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Responsible Innovation Strategies: "Typology, Opportunities and Trajectories"

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Abstract.

A literature review at the interface of innovation, corporate social responsibility and the stakeholders' "theory", coupled with the early analysis of secondary data, led us to formulate the following research questions: What are the opportunities for companies to develop Responsible Innovation Strategies ? (ii) What are the characteristics and trajectories of Responsible Innovation Strategies?. This invited us to develop a (provisional) "typology" of responsible (product(s)-market(s)) innovation strategies. This typology is based on the following dimensions (obtained after reduction); Market' characteristics : segments: groups of buyers (served - less served –un-served), needs (expectations–use-capabilities) products' characteristics (attributes/ functionalities, added services), innovation processes; openness- stakeholders' involvement. This led to the identification of a set of Responsible Innovations Strategies (RIS) (provisionally) labelled (after reduction) "conformist", "competitive", "disruptive", "social" and "societal". We identified their "strategic trajectories" as well as some "emerging trends". For the purpose of this paper we use the case of the mobile phones' as an illustration.

Our investigation suggests that, the great majority of innovations strategies led in this industry are" classical" and "competitive" in the sense that they primarily aim at benefitting from differentiation and at serving existing (and sometimes over-served) markets in developed countries. This trajectory leads to successive "reference offers" on the markets, through rapid "imitation" by major competitors. The second "classical" competitive strategy consists in sustaining the diffusion of simple and easy-to-use products to serve markets that are "trans-generational". Economies of scale, accumulated experience and others cost advantages enable companies to benefit from low costs and to charge a low price.

Our study shows that the great majority of large established companies adapt these categories of products to serve markets segments that are "less-served" (ex: disabled or aged human beings. These "dominant" competitive RIS are based on "sustained innovations" (depending on the situation they are incremental, architectural, or modular). The underlying innovation processes are (relatively) "closed".

We found cases of RIS consisting in offering specific products dedicated to niche markets (ex: to serve the needs of disabled persons). The process sustaining the development and diffusion of these specific "product-market" lines are more "user centred" and the corresponding innovation process is more "open" (involving experts and potential users)

"Disruptive" and "Value" Innovation RIS aim at serving less served or un-served markets. They can be applied to serve the needs of mass "markets" like ageing human beings in developed countries or the poorest in developing countries. They are often based on "disruptive technologies" and their underlying innovation processes are more open than the previous ones (they involve NGOs and not for profit organisations) We found some RIS strategies that can be viewed as "disruptive" for markets in developing countries and more "Value Innovations Strategies" enabling to create "new market spaces" in both developing and developed countries. These RIS can open avenues for "the development of Social RIS"