept is usually associated with the natural sciences, where "ecosystem" is understood as "a group of interconnected elements formed by the interaction of a community of organisms with their environment" (Kreuzer *et al.,* 2018, p. 10). Similar to biological ecosystems, the entrepreneurial ecosystem consists of various elements that form a community through interaction with each other (individuals, groups, organizations, and institutions), but also encompasses environmental determinants that influence the way these actors work and connect.

One of the most commonly used models of what constitutes and how an entrepreneurial ecosystem functions was developed by Isenberg (2010). He developed nine prescriptions (principles) for how policymakers should create an entrepreneurial ecosystem, namely:

1: Stop imitating Silicon Valley.
2: Shape the ecosystem according to local conditions.
3: Engage the private sector from the start.
4: Prefer high potential.
5: Take a big win on board.
6: Deal directly with cultural change.
7: Stress the roots.
8: Don't reorganize clusters; help them grow organically.
9: Reforming legal, bureaucratic and regulatory frameworks.

Isenberg believes that following these principles must be integrated into a holistic system implemented by politicians. In this system, a set of six elements are interconnected and work together: politics, finance, markets, human capital, support and culture, each of which is favourable to entrepreneurship, but is insufficient to sustain it. For the most part, governments focus on only one or two elements of the entrepreneurial ecosystem, but together – extremely rarely, although their integrated efforts would lead to significant growth. In each of the areas, Isenberg outlines their content by defining their constituent elements. He emphasizes that entrepreneurial ecosystems are geographically limited, but not limited to a certain geographical scale, which means that they can relate to a nation or to smaller geographical areas, e.g. cities.

The other work that laid the foundations for the contemporary popularity of the topic of the entrepreneurial ecosystem is by Feld (2012), which clarifies the vital principles of the startup community, as well as its participants. Already in the preface to his book, he points out that "…startup communities consist of many more participants than just entrepreneurs. Government, universities, investors, mentors, service providers, and large companies play a key role in the development of a startup community." (Feld, 2012, p. xiii). The work provides valuable prescriptions for municipal governments on how to support private entrepreneurs, but also on how they themselves can be more entrepreneurial.

The last few years have been marked by intense academic interest in entrepreneurial ecosystems. However, authors such as Alvedalen and Boschma (2017), through a systematic review of the literature, identify five areas where there is a lack of research: there is no clear analytical framework that clarifies what is cause and what is effect in entrepreneurial ecosystems; it is not always clear how the proposed elements are connected in entrepreneurial ecosystems; it remains a challenge to understand which institutions (and at what spatial scale) influence the structure and performance of these ecosystems; studies often focus on entrepreneurial ecosystems in individual regions or clusters, but lack a comparative and multiscale perspective, and the literature in this area often provides a static framework, taking a snapshot of a specific ecosystem without systematically considering their development over time. Even nowadays, research on entrepreneurial ecosystems continues to focus on documenting the presence of systemic components, but there are still too few who study the connections and interactions between key elements and actors in ecosystems (Wurth *et al.,* 2022).

With the development of digitalization, emphasis on entrepreneurial ecosystems has also been placed on their digital aspects, and digital entrepreneurial ecosystems are increasingly being studied. Logically, such ecosystems are in one way or another linked to the information and communication technology sector, although their comprehensive penetration into modern life and business is so deep that a significant part of traditional ecosystems are also beginning to have a digital substructure. A conceptual framework of the digital ecosystem is proposed by Song (2019), who offers a new reading of the ecosystem to support the understanding of entrepreneurship in the digital age. It integrates four concepts in a 2 x 2 matrix, namely: Digital User Citizenship, Digital Entrepreneurship, Digital Market and Digital Infrastructure Governance. Two of the concepts cover biotic entities (digital user citizenship and digital entrepreneurship), and the other two cover abiotic entities (digital market and digital infrastructure governance). Based on a critical analysis of another digital entrepreneurial ecosystem framework developed by Sussan and Acs (2017), an attempt is made to improve the understanding of digital entrepreneurship in the broader context of digital platforms, users and institutions. Reconfigurations of the elements are proposed and the emphasis is placed on digital platforms as the foundation for these ecosystems. Significant attention is also paid to issues related to the protection of digital infrastructure.

In summary, while business ecosystems focus on the interdependent relationships between firms aimed at creating value, entrepreneurial ecosystems encompass the context that supports entrepreneurial activities. Both ecosystems are interconnected, with business ecosystems providing the necessary infrastructure for entrepreneurship to flourish, especially in an increasingly digital and interconnected world.

2. STRUCTURES AND INDIVIDUALS OF CRUCIAL IMPORTANCE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INTRAPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM

The implementation of intrapreneurial processes is related to synchronizing the efforts of multiple individuals and structures in the company, so that existing development opportunities are realized in profitable realities. The perception that the intrapreneur is the most important person in this process is inaccurate and could divert attention in the wrong direction. In itself, he/she is valuable to the organization, but his/her efforts would not be crowned with success if his/her idea, project, proposal or vision for change is not supported by a team of enthusiastic volunteers. However, before seeking funding for the proposal, this initial "team" should build a network of "sponsors" who can support him/her with advice. But all this is impossible if a favourable climate is not created in the company that allows people with ideas, entrepreneurial spirit, will and energy to harness their strengths for the organization.

According to Pinchot and Pellman (1999), the critical key roles in the organization for innovation to occur through the prism of intrapreneurship are:

- People with ideas – They are an exceptional asset for the organization. Every person has a creative nature, and for some it is dulled, as a result of schooling, family environment or managers. Nowadays, creativity and new ideas are considered the most valuable resource of a business organization. Studies on the future of work confirm that creative thinking will be among the top 3 most sought-after skills by companies in the coming years (World Economic Forum, 2023). A series of policies, strategies and tactics encourage employees to be creative and create an environment that is "friendly" to innovations. Many ideas are created in the organization, some of which have good potential, others - not, but the presence of good ideas is not enough for the business. They must meet the enthusiasm and commitment of the entrepreneur, who will turn the idea from such into a venture.
- Intrapreneurs can be the original source of the idea, but they can also be the ones who see that it makes business sense. They are the "dreamers who do" – they roll up their sleeves and get to work, gathering like-minded people around them.
- The intrapreneurial team usually consists of volunteers who gather around the intrapreneur. They form a core group that starts the project venture in its very initial stage until the moment of its commercialization or implementation. Usually this is not a large team - often it is even of 3 or 4 with different professional orientations, who after the development of the idea often remain within the framework of a larger team that completes the project.

- Sponsors are individuals who support people with ideas from the so-called "corporate system". They also mentor intrapreneurs by helping them find the right answers to their searches. Effective sponsors create a compelling vision that calls for the realization of efforts and focuses on innovative effects; bet on people, not just the idea or plans; spend time preparing and guiding intrapreneurial teams; anticipate difficulties and protect against pitfalls prepared by others in the organization; provide resources or borrow the necessary ones or permissions for them, so that the intra-team's project endeavors can be realized.
- People, policies, procedures and other mechanisms that "make" the climate in the organization – modern multinational companies need more than one or two "make" climates, an environment in which internal entrepreneurs and sponsors come together to work. This means having a widely accepted understanding of innovation and a strong determination to maintain it as a spirit in the organization.

The classic key players in the intrapreneurial ecosystem can be systematized according to their level of functioning in the company. From this position, we refer to the first level as the organization's management, which provides the strategic direction and support for the development of a spirit of intrapreneurship. An important place is also occupied by participants from the middle management level, which is directly responsible for the implementation of innovation strategies and the achievement of the set goals. The top and middle management levels must be prepared to support and facilitate the process of intrapreneurship in the organization. They play a key role in the construction and establishment of the intrapreneurial ecosystem. They should be able to remove bureaucratic obstacles and provide the necessary resources for the implementation of innovative ideas. They should also be able to build an appropriate organizational culture that supports and encourages intrapreneurship in the organization.

In addition to them, work teams and innovation groups play an important role. They are the driving force behind the creation and development of innovative ideas. These teams should be formed by creative and motivated specialists, ready to engage in the innovation process and work together towards achieving the common goals of the organization.

Human resource management departments have played a significant role in the processes of building an internal innovation climate in recent years. They actively help create an appropriate organizational culture that supports it by implementing related activities to manage and stimulate the creative and innovative activities of employees. Together with the company's management, they lay the foundations of a corporate culture and subsequently develop it to establish common values, beliefs and goals that are perceived by employees. Creating such an inspiring culture of openness, courage and risk-taking is essential for its successful implementation. To achieve this, human resource management departments must work actively to build positive relationships between employees, encourage teamwork and individual contribution, as well as provide appropriate feedback and recognition for successful entrepreneurial efforts. This implies that the company constantly implements training, communication and support in order to embed the spirit of entrepreneurship in all its aspects. Another tool that is implemented by the departments is related to providing opportunities to work on projects that require an innovative approach and creative thinking. This is achieved through intrapreneurship programs that provide financial and other resources for the development of ideas by employees and their teams. In parallel with the opportunities for employees, human resources departments should implement a policy of financial and non-financial incentives for those individuals who develop and/or participate in intrapreneurial projects. Non-financial incentives such as recognition, praise, status promotion or career development opportunities for intrapreneurs should also be carefully considered and consistently applied, as it is precisely this type of incentive that can be a powerful motivational factor for the manifestation of intrapreneurial thinking and action.

What has been said so far gives us reason to turn to a term used in world literature, namely the concept of “*agents of change*”. It describes people who, with enthusiasm and actions, make it possible for ideas to become reality. Following the multidimensional characteristics of these agents, we could argue that they refer to individuals who are crucial for the development of intrapreneurship, since (Vasilska and Stoykov, 2024):

- work independently, successfully overcoming functional barriers;
- they do not seek recognition for their actions;
- exhibit “self-confidence mixed with humility”;
- creatively manage change and are close, empathetic and open to the members of the organization;
- possess leadership and entrepreneurial initiatives to help address major social challenges;
- have networking skills;
- are management consultants, etc.

A key point for the intrapreneurship implementation is the correct choice of both external and internal change agents, as their actions are directly related to the processes of change and transformation of organizations. They can be perceived “as a mechanism for intrapreneurship in large corporations” (Vasilska and Stoykov, 2024, p. 151) and “have the task of counteracting the so-called “anti-innovation culture” – bureaucracy, obstruction of information flows and resistance to change” (Vasilska and Stoykov, 2024, p. 151).

An important point in the processes of developing intrapreneurship is the presence and the positive results-generating functioning of related programs and initiatives. They are created with the aim of stimulating innovation and the development of intrapreneurial potential in the organization. They include creating appropriate conditions for the development of ideas, training and upskilling of participants, as well as creating mechanisms for financing and supporting intrapreneurial projects. Individual organizations implement programs related to the development of intrapreneurship in different ways: some of them work under a formal program, others have an informal one, and still others - a combination of formal and informal measures in this direction. According to Hornsby *et al.* (1993), the program should have two components: personal and organizational. The sequence of actions for its implementation is as follows:

- ✓ Participants brainstorm to develop a list of potentially profitable or beneficial business ventures for the organization;
- ✓ Participants form teams that create a plan for a project idea. The person who gives the idea "champion" takes the lead in developing the plan. This is usually someone who has been thinking about it for a long time but has never had the opportunity to develop it. He gathers volunteers around him to develop a general framework for the plan to implement the idea. This usually takes no more than a week and the result is a working plan of 20-70 pages;
- ✓ Each team presents its plan to a "board of evaluators," who decide whether the plan deserves funding.

The implementation of intrapreneurial program should not be a single act, but part of the organizational culture of the enterprise - a culture that encourages the intrapreneurial spirit in employees and is woven into the company's change strategy. And since intrapreneurship helps achieve the strategic goals of the business for years to come, it should be among the priorities of every modern business structure.

A similar, but much more complete, model of an intrapreneurial program is offered by Pinchot and Pellman (1999), who bring out the following key points:

- *Sharing a business strategy that sets out and provides guidance for implementing innovative solutions*. The broad sharing of what the organization and intrapreneurs can contribute to each other can be organized in various ways: through speeches, e-mails, posters, internal magazines, etc. The most important thing is to make it clear to everyone in the organization what it wants to achieve with this endeavour. The key point is to seek help from everyone on how to reach the set strategic goals, i.e. communication should be open-ended. In this way, employees will be encouraged to think about how to reach the set goals and will not just wait for ready-made prescriptions to carry them out;
- *Creating sales channels for intrapreneurs with ideas that are in line with the strategy*. There are different options in this regard: by *creating "seed" capital funds* that provide individuals with a small amount to test the idea (for creating a prototype, travel expenses to obtain important information, initial research into the market possibilities of the idea, etc.); as well as by holding an *innovation exhibition* – each candidate entrepreneur makes a

"pitch" of his/her idea, and potential sponsors and teammates tour the exhibition and stop to talk to the intrapreneurs. Such an event creates networks between individuals in the organization and is very necessary for the implementation of overall innovation process in the company. They can be organized in different ways, one of the options being to combine the exhibition with a short presentation of projects to potential sponsors. After the exhibition is concluded, selected teams of intrapreneurs are nominated for inclusion in a "start-up workshop", including those teams that have received the consent of a member of the management to mentor them and provide them with funds for the project endeavour, as well as intrapreneurs with at least two teammates who have expressed a desire to participate in the realization of the idea during the workshop.

- *Support the launch of intrapreneurial enterprises (intraprises) with sponsors, training and coaching*. One of the best ways to bring the intrapreneurial spirit to life in an organization is to use training to launch several real intrapreneurial teams that are relied upon to succeed in their ventures. In almost all organizations, there are many potential intrapreneurs with good ideas for their future development. With help, guidance and support, many of them could succeed. The intrapreneurial startup workshop usually has three instructor-led sessions with two to four weeks of "homework" in between. The latter may or may not be supervised by an instructor. The advantage of the three separate training sessions is that it allows for two revisions of the business plans. After this workshop, it is advisable for the teams to continue to receive specialized guidance, and it is advisable to meet again to monitor the progress and barriers to the implementation of their business idea.

Effective tools for the development of intrapreneurship can be corporate hubs and accelerators. They provide comprehensive support for intrapreneurs, providing them with a workspace, mentoring, training and access to investors. We can argue that they are essential for promoting innovation and the rapid development of intrapreneurial ideas within the organization.

Corporate innovation hubs (centers) (Otieno, 2024) are often perceived as an evolved form of corporate venture, although there is a difference between the concepts. Modern companies, in order to continue to occupy competitive positions, purposefully cultivate what can be called institutionalized intrapreneurship. Hubs or innovation centres are a physical, and more recently, digital space, in which various technical and non-technical facilities are combined, with a view to generating, developing and implementing the largest number of innovative ideas. In its physical form, this is usually a comfortable but unconventional office space, which allows for joint work between specialists with different professional profiles. It employs experts in marketing, finance, human resources, law, etc., with the aim of developing innovative projects in support of achieving sustainable competitive positions of the company. Within the hub, financial support is provided for the development of ideas, the achievement of results and their implementation in production. Companies usually encourage participants to enter and exit the program in order to acquire some or other intrapreneurial skills needed to implement their specific project. Hubs are an operational and at the same time strategic tool for revitalizing established company practices, products, services, etc., but also for developing radical business solutions that could change the direction of the company's development.

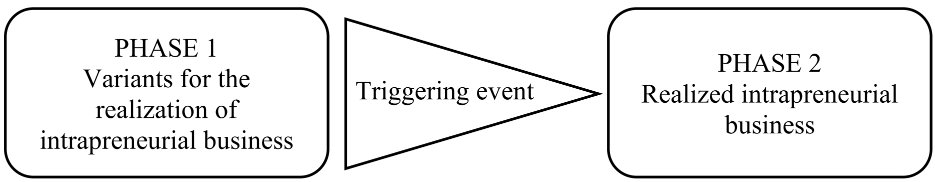
Accelerators are usually organized by established companies that help internal and external startups identify, develop, and scale innovative products/services/business models within the scope of their strategic goals (Lenet, 2020; Top corporate accelerator programs (and how to get started as a corporate), 2023; StartupGuru Team, 2024). These are managed and funded time-limited corporate programs that aim to stimulate innovation processes within them. They provide a program in which participating startups can use mentors from the company, technical assistance in product development, infrastructure, legal assistance, support in recruiting, advice on fundraising, even capital investments and distribution channels developed by the parent company. Within its framework, participating entrepreneurs can collaborate with internal teams, external startups, academic institutions or other partners to stimulate innovation in various areas of business. Implementing accelerator programs provides serious advantages to companies, as it provides them with direct access to new ideas, technologies and talent while limiting the risk they take, as startups test their ideas and concepts in a controlled environment while committing insignificant resources to them.

Delineating the key individuals and structures related to the implementation of intrapreneurship in companies allows us to give a new reading to the parameters of the intrapreneurial process. This will significantly help clarify the elements of the intrapreneurial ecosystem and deduce the connections and dependencies between them.

The launch of intrapreneurial activity within an existing organization, similar to this process in its classical form, is preceded by a number of mental actions on the identification of business opportunities, analysis of the environment, resources, etc. Unlike the classical version, both the personal characteristics of the intrapreneur and the characteristics of the internal environment of company are important for the success of intrapreneurial initiative. The process of establishing intrapreneurship is a set of actions that lead to the creation of certain conditions in traditional enterprises, encouraging and supporting intrapreneurship. A modern enterprise is a complex economic system that functions thanks to the activities of many different partners (Tomilov *et al.,* 2000). If we adopt a systematic approach to the study of intrapreneurship, then the sequential change in the parameters of enterprise should be considered as the trajectory of this system. The starting point of this trajectory is characterized by the parameters of base enterprise.

Following the generalized model of the entrepreneurial process (Hristova and Stoyanov, 2015) (Figure 1), which is perceived as a sequential change in the development of creative search and realization of ideas and opportunities in products/services, but within the framework of an existing company, we can outline two of its phases – one related to the search and development of options for implementing the business idea and the other – with the real business activities implemented by the intrapreneur, the team and the company. The watershed in this process is the "triggering event" that prompts the potential employee to adopt a real image of an intrapreneur.

Despite the diversity of processes and activities occurring in different companies, the intrapreneurial process can be presented by a combination of algorithmic representation of the individual stages with the time arrangement during their course. Based on the author's previous views, it can be shown in the following way modified for the needs of intrapreneurship:



Source: based on Entrepreneurial process generalized model (Hristova and Stoyanov, 2015)

Figure 1. Generalized model of the intrapreneurial process

For the implementation of intrapreneurial process, each of its constituent stages has a place and importance - idea/opportunity for business, assessment and limitations of the idea/opportunity, selection, test, intrapreneurial analysis. Within the company, the initially identified idea or opportunity, which is also the starting position from which the intrapreneurial process begins, may arise as a result of a personal need of the employee, a suggested opportunity within or outside the company, an idea generated by a team with an intrapreneurial focus, existing asynchrony in processes, technology, resources in the company, etc. The idea or opportunity, once accepted as an option for developing an intrapreneurial activity, must be carefully evaluated in terms of the market, risks and revenues, competitive advantage, strengths and weaknesses of the new product, etc. The specific choice of idea or opportunity must be consistent and in line with the strategic goals of the company. After making this choice, the idea is tested, after which the results are analysed and, if necessary, adjustments are made to the attributes of the new product. The stage of analysis regarding the external environment and the market is extremely important, including an analysis of the resources needed to implement the idea/opportunity. The adverse risks accompanying the implementation of the idea are also identified.

The second phase of the intrapreneurial process concerns the implementation of specific actions that generate real results for intrapreneurs and company. It begins with the localization or institutionalization of the intrapreneur and the team that will work on the implementation of the idea. Here, the work of the team includes the entire set of agents of the change, who with their support lead to the development of the potential of idea for implementation. Of essential importance are the infrastructure that supports intrapreneurship, the organizational culture and the systems of rewards and incentives for employees with intrapreneurial behaviour.

The transition from the first to the second phase of the intrapreneurial process is achieved thanks to the so-called :triggering events", which within the company can be: existing successful models of work of intrapreneurial teams; a suitable, innovation-encouraging climate that supports the search for new and productive solutions for the company; manager/managers who identify and support the implementation of projects by proactive employees; a working accelerator program in the company with results that encourage innovative behaviour; appropriate training with a focus on intrapreneurship; strong competitive pressure; undeveloped fields for the company's development, etc.

The entrepreneurial process in companies is not a one-time process associated with the creation of a new venture, but is closely intertwined and repeatedly repeated in the life of company/companies. It arises and is realized again and again with each management decision, concerning both the opening of a new production and the improvement of existing ones. It is an element of entrepreneurial management throughout its existence, which also necessitates the study of its characteristic features and specific manifestations.

3. KEY ELEMENTS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE INTRAPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM

Intrapreneurship is a complex and multi-layered process through which an organization helps its employees generate new ideas, develop innovations, and undertake groundbreaking projects within its structures. The introduction of this type of entrepreneurship allows companies to be more adaptable to changes in the business environment, attract and retain talent, and ultimately create competitive advantages. for themselves. The focus of building a comprehensive intrapreneurship ecosystem is to create a functioning environment for entrepreneurial activities within the organization with the aim of a flexible and innovative work environment that generates constant new solutions, products and services in line with the strategic goals of the company. This ecosystem is characterized by a supportive culture, resources and structures that allow employees to innovate and stimulate new initiatives, similar to the way entrepreneurs work in an external environment. The concept emphasizes the importance of internal dynamics and relationships that facilitate intrapreneurial behaviour, leading to innovation and competitive advantage for the organization (Cantner *et al.,* 2021; Buratti *et al.*, 2023).

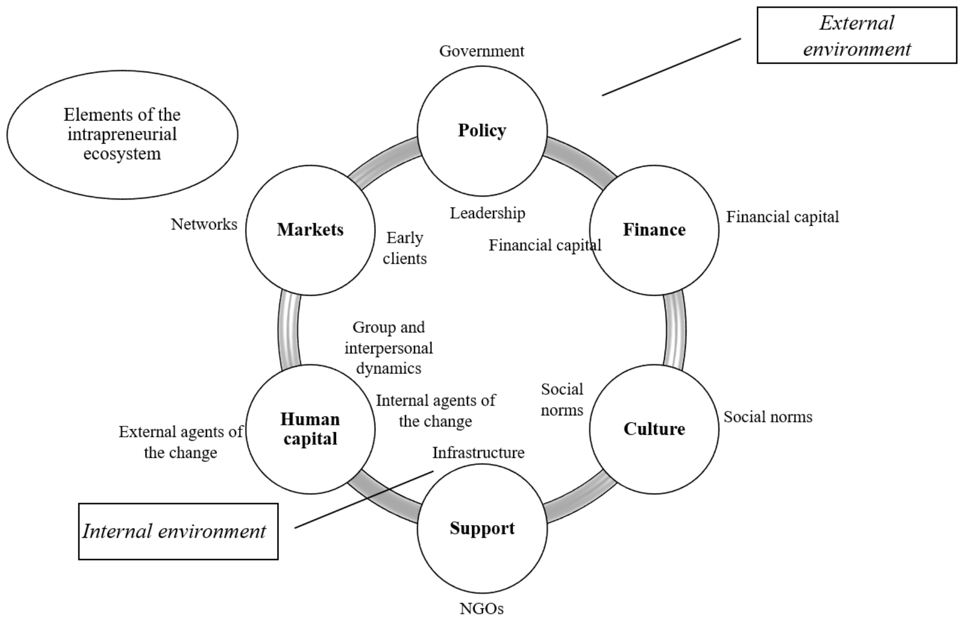
The intrapreneurial ecosystem is a complex structure that combines different elements to stimulate and support innovation and growth in an organization. They interact with each other, creating a favourable environment for the development of new ideas and projects. In published studies, the models that visualize and prove the connections and interdependencies within intrapreneurial ecosystems are not many and often focus on a specific type of intrapreneurship. One such model is presented by Hester Le Roux, etc. This model is built on the basis of a survey of social intrapreneurs, entrepreneurs and experts based on the framework of presentation of the entrepreneurial ecosystem by Isenberg (Le Roux, 2018) . Referring to the results obtained, the team behind this study identified several key factors that make up the intrapreneurial ecosystem. According to them, it includes external factors - such as the competitive and political environment in which the company operates. It also includes factors that transcend company boundaries, such as shareholder and stakeholder influence, access to capital, networks and partnerships, and technological innovation. The intra-organizational purpose (the purpose beyond profits) is at the heart of the intrapreneurship ecosystem and is enabled by elements such as: recruitment, development, and incentives (people are seen as agents of change); distribution of power, processes, and norms (the power of togetherness); and targeted programs and funds for social innovation. The social intrapreneurship model is visualized through four key elements: purpose, people, power, and direction. Although the model refers to Isenberg, it lacks some of the initial identified components such as culture and support. However, the proposed vision is presented through the prism of social intrapreneurship and reflects the presence of both internal and external components for the company.

Another “specialized” model of the intrapreneurial ecosystem, but with a focus on universities, conceptualizes their complex and intricate nature and empirically tests the presented view of its authors Abreu and Grinevich (2024). They base their model on another existing one – that of Stam and van de Ven (2021) for the entrepreneurial ecosystem, by refracting it through specific conceptual views based on research on intrapreneurship in universities. In view of the broad coverage of the results generated by universities, they significantly enrich them. Their main assumption in this direction is based precisely on the presence of intrapreneurial intentions and behaviour of all university staff, both academic and non-academic. In this way, it is possible to add to the results traditionally derived from universities, those resulting from their “intrapreneurial abilities”. In this model, the intrapreneurial ecosystem of a university is theorized as a set of elements and interdependencies at the university level, organized in such a way that they enable outcomes that are considered significant (i.e., value-adding) from an organizational perspective. The authors seek empirical evidence for their model by referring to the career fulfilment of graduates, the relevance of post-graduation experience, and satisfaction with the relevance of acquired skills at the university. Thus, by linking key competitiveness indicators to the academic and non-academic staff of the university in terms of their identification and action to introduce innovations in their area of responsibility, they link intrapreneurship, employment, and well-being.

Although the presented model by Abreu and Grinevich (2024) was prepared for university intrapreneurial ecosystems, it outlines a perspective towards a broad view of the performance of specific organization in the context of community and society in which it operates. It raises issues such as the well-being of graduates, engagement with the social agenda, and a new understanding of organization in terms of innovations it achieves.

An interesting model of intrapreneurship, without being tied to a specific context, is presented by the International Institute for Management Development (IMD, 2018). It is based on the development of Vogel, Fischler and Strassack, who adopt a holistic approach to intrapreneurship. According to the authors, although building an intrapreneurial culture is an extremely difficult process, its very existence in the company facilitates multi-channel interactions and helps to combine bottom-up and top-down approaches to innovation. In this way, diffusion of innovative ideas is achieved. Significant moments in the ecosystem are the design of an appropriate package of rewards and incentives, a mechanism for turning innovations into working solutions, strong leadership aimed at implementing innovations outside the company's fields of work, as well as working with disruptive innovation activities, which should be positioned in a separate structure, but integrated with the senior management team.

The above arguments in support of the construction of intrapreneurial ecosystems are a small part of the reasons that push management to focus on innovations based on the development of intrapreneurship. It is evident from the models presented so far that the main elements of the intrapreneurial ecosystem are: innovation, leadership, structures, resources, collaboration, supporting infrastructure and development. It is difficult to give priority to any of the elements when deriving the conceptual framework of the intrapreneurial ecosystem.



Source: (Hristova, 2025, p. 106)

Figure 2. Conceptual framework of the intrapreneurial ecosystem

Referring to the most commonly used model of the entrepreneurial ecosystem, developed by Isenberg (2010), we can seek its enrichment and adaptation for intrapreneurship. According to him, this system is supported by the joint functioning of the elements: politics, finance, markets, human capital, support and culture, each of which is favourable for entrepreneurship, but is insufficient to support it. Following Isenberg's views, significant growth can be achieved with integrated efforts for the optimal functioning of all six elements. In each of the areas, it can be modified by the external and internal environment, the context of the company, in which case the constituent elements of the areas of intrapreneurial ecosystem will have the form (Figure 2).

The proposed conceptual framework of the intrapreneurial ecosystem follows Isenberg's elemental structure, in which the derived components are six:

Element: policy - The policy has both an internal and an external component. In the company, it is manifested mainly through clearly defined goals and innovation strategies, in which activities are implemented to provide real support for intrapreneurs through mentoring and coaching, accompanied by the resources provided for this. A key point in this element is leaders and modelling behaviour through leadership, as they serve as an example of innovative thinking and action. Support for intrapreneurship should be unambiguous, socially legitimized and dressed in an appropriate strategy; it is possible that it has an HR expression and relevant support from HR department. The external component of the policy finds expression in the supporting activities undertaken by the government, expressed in institutional support, established innovation funds; tax breaks; research institutes, legislation favourable to venture enterprises, etc.

Element: finance - The implementation of innovation activities is accompanied by the provision of processes with the appropriate financial resources. Considering financial capital from the position of internal provision, we take into account the totality of venture capital funds for the zero stage, the granting of microloans within the company for testing a new product, service, procedure, etc. Here we also include funds that support the implementation of accelerator programs, as well as all costs of implementing the activities of innovation hubs and internal entrepreneurial programs (e.g. innovation fairs). Financial capital can also have an external origin for the company, such as business angels that support newly created ventures, external venture capital funds, public capital markets, etc.

Element: culture - This is the most frequently mentioned and analysed element of the intrapreneurial process and ecosystem, as it encompasses the invisible fabric of the organization through the behaviours, beliefs, and values of the personnel who are assumed to work in the organization. Its central place in the development of these ecosystems is occupied by innovation and the "cultivation" of a culture focused on innovations. This implies encouraging the sharing of ideas, seeking feedback, and generally maintaining open communication. Another important point is rapid adaptation to changes. No less significant is the tolerance for errors, which predisposes to the creation of a safe environment for experimentation. The same components have their expression and significance originating from the external environment for the company, namely how people's successes are treated in society, what is the susceptibility to risk, mistakes, and failures, what is the social status of the entrepreneur, the need for novelty, the tendency to seek and implement innovations and experiments, etc.

Element: support - The realization of high results from the functioning of the intrapreneurial ecosystem is dependent on the availability of appropriate infrastructure and supporting experts. Infrastructure includes telecommunication means and channels available to intrapreneurs, energy sources, transport and logistics to power the testing and implementation of ideas into products, separate areas, co-workplaces, incubators, accelerators and others that support innovative behaviour and actions. In addition to the available infrastructure, intrapreneurs' direct access to legal, accounting, financial and technical experts and advisors to support them throughout the entire intrapreneurial process is of particular importance. External supporting structures are no less important for the success of these intrapreneurs, and here both associations uniting such individuals and conferences, competitions and other events of a similar nature play a role. NGOs that carry out activities in support of intrapreneurs also play an important role.

Element: human capital - This is undoubtedly the key element, on whose behaviour, qualifications, knowledge, skills and attitudes the direct and indirect results of intrapreneurship depend. Here we refer to the diverse set of individuals with crucial importance for intrapreneurship in the company, a large part of whom are agents of change. The latter are both internal and external to the organization. Human capital also encompasses training for the acquisition and improvement of specific types of intrapreneurial skills, which aim to promote such behaviour within the company. Of utmost importance are group and interpersonal dynamics, expressed in the established ways of interaction between people, their exchange of ideas, opinions, even feelings regarding the implementation of intrapreneurial projects, etc. Family, friends and the environment of intrapreneurs have a place in this element as a part of external environment.

Element: markets - Conducting activities to promote intrapreneurship aims to conquer new markets, expand existing ones and generally strengthen the company's market leadership. This is what makes the importance of markets particularly high. From the standpoint of internal environment, the key here is the place of early customers, who, with their expertise in production and the first reviews of the new product/service, predetermine the future market trajectory of the newly created product. No less important are the elements of the market outside the company, to which we refer the various collaborations with external organizations such as universities, startups and other companies, the presence of platforms for the exchange of ideas and knowledge outside the organization, etc.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The effective organization and management of the knowledge, skills, attitudes and energy of employees in the company can be achieved in various ways, one of which is through the tools of intrapreneurship. The skilful use of the potential of already employed individuals, allowing them to think and act as entrepreneurs, regardless of the fact that they are already employed, has emerged as one of the most successful models for company-employee interaction. Since the concept was first developed in the 1980s, a considerable amount of theoretical knowledge has been accumulated. At the same time, it is only in the current century that scientists have begun to study and expand the field of intrapreneurship much more intensively, bringing out new and new directions of research. A promising line is the study of the intrapreneurial ecosystem and systematizing ways to support the development of intrapreneurial initiative in the company. The article proposes a conceptual framework for such an ecosystem, the establishment, development, and outcomes of which should be carefully supported by both intrapreneurs and company management.

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