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Title

Exploring Practices in Collaborative Innovation: Unpacking Dynamics, Relations, and
Enactment in Spaces In-Between

Guest Editors

Anna Yström, PhD

Assistant Professor

Department of Technology Management and Economics
Chalmers University of Technology, Gothenburg (Sweden)

E-mail: anna.ystrom@chalmers.se

Marine Agogue, PhD

Assistant Professor

Department of Management
HEC Montréal, Montréal (Canada)

E-mail: marine.agogue@hec.ca

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About the special issue

Organizations increasingly engage in collaborative innovation and do so in various ways e.g. with partners, suppliers, customers and users, by bridging organizational boundaries to tap into knowledge from different sources and by co-creating solutions (Baldwin and von Hippel, 2011, Huizingh, 2011). Collaboration has become necessary in order to tackle complex problems (Agogue et al., 2013, Dougherty, 2016). However, many organizations tend to underestimate the difficulties of engaging in collaborative innovation (Huxham and Vangen, 2004, Ollila and Elmquist, 2011). The challenges in collaborating to innovate take place in a “space in-between”, where boundaries, motives and mandates are often unclear. Collaboration requires that partners cope with different institutional logics, develop new collaborative capabilities in the unknown and face unwillingness to compromise, political struggles and unrealistic expectations of one another. As a consequence, many collaborations collapse or do not create satisfactory value.

Research shows that multi-actor collaboration involves complex and disorderly interactive processes and it is only by engaging in those processes that a collaborative competence can be nurtured and successful outcomes repeatedly achieved (Ollila and Yström, 2016). It has been proposed that successful collaboration requires initial identification and involvement of key actors; maintenance of the collaboration process; (long-term) implementation of collaborative outcomes (Arnaboldi and Spiller, 2011) and a process that allows for continuous dialogue between collaborators (Fayard and Metiu, 2014). This requires that collaboration is thought of as an on-going process, in which actors need to continuously learn.

Despite the increased interest of practitioners and researchers in collaborative innovation, we know surprisingly little about what practices it involves and how to support them. In a recent review, Bogers et al. (2016) concluded that more research is needed, especially research related to the micro-foundations of collaborative innovation. In this special issue, our intention is to emphasize one dimension of such micro-foundations by exploring and problematizing collaborative innovation practices, in order to extend our knowledge about what happens as different actors (both on an individual and organizational level) engage in interaction to innovate together.

Why the focus on practices? In the innovation management literature, research has primarily focused on investigating technical, contractual or business aspects of a firm engaging in innovative activities outside of its boundaries, and often has not taken into account the influence and roles of individuals in such interactions. Furthermore, organization scholars have, over the past two decades, argued the need for a practice turn (Barley and Kunda, 2001, Corradi et al., 2010), thereby implying that theories need to be constructed based on what happens in practice rather than researchers' conceptualizations. By specifically addressing collaborative innovation practices, we recognize the centrality of human actions to organizational outcomes, which also reflects an increasing recognition of the importance of practices in the ongoing operations of organizations. To investigate collaborative forms of organizing, characterized as complex, dynamic, distributed, mobile, transient, and unprecedented, a practice lens is argued to be useful in understanding these kinds of novel, indeterminate and emergent phenomena that arise in spaces in-between (Ciborra, 1996, Barley and Kunda, 2001). We believe that a practice perspective, with its focus on dynamics, relations, and enactment (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011), is particularly well-positioned to gain new insight into many aspects of collaborative innovation. This will unpack what people do, how they do it and why they do it.

In this special issue, we welcome both conceptual and empirical studies, using a wide variety of methods. Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

Meanings and definitions:

- How can collaborative practices be made sense of?
- How do organisational actors construct meaning in everyday occurrences so that collaborative experiences and actions can be legitimised?

Dynamics, Relations, and Enactment:

- How do collaborative practices develop over time? What drives the development of collaborative practices?
- What are the cognitive dynamics of actors engaging in collaborative innovation?
- How do power relations influence collaborative practices? As collaborative practices develop and are adopted, how does that influence the partners?
- What are the roles of different actors in the development and/or enactment of collaborative practices?

Innovation management in Spaces In-Between:

- How can collaborative practices be managed? What does such management entail and what is important to consider when managing collaborative practices?
- What role does the "context of unknown" or the "search for breakthrough/disruption" play in the development of Spaces In-Between?

- How can different organizational forms or designs of Spaces In-Between influence the development and/or enactment of collaborative practices?
- How do organizations experiment with collaborative innovation in Spaces In-Between and learn from such experimentation?

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