Innovation implementation: Harmony and conflict in Chinese modern music festivals

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Enriches understanding of innovation through a categorization of interpersonal relationships.
- Identifies four types of exchange relationships within innovation implementation in events.
- Develops a conceptual framework showing the complex manner in which relationships impact innovation.
- Creates a typology of innovation implementation which focuses upon organisational capabilities rather than process.

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

There is a degree of consensus in the academic literature that innovation is a vital source of competitive advantage. Although some processional aspects of innovation have been examined in detail, the process of implementation of innovation at an organisational level has been neglected, especially in the tourism literature. This paper adopts a relational perspective to examine the implementation of innovation within the burgeoning Chinese modern music festivals sector. The findings of six detailed case studies show how identity, equality, guanxi, and a range of specific contextual factors, influence the development of relationships. These, in turn, affect innovation implementation, notably by influencing the acquisition and use of knowledge and other resources essential to the process. A conceptual model is proposed which explains the complexities of these relationships, their roles in innovation implementation, and incorporates mediating factors such as temporality, organisational structure, and the reliance upon volunteers found within events.

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1. Introduction

Innovation in tourism has attracted significant academic interest in recent years (e.g. Brooker & Joppe, 2014; Carmisón & Monfort-Mir, 2012; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010; Krizaj, Brodnik, & Bukovec, 2014). This has ranged from research on destination and national tourism innovation systems (e.g. Carlisle, Kunc, Jones, & Tiffin, 2013; Hall, 2009; Rodriguez, Williams, & Hall, 2014; Weidenfeld, 2013) to explanations for differing levels of innovation on various spatial or sub-sectoral scales (e.g. Hjalager, 2015; Sorensen, 2007; Weidenfeld, Williams, & Butler, 2010). Though slow to emerge, there has also been a growth in the number of studies reporting research on innovation in commercial tourism organisations (e.g. Nieves & Segarra-Ciprés, 2015; Thomas & Wood, 2014, 2015) and on events and festivals (e.g. Carlsen, Andersson, Ali-Knight, Jaeger, & Taylor, 2010; Paleo & Wijnberg, 2008; Van Limburg, 2008; Yaghmour & Scott, 2009). This paper examines an aspect of innovation in an under-research commercial context, namely modern music festivals in China.

Chinese modern music festivals organized by private companies tend to be held in large cities where market opportunities make them financially viable. Smaller cities (or counties) also host this genre of festival but they are usually supported financially by local government as a means of promoting particular economic and cultural visions of places, as happens elsewhere in the world (Getz & Page, 2016; Schilbach, 2010). Although impossible to quantify precisely, the number of festivals in China which adopt a Western format is growing rapidly and their dynamic nature provides

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tourism researchers with numerous examples of managerial, organisational, product and process innovations.

To date, most commentators have focused upon particular aspects of the innovation process, especially those relating to the role of knowledge and knowledge flows (e.g. Czernek, 2017; Shaw & Williams, 2009; Shaw, 2015; Thomas, 2012; Williams & Shaw, 2011). There has been little or no research published on the process of implementing innovation within organisations allied to tourism, even though there have been calls in the innovation literature for this topic to be addressed (e.g. Carlborg, Kindstrom, & Kowalkowski, 2014; Choi & Moon, 2014; Van De Ven, Polley, Garud, & Venkataraman, 2008).

Definitions of innovation vary but all note that 'As long as the idea is perceived as new to the people involved, it is an 'innovative idea', even though it may appear to others to be an 'imitation' of something that exists elsewhere' (Van De Ven et al., 2008: 9). The consequences of innovations may, therefore, represent no more than modest, or incremental, adaptations to practice (Hjalager, 2002). The implementation stage of the innovation process occurs when an innovation is introduced to the market, transferred to operating sites or diffused to potential adopters within, or external to, an organisation (Van De Ven et al., 2008). Implementation is, therefore, usually defined as the adoption of the innovation by 'users' both internally (staff) (Van De Ven et al., 2008) or externally (customers or suppliers) (Klein & Sorra, 1996; Sawang & Unsworth, 2011). Failure to implement successfully is not only intuitively problematic but has been shown to be detrimental to organisations in a variety of ways (e.g. Klein & Knight, 2005; Klein, Conn, & Sorra, 2001; Pfeffer, 1994; Walker, Craig-Lees, Hecker, & Francis, 2002). Long-standing calls by public policy-makers for greater innovation in tourism are not likely to be fulfilled until this neglected but potentially decisive aspect is more fully understood.

The prominent role interpersonal relationships play in shaping business practices generally is widely recognized but remains under theorized within the innovation and tourism specific literature (Bornay-Barrachina, López-Cabrales, & Valle-Cabrera, 2016; Noordin & Karim, 2015; Sung & Choi, 2014). Behavioural issues were identified some time ago by commentators such as Mohamed (1995) and the impact of 'destructive' conflicts have been observed, inter alia, by McAdam (2005). However, a wider range of additional relational factors, such as the influence of power and hierarchy structures within organisations seeking to innovate, have received scant attention, notwithstanding their identification (Bruque & Moyano, 2007).

The aim of the research reported in this paper was to analyse the role of interpersonal relationships in the implementation of innovation in modern music festivals in China. This involved the achievement of four objectives; to identify the range of interpersonal relationships within Chinese music festivals that affect the implementation of innovation; to interpret what influences the development of these relationships through the application of social exchange theory; to identify the range of outcomes of innovation implementation within these festivals; and to. provide a conceptual framework to explain the influences of interpersonal relationships on the outcomes of innovation implementation in the festival sector.

2. Conceptualising the implementation process

More than twenty years ago, Klein and Sorra (1996) proposed a model of innovation implementation that introduced notions of 'climate' and 'innovation-value fit'. The former refers to the extent to which employees perceive that their contribution to a specific innovation is expected, supported and rewarded within an organisation. Innovation-value fit is defined as 'the extent to which

targeted users perceive that use of the innovation will foster (or, conversely, inhibit) the fulfilment of their values' (Klein & Sorra, 1996, p. 1063). More recent studies have developed these ideas (e.g. Dong, Neufeld, & Higgins, 2008; Sawang & Unsworth, 2011) resulting in six key factors that are broadly agreed as influencing and shaping the implementation process. These are: (1) implementation policies and practices, such as staff training, technology support, and a rewards systems; (2) perceptions of the importance of innovation implementation within the organisation; (3) the role of managers in fostering cultures and working practices conducive to implementation; (4) financial support; (5) the existence of a learning environment whereby on-going development leads to knowledgeable and motivated staff; and (6) managerial patience, which reflects a recognition of the time it takes to implement some innovations (Klein & Knight, 2005). Many of these are likely to have specific challenges within the time constrained, volunteer reliant festival context.

Several commentators have drawn attention to the centrality of 'human resources' to effective implementation (e.g. Dooley, Subra, & Anderson, 2002; Sawang & Unsworth, 2011; Starkweather, 2005) and in particular the role of front-line employees (Cadwallader, Jarvis, Bitner, & Ostrom, 2010; Hausmana & Stock, 2003; Van De Ven, Angle, & Poole, 1989). Interpersonal communication is also highlighted as an enabling factor (Hausmana & Stock, 2003; Rapert, Velliquette, & Garretson, 2002) with socialization among staff encouraging the development of shared values (Bruque & Moyano, 2007). Naturally, staff relations may also pose problems in terms of implementation as a result of user reluctance. Indeed, this has been found to have a greater negative impact on the implementation of innovation than technical and administrative problems (Nieves & Segarra-Ciprés, 2015; Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2013). It is, therefore, appropriate to explore the extent to which the mix of paid workers, volunteers, private and public sector management found in the Chinese music festival sector share values and how these are created or otherwise through interpersonal communication.

The characteristics of particular innovations may also influence their implementation. Examples of these include the compatibility between the innovation and the company's existing values and practices; and the adaptability and flexibility of the innovation to the local context (Sung & Choi, 2014; Venkatesh, Morris, Davis, & Davis, 2003). Moreover, these characteristics may mediate the influence of individual competence and prior experience particularly on users' interaction with the innovation (Sung & Choi, 2014).

Fig. 1 summarizes the literature on a range of factors that have been identified as influencing the process of implementing innovations successfully. Clearly, not all factors will have the same level of influence. However, it provides a useful starting point for investigating the connections between interpersonal relationships and their potential mediating effect on factors influencing a festival organisation's ability to implement proposed innovations.

The potential longer term effects of approaches to implementing innovations have been described by Klein and Sorra (1996). They argue that possible outcomes include effective implementation and enhanced organisation performance; effective implementation but no enhanced organisation performance; and a failure of implementation. Their study, does not, however, define 'effective implementation', or 'failure of implementation' and is somewhat imprecise on what would constitute enhanced organisational performance. It is perhaps more useful, therefore, to conceptualize potential outcomes along axes of stakeholder satisfaction and the efficiency of implementation. This allows for more nuanced outcomes to be considered which offers a useful means of understanding the connection between interpersonal relationships and the implementation of innovation.