

Innoiversity



A Study of the dynamics inherent in the relationship between
innovation and diversity

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Master thesis in Intercultural Management

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Copenhagen Business School December 2000

MPP Working Paper No. 6/2001 © May 2001
ISBN: 87-90403-93-2
ISSN: 1396-2817

“Den aandelige Fuldkommenhed kan ligesom den physiske Væxt kun fremmes derved, at Individet jævnlig smelter sammen med, hvad der er fremmed for det, og tilsynsladende opoffrer sig selv for at vende beriget hjem igjen til sig selv”

Poul Martin Møller, 1837

"Spiritual maturity, just as physical growth, can only be nurtured by the individual frequently embracing what is foreign, and in appearance, sacrificing his own self, in order to return enriched to his own individuality."

Poul Martin Møller, 1837

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Innovation and the ability to create new knowledge constitutes an important competitive edge for organisations in the 21st century, and diversity within organisations offers interesting new perspectives for innovation and may increase the ability to create new knowledge. Understanding the dynamics of the relationship between innovation and diversity, and thereby how innovative practice may benefit from diversity, thus becomes important to organisations wanting to increase their competitive edge; especially in a decade where changing demographics are affecting, or about to affect, most all organisations.

However, existing theory indicates that diversity is more likely to impair innovative practice, and provides very little support to findings from practice indicating that innovative practice may instead benefit from the potential of diversity. But by making use of a Community of Practice Framework, this thesis provides a theoretical explanation to the findings from practice, - thereby addressing the theoretical void arising from such inconsistency between theory and practice.

The theoretical explanation provided in this thesis to address this theoretical void centres on two new theoretical findings. Firstly, how diversity may potentially ignite five innovers' drivers seen to enhance different aspects of innovative practice, such as: absorptive capacity, requisite variety, network access, creative destruction and problem solving. However, these drivers are difficult to ignite due to diversity also giving rise to intergroup anxiety, miscommunication and goal incongruence – thereby impairing coherence, which is important for innovation to occur.

The second part of the theoretical explanation therefore focuses on understanding the context within which it is possible for the innovers' drivers to ignite. This understanding is obtained by viewing diversity and innovation as embedded in communities of practice, as opposed to traditional teams and workgroups. This Community of Practice Framework establishes how the necessary coherence is obtained – not necessarily from perceived similarity – but instead from the mutual engagement in a shared practice field.

This thesis has therefore substantiated the potentials of diversity for innovative practice, and demonstrated that the existing theory predicting vicious outcomes from innovation in a diverse setting does actually have a virtuous counterpart: innovers' – both in practice and in theory.

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	ii
LIST OF FIGURES	vi
1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Wondering why.....	1
1.2 Setting the stage... ..	2
1.3 Research question and hypothesis.....	5
1.4 Delimitation	7
1.7 Outline of the thesis structure	7
2. METHODOLOGY	11
2.1 Ontological assumptions	11
2.2 Epistemological assumptions	13
2.3 Methodology.....	16
2.4 Studying organisations.....	17
2.5 Studying innovative processes in organisations	18
2.6 The Community of Practice model.....	19
2.7 Conducting my research.....	21
2.7.1 Process description.....	21
2.7.2 Interviews.....	24
2.7.3 Models.....	26
2.7.4 Use of examples.....	26
2.8 Summing up on methodology.....	28

PART I: INTRODUCING CoPs, INNOVATION AND DIVERSITY

3. INTRODUCING COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE	30
3.1 Communities of practice	30
3.2 Organisations as constellations of communities of practice	32
3.3 Legitimate peripheral participation.....	32
4. INTRODUCING INNOVATION	34
4.1 Knowledge	34
4.2.1 Tacit and explicit.....	34
4.2.2 Individual and social.....	36
4.2.3 Process and object.....	36
4.2.4 Defining knowledge	37
4.2 The creation of knowledge	39
4.3 Innovative practice.....	40
4.3.1 Combination and exchange	42
4.4 Innovative practice in the organisational context.....	43
4.4.1 Innovative practice at the individual level	43
4.4.2 Innovative practice in communities.....	44
4.4.3 Innovative practice at the organisational level.....	46
4.5 Summing up on innovative practice.....	47

5.	INTRODUCING DIVERSITY.....	48
5.1	Diversity theory.....	49
5.1.1	The variables and dimensions of diversity.....	50
5.1.2	Defining diversity.....	51
5.2	Diversity and identity.....	52
5.3	Diversity and interpersonal relationships.....	54
5.4	Diversity in organisations.....	56
5.4.1	Diversity in techne.....	56
5.4.2	Cognitive diversity.....	57
5.5	Diversity vs. cohesiveness.....	57
5.6	Diversity in communities of practice.....	58
5.7	Summing up on diversity.....	59

PART II: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INNOVATION AND DIVERSITY

6.	VICIOUS CIRCLES OF DIVERSITY SEEN TO IMPEDE INNOVATION	61
6.1	Destructive driver #1: Intergroup anxiety.....	61
6.2	Destructive driver #2: Miscommunication.....	64
6.3	Destructive driver #3: Goal incongruence.....	66
6.4	Summing up on how vicious circles of diversity are seen to impede innovation.....	67
7.	VIRTIOUS CIRCLES OF DIVERSITY SEEN TO ADVANCE INNOVATION	68
7.1	Innoversity driver #1: Absorptive capacity.....	69
7.2	Innoversity driver #2: Requisite variety.....	70
7.3	Innoversity driver #3: Network variety.....	72
7.4	Innoversity driver #4: Creative destruction.....	73
7.5	Innoversity driver #5: Enhanced problem solving skills.....	75
7.6	Innoversity drivers and overall organisational performance.....	76

PART III: INNOVATION AND DIVERSITY IN CoPs

8.	DIVERSITY AND COHESIVENESS IN COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE.....	79
8.1	The Innoversity Paradox.....	79
8.2	Applying the Community of Practice Framework.....	82
8.3	Practice.....	83
8.4	Community.....	86
8.4.1	Joint enterprise.....	87
8.4.2	Mutual engagement.....	88
8.4.3	Shared repertoire.....	89
8.5	Meaning.....	91
8.6	Identity.....	93
8.7	Summing up on diversity and cohesiveness in communities of practice.....	97

9.	INNOVATION AND DIVERSITY IN COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE.....	99
9.1	Diversity ‘pulling’ innovative practice in CoPs	100
9.2	Diversity drivers and innovative practice	104
9.3	From the Innoversity Paradox to Innoversity	108
9.4	The organisational knowledge regime.....	110
9.5	What are the implications of the findings in this thesis?	113
9.5	Summing up on innovation and diversity in communities of practice.....	114
10.	CONCLUSIONS.....	116
APPENDIX A:	Definitions	119
APPENDIX B:	References.....	120
APPENDIX C:	Interview with Etienne Wenger	128
APPENDIX D:	Interview with Bob Carman (Boeing RocketDyne).....	134
APPENDIX E:	Interview with Elisabeth Plum.....	139
APPENDIX F:	Interview with Thomas Mathiasen (Foss Electrics).....	145
APPENDIX G:	Interview with Birgitte Møgård Hansen (Skibet).....	149

List of figures and models

1.1	Innovation and cohesiveness	3
1.2	The Innoversity Paradox I.....	3
1.3	Graphical illustration of the structure in this thesis	8
2.1	The Model Funnel.....	12
2.2	The Community of Practice Framework	20
3.1	Legitimate peripheral participation.....	33
4.1	The knowledge hexagon.....	38
5.1	Identity and self-categorisation.....	53
8.1	The Innoversity Paradox II.....	81
8.2	Vicious and virtuous circles of diversity.....	82
9.1	Tension between the experience and competence regime in a Cop	101
9.2	‘Skibet’ depicted in the Knowledge Hexagon.....	107
9.3	Innoversity in communities of practice	109
9.4	Organisations as constellations of communities of practice.....	111