

## **Defining Innovation – The Future of Academic Innovation**

*Commercialization*

Run Time – 3:35

Innovation is not by definition entrepreneurial. This runs counter to the manner in which innovation is discussed in popular society and the threads presented to its history. Much recent thinking posits innovation in the realm of Clayton Christensen's Disruptive Innovation (Christensen, Johnson & Horn, 2008), which is then likened to Joseph Schumpeter's Creative Destruction (Schumpeter, 2012). This history is inadequate; the line between Schumpeter and Christensen was only possible because of the work of Christopher Freeman (1974), which melded the Schumpeter economic vision with the popular sociological thinking of Everett Rogers (1962). Rogers came to notoriety with his book Diffusion of Innovations, positing innovation as a process to change social structures and practices for a societal benefit. Freeman's work combined the economic engine of Schumpeter with the social value of Rogers, which is a large reason why today we use innovation as a term without a modifier like technological, economic or political.

Christopher Freeman was not the first intellectual, much less the first economist, to identify innovation as a combination of practitioner disciplines. 19th Century American economist Thorstein Veblen did not see entrepreneurs as the lifeblood of an economic engine unless they were engaged within the community of economic operation. Technologies, in this instance, could be instrumental and in service of the imperatives of the society, or they could be ceremonial and rooted in what Veblen called the conservation of a society's history of 'tribal legends.' For Veblen, innovation had to be contextual – progress in and of itself was meaningless unless it furthered the social aims and goals of the culture (Veblen, 1899).

Like Uber, but for education. According to Pew Research (2016), only 15% of Americans have used a ride-sharing app. This is similar to the number of Americans who depend on public transportation (Pew, 2016), but the demographics of each vary. In terms of Veblen, ride-sharing would be an example of conspicuous consumption, wasted resources as part of social stratification.

Like Netflix, but for education. Between 2010 and 2018 the number of titles available for viewing on Netflix dropped nearly 25% (Rife, 2018). As the one-stop shop for narrative audiovisual media, Netflix's business model has shifted from providing an expansive catalog of distributed releases into a shrinking catalog that fills out space in between Netflix's releases. When we speak wistfully about a Netflix for education it is as a manner to connect people with endless opportunities for learning material. When we consider the Netflix of today, the social aims of the

culture have been replaced by commercial ones.

How often did Veblen feel innovation and technological progress was in the spirit of the people, a communal good? Veblen saw innovation solely as the pursuit of entrepreneurs and society, an effort to gain creative distinction on products and services rather than provide a greater benefit with products or services. The innovation Veblen saw celebrated in economics was rooted in capital and profits, life improvements were only of a consumer nature.