



# "HOW TO CATCH AND MANAGE INNOVATIVE PRACTICES"

Mats Edenius, Uppsala University

February 2010

*Users are innovators!*



# "HOW TO CATCH AND MANAGE INNOVATIVE PRACTICES"

Mats Edenius, Uppsala University

February 2010

In this article prof. Edenius discusses how diversity and interaction across disciplines influence innovation.

## Innovation happens at the boundaries of disciplines.

Most innovation happens at the boundaries between disciplines or specializations. It is when people meet across the boundaries that new knowledge is generated or integrated and new innovations comes up. We know this, but we also know the relative complexity to manage innovative processes at a given boundary. The researcher Carlile has spent a lot of time in many papers to explore and investigate this complexity. We argue that by understanding this complexity we might be able to better manage these processes.

Carlile proposes that we should shed light on three different properties of knowledge at boundaries; *difference*, *dependence* and *novelty* (Carlile and Rebentisch 2003, Carlile 2004). Differences in knowledge refer to a difference in the amount of accumulated knowledge. And this is a dilemma. Creating a

*"Without dependence, difference is of no consequence"*

complex service (i.e. innovation), for example, often requires differences in the amount and type of knowledge. At the same time, practically, it means that different actors have different experiences, different terminologies, different incentives, etc. Furthermore, every actor has to re-learn. This might have a negative impact of the willingness of an actor to participate in an innovative process. Nevertheless, these processes need to be overcome.

The second relational property of knowledge at a boundary is dependence. To be able to manage innovative processes we need to take into account how different actors and their activities are dependent on each other. As Carlile (2004: 556) points out - *"Without dependence, difference is of no consequence"*.

*Users are innovators!*



# "HOW TO CATCH AND MANAGE INNOVATIVE PRACTICES"

Mats Edenius, Uppsala University

February 2010

Dependence can, for example, be described in political terms, i.e. are actors willing to participate in innovative processes because of situated dependence? Furthermore, how will innovative processes change dependence between actors or processes?

The third relational property of knowledge at a boundary is how novel the circumstances are. As Carlile writes; *"... the most challenging aspect of the relational nature of knowledge at a boundary is that for each actor there is novelty to share with others and novelty to assess from others."* To be able to manage innovative processes we must be aware of that when novelty arises there is often a lack of common knowledge to adequately share an assess knowledge at a boundary. An innovative thought might, for example, be regarded with suspicion and insecurity, not because the idea is not of great value, but that there is a lack of language to catch the innovation with.

Our approach and analysis may indeed be regarded as complex and abstract. However, by illuminating what happens at the boundaries between disciplines and specializations may help us to understand and develop an innovative climate in our organizations. By focusing on the three properties of boundaries we may open a window to further understanding about how the flux and flow of organizational processes can be arrested in concepts and translated into pragmatic use. What could be more instrumentally usable? ¶

*Users are innovators!*



# “HOW TO CATCH AND MANAGE INNOVATIVE PRACTICES”

Mats Edenius, Uppsala University

*Mats Edenius is Visiting Professor and director at Swedish IT-User Center, Uppsala University. He received his PhD in 1996 from Stockholm University. His research interests lie within the areas of information technology and knowledge management. At present, he is involved in different projects about information technologies and open innovation and collaboration processes.*

## Further reading

Carlile, P., and E. Reberich (2003) *Into the black box: The Knowledge transformation cycle*, Management Science. Vol. 49, pp 1180-1195.

Carlile, P. (2004), *Transferring, translating, and transforming: An integrative framework for managing knowledge across boundaries*, Organization Science Vol. 15 No. 5, pp. 555-568.

## Open Innovation

From the Open Innovation Forum's perspective open innovation involves all aspects of creating new business opportunities by engaging end-users in co-creative activities. Web 2.0 technologies has caused electronic collaboration to evolve, hence paving the way for companies to invite customers and employees to be involved in the refinement of their offerings. Ideally open innovation will create win-win situations where users get services that are more oriented to their needs and organizations will offer services that are more desired by the market.

## The Open Innovation Forum

The Open Innovation Forum aims at being a knowledge hub and rallying point for user-oriented open innovation, where innovation experts and researchers can collaborate on improving theories and practices, while open innovation novices are invited to follow, or take active part, in the development of the area.

[www.openinnovationforum.com](http://www.openinnovationforum.com)



The content in this article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 License, which allows the material to freely be copied, distributed, transmitted and remixed as long as the work is attributed to the original authors.