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Francesco Schiavone

# Communities of Practice and Vintage Innovation A Strategic Reaction to Technological Change

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A Strategic Reaction to Technological  
Change



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*The visionary is the only true realist*

Federico Fellini

# Foreword

An endogenous interest of consumers for old-fashioned things and objects is typical in many industries and markets. Vintage innovation, the subject analyzed in this text, is based on this belief.

If we only look out of the window we see a large number of Fiat 500, Mini, Triumph, or Harley<sup>1</sup> passing; it is easy to understand that in many fields we have a trend to rediscover and propose again lines, brands, and objects with a vintage taste. These products go beyond the present example linked to the car and motor-bike sectors; they are interpreted again thanks to modern technologies but they keep and underline vintage peculiarities and habits. If we browse for a moment it is also easy to notice that there are forums and communities for people keen on watches, motorbikes, glasses, hi-fi, musical instruments, and in each commodities' sector category lives in its vintage field a remarkable dynamism and enthusiasm. The involvements of this phenomenon are an opportunity for a company able to find, intercept, (or create) the vintage trends, and able to deal with its structure in the vintage direction. The vintage area is a real competitive arena.

This book summarizes and develops comprehensively the latest and main research theme by Francesco Schiavone, on which the author focused over the past years. The book is organized into five chapters.

**Chapter 1** analyzes the phenomena of technological change, adoption, and diffusion of innovation which shape the general context of vintage innovation.

**Chapter 2** describes the concept of communities of practices, a typical form of social aggregation in which vintage innovation takes place.

**Chapter 3** describes in-depth the phenomenon of vintage innovation, the innovative way by which the so-called vintage products improve the performance of old technology-based products becoming obsolete after technological change. The chapter ends with an analysis of the main implications of this phenomenon for companies in terms of technology management, innovation strategy, and marketing.

**Chapter 4** reports two case studies of vintage innovation by companies developing innovations for communities of practice centered around old technology-based

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<sup>1</sup> For example just to give a clear measure of the phenomenon, during the assembly for the anniversary of 110 years from the birth of Harley, on 13–16 June 2013, the city of Rome was visited by more than 150,000 motorbikes coming from all Europe.

products. The cases here reported are the vinyl emulator for DJs turntablists and film scanners for analog photographers.

[Chapter 5](#) reports two case studies on vintage innovation by communities of old technology users. The cases of multimedia software for radio-amateurs and emulation software for arcade videogamers are presented.

The work done by Francesco Schiavone is an interesting analysis of a growing phenomenon, of a strategic trend supporting companies in their development process and fighting against crisis based on an innovative return to past.

I encourage Francesco to continue his studies and I hope that also other academics will devote to the vintage innovation and to the further analysis of the different social and cognitive implications, strategic but first of all structural, linked to this phenomenon.

Naples, July 2013

Luca Dezi



# Preface

The word “technology” is derived from the Greek *techne*, meaning art, craft, or skill, and *logos*, meaning word or knowledge. These two meanings well summarize and merge the two basic sides of the concept: the execution of some task or activity and the human narration about this activity.

Technology, as every human activity and every human being, rises, develops, becomes mature, and then declines until the end. And each of these phases shapes some specific narrations and social interactions about and around the practices performed by technology. Many scholars focused, maybe excessively, their attention on the first stages of the technology life cycle and neglected a clear evidence that every day we recognize in television, magazines, or the Internet: people are attracted by the past and old things.

Philosophers as Gianbattista Vico or Alexandre Kojève argue that history repeats itself. Of course, the past shapes the future and somehow, our desires. Economic phenomena as retro-marketing or old product revitalization are based on the need of people living again their past experiences, memories, and emotions. The vintage wave is nowadays mainstream in several markets.

This book identifies communities of practice as the best loci for the celebration of old technology and the resurrection of people’s memories about an outdated technology. Everyone of us is member, consciously or unconsciously, of some community of practice with specific legacies, traditions, and memories. When these invisible assets are related to some technological product that became obsolete here comes the phenomenon that I called vintage innovation. Actually, 5 years ago I took the inspiration to develop this research over time, basically, thanks to my former membership of a technological community of practice.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary reports that, literally, the word vintage is an adjective referring to something “of old, recognized, and enduring interest, importance, or quality”. Vintage innovation bridges together naturally and innovatively the appeal, nostalgia, and mystery of old technologies with the power and efficiency of new technology. High-tech companies can perform, under given conditions, a technological reverse strategy in order to provide valuable products to their customers belonging to old technology-based communities. The development of a vintage innovation approach is the core of such innovation strategy. However, the empirical analysis reported in [Chap. 5](#) of this book shows vintage innovation

is something deeper and larger than a niche corporate strategy to react to technological change. Indeed, this approach can be implemented even by communities' members themselves.

This book summarizes the main findings of my research activity of the past 5 years. This was an amazing research experience. Primarily, because the interaction with many members of various communities of practice made data collection and data analysis interesting and meaningful. They transmitted to me their enthusiasm and passion for their old beloved products and, as a consequence, this critically increased my curiosity about this hybrid technological phenomenon integrating old and new technologies, artifacts, knowledge, and competences.

Over this period, I had the opportunity to receive many valuable suggestions by several colleagues and friends who shared with me the passion for this fascinating topic. I have to thank several (known and unknown) academics across the world for the development and refining of vintage innovation. First, the European professors who invited me to give research seminars in their Business Schools: Ludovic Dibiaggio, Stefano Borzillo, and Renata Kaminska-Labbe at SKEMA in Sophia Antipolis (2009), Laurent Bibard at ESSEC in Paris (2011), Slawek Magala at Erasmus University in Rotterdam (2013). I want also to thank all the editors and anonymous reviewers of the journals in which I published my articles about this topic (European Journal of Innovation Management, IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management, International Journal of Innovation Management, Management Decision, Journal of Organizational Change Management). The comments of all these colleagues oriented me effectively in framing and defining the boundaries and implications of vintage innovation.

Furthermore, I wish to express my gratitude to Marina Forlizzi and Maria Cristina Acocella (Springer Italy), who supported me in the review process of the proposal of this book and all over the editorial process.

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Naples, July 2013

Francesco Schiavone

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