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Problematizing the collaboration process in a knowledge-development context[☆]

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ABSTRACT

This research discusses the role of collaboration in the development of new knowledge and innovation management. To illustrate collaboration's significance, this research uses a flow path analytic model to examine the key antecedents and their predictive relationship with organizational performance in the course of collaboration process. The antecedents comprise consensus, technological support, rules & procedures and innovation complexity. The research further documents a corroboratory note in an industrial innovation case, which measures the collaboration antecedent effects on the innovation outcome using three behavioral indicators, dependence, essentiality and predictability. The analytic results provide evidence about collaboration management in organizational learning and new knowledge activities. Finally a parsimonious framework shows that the effects resulted from the individual collaboration antecedents along the three stages of innovation work. This research has implications for managing collaboration as a means of organizational learning and perfection.

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1. Background

The management literature considers collaboration as one of the pre-essential sources for organizational learning, through which groups of functional teams with diverse expertise share knowledge and conceive innovative product or process concepts collectively. New competence hence develops in the course of such collaboration process. Yet identifying the collaboration nature and requirements is also one of the most vexing problems challenging the conventional management view (Krishnan & Loch, 2005; Taylor & Greve, 2006). Collaboration is context-specific and only evolves adaptively through practices. From a phenomenological perspective, firms cannot plan organizational collaboration; the outcome of collaboration in different innovation can be very diverse, even if the same organizational teams participate.

Typically, scholars regard an organization as a commixture of operational functions that comprise activities and teams with distinct expertise, work patterns and performance goals. For instance, along a conventional supply pipeline in global business, product design team predicts market trends and conceives potential consumer preference directions. The technical team for new product evaluation and development will receive this information. The sales and marketing team correspondingly examines the historical sales data and emerging selling requirements for finalizing production requirements and schedules. In

due course, the production team specifies all the upstream manufacturing plan work in different countries. The plan work perhaps concerns a new conception of raw material processing methods, a new source of power, water supply, a responsive warehousing, or an intelligent logistics information system, etc. During the process, all individual functional teams must account for its own particular tasks, but, to various extents, teams also show interest in the entire development of the new product values, process requirements and likely difficulties in the other teams (Ross et al., 2010). For innovation projects in whatever scales, such context incubates a group of new knowledge co-workers, interdependently wading through sets of technical and managerial solutions. Organizations gain benefit by continually exploring or expanding the knowledge boundary. Inappropriate alliance of these teams gives rise to a series of propagated problems of resource commitment and risk bearing (Stirling, 2014). Current research and practicing communities are still addressing the issues of effective collaboration for coherent control of innovation progress (Jiménez-Jiménez & Sanz-Valle, 2011).

This research addresses the issues of collaboration in new knowledge development activities. At first, the research corroborates a context-centric management model that examines a set of antecedents and their predictive relationship with organizational performance. To corroborate the model's significance, this research documents an empirical experience gained in an industrial innovation project case. This is case-oriented, analyzing a small-N data source ethnographically (Ragin, 1994). The authors observe that the project progresses and measures methodologically the collaboration behavior across different stages of innovation. The authors also propose a framework of how the management of contextual antecedent factors can signify the organization-wide knowledge building as in a course of learning process. In short, organizations widely apply team-based collaborations

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to develop and execute new knowledge nowadays; however the collaborative relationships, performance management and accountability among these project teams still reveal concerns and uncertainty.

2. Concepts of collaboration in new knowledge management

The basic concepts of collaboration are not new in management literature. In most conventional thoughts, collaboration comes up with a significant value of collective *co-work* among groups of stakeholders who share with and learn from one another. These stakeholders exercise their expertise and work autonomously in their own work patterns. Yet, management expects the final results of their co-work to be much greater than that simply counting up their individual performance on one-plus-one basis (Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2000; Wood & Gray, 1991). Interestingly, in socio-centric organizations, people *must* work collectively in an attempt to bring out some unimaginable breakthrough. As the social and cultural psychology describes in phenomenological terms, people belong socially, and/or morally, in types of organizations and dedicate themselves to identifying and pursuing socially recognized goals, often ahead of the individuals' interests and goals (Gray, 1989; Henrich & Henrich, 2007; Hoang & Rothaermel, 2005). Although the organizations accentuate the individuals' achievements, the achievements have to still align cohesively with one another.

Management encourages expert groups to search new knowledge and creative possibilities beyond their own intellectual limits, while keeping those groups aware of a social work context within which the experts can learn and challenge each other empathetically. Thus, the work context can benefit all levels of organizations holistically, not individually. Management can therefore perceive collaboration as a sort of organization learning and knowledge management amalgamated with

these thoughts of individualistic creativity and social interaction. In a sizable organization, a classification of collaboration contexts might follow the organization's demand levels for new knowledge (Fig. 1).

Yet, putting forth new ideas, knowledge toward forms of competence inevitably brings up another question of probability or plausibility of innovation success. The success demands knowledge development and convergence, and support of organized repositories. Collaboration across teams with diverse disciplines can serve for such knowledge convergence (Benavides-Espinosa & Ribeiro-Soriano, 2014; Mohammed & Dumville, 2001).

3. A contextual model of collaboration process in new knowledge development

Fig. 2 illustrates a contextual analysis and models the prerequisites, mediating factors and consequences during the course of collaboration processes and their relational effects onto innovation projects. The model characterizes a prototype of cross-functional collaboration process. Herewith, the research discusses this prototype from a new, epistemological angle.

The contextual model stems from the observation and evaluation of the antecedents and outcomes of cross-functional collaboration in innovation activities. Prevalently, socio-psychological satisfaction judgment and tangible task performance are the two key post-hoc criteria to evaluate new knowledge development and innovation. Socio-psychological satisfaction refers to team members' judgment of satisfaction over their learning experiences in the course of collaboration processes; whereas task performance consists of those tangible results of innovation objects, such as the punctuality of completion time, resources consumed, and the extent of breakthrough or scope of new

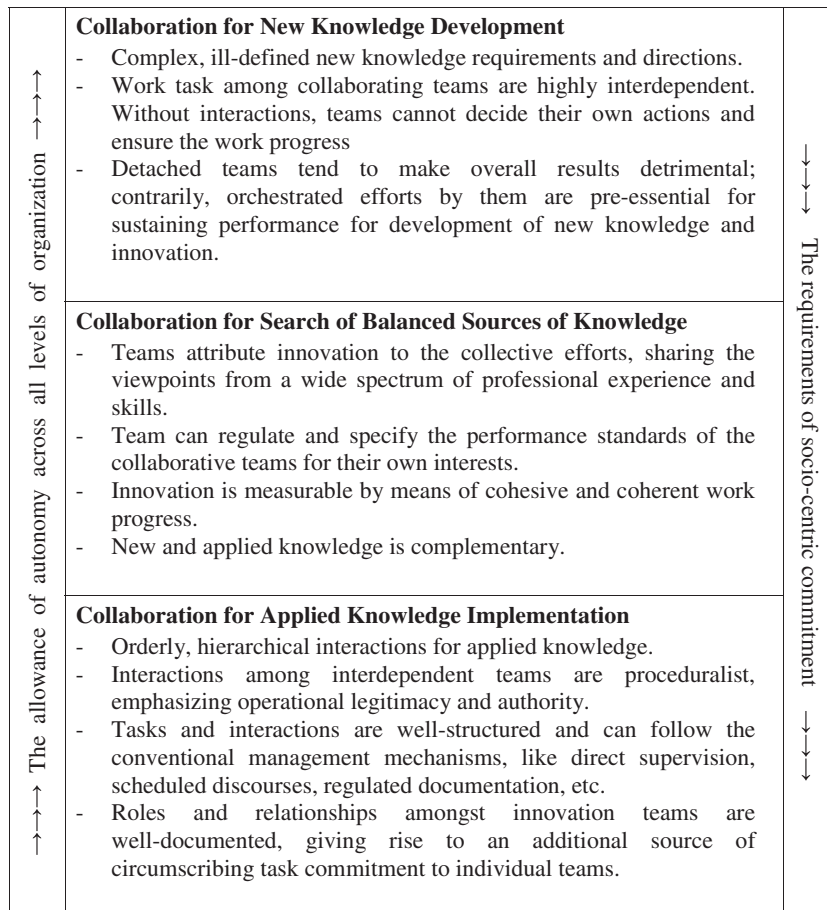


Fig. 1. Collaboration for use of organization knowledge.

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