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The role of interorganizational citizenship behaviors in the innovation process

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the role of citizenship in the innovation process. While there is a large amount of research on organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), interorganizational citizenship behavior (ICB) has received less attention. This study examines a dense, localized cluster of private, public, and non-profit organizations. Seven dimensions characterize ICB during the different phases of the innovation process. These ICBs reflect 16 interorganizational practices that generate absorptive capacity. Seven of these practices occur during the ideation phase, five during the invention phase, and four during the exploitation phase. Cooperation and collaboration precede or underlie ICB. This study shows that spatial proximity is insufficient for enhancing innovation activities in industrial agglomerations and that ICB, collaboration, and cooperation are necessary. Therefore, these findings contribute to knowledge on the theory of innovation management and economic geography.

1. Introduction

Firms innovate based on both internal and external sources (Chesbrough, Vanhaverbeke, & West, 2006; von Hippel, 1988). More specifically, these external knowledge sources include competitors (Smets, Langerak, & Tatikonda, 2016); suppliers and subcontractors (Un & Asakawa, 2015); education and research institutions (Etzkowitz, 2012); governing authorities and industry associations (Watkins, Papaioannou, Mugwagwa, & Kale, 2015); end-users (Schweisfurth & Herstatt, 2016); and non-competitive industry peer networks (Zuckerman & Sgourev, 2006).

Citizenship behaviors are discretionary behaviors that are neither directly nor explicitly included in formal agreements but promote the functioning of an organization or interorganizational unit in the aggregate (Autry, Skinner, & Lamb, 2008; Organ, 1988). The current research distinguishes organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), interorganizational citizenship behavior (ICB), and customer citizenship behavior (CCB).

OCB that is enacted by employees leads to innovation and creativity (Podsakoff, Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Maynes, & Spoelma, 2014; Xerri & Brunetto, 2013). CCB contributes to innovation purposes through value co-creation activities (Nambisan & Baron, 2009; Langner & Seidel, 2015) and positively influences idea generation (Im, Montoya, & Workman, 2013; Langner & Seidel, 2015). Nambisan and Baron (2009) identify CCB as one of the motivations to engage in product design, testing, and product support activities. Another study reveals that customer involvement occurs throughout the entire innovation process (Schweisfurth & Herstatt, 2016).

ICB is featured in research that investigates supply chains (Autry et al., 2008; Skinner, Autry, & Lamb, 2009), teams, and projects (Braun, Ferreira, & Sydow, 2013; Ferreira, Braun, & Sydow, 2013). For example, one study finds that ICB in cross-functional teams promotes new product development and creativity (Qiu, Qualls, Bohlmann, & Rupp, 2009). Although interorganizational linkages are important sources of innovation (Dagnino, Levanti, Minà, & Picone, 2015), there are few studies on citizenship as a facilitating behavior in interorganizational contexts.

The purpose of this research is to identify interorganizational practices, which enable organizations to understand, access, and use external knowledge and information to innovate. This study builds on organizational theory and contributes to the stream of research investigating mechanisms leading to the beneficial horizontal and vertical interaction of spatially proximate organizations (Knoben, 2009). This research uses an abductive approach, utilizes ICB dimensions to analyze the innovation process, and inductively derives various interorganizational practices (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). The literature on interorganizational linkages as a source of innovation provides the basis for the research propositions. This research empirically investigates the single

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case study of a sports industry cluster based on 27 semi-structured interviews, four observations, and thirteen secondary data documents. The next sections present the empirical context, research design, data collection, and data analysis procedures. The following sections include the results, discussion, suggestions for future research, and reflections on limitations.

2. Theoretical background

The literature on spatial clustering—a dense concentration of organizations and firms in a geographically denominated area—and its impact on innovations is vast. A variety of academic disciplines have an interest in the origin and development of economic agglomerations (i.e., clusters) or attempt to explain the advantages of clustered organizations versus isolated ones (Knoben, 2009; Malmberg & Maskell, 2001). The field of economic geography provides the major body of research concerning clusters, in which there are two major schools of thought. The first school of thought posits that agglomeration benefits for clustered organizations occur without any interorganizational interaction (e.g., better infrastructure, increased revenues) (Krugman, 1991), while the second argues that agglomeration benefits require active interaction and exchange (Knoben, 2009; Mota & de Castro, 2004).

The network perspective can be useful in the analysis of spatial clustering (Araujo, 1998; Håkansson & Snehota, 2006), which maintains that, for certain organizations, the environment consists of a "limited number of identifiable organizational entities (actors)" (Håkansson & Snehota, 2006, p. 259). The network provides access to relevant but tacit knowledge and resources that are unavailable for organizations outside the network (Greve, 2009; Maskell, 2001; von Corswant, 2005). Socio-economic processes and spatial proximity facilitate the knowledge transfer within localized business networks (Molina-Morales, Belso-Martínez, Más-Verdú, & Martínez-Cháfer, 2015). Therefore, spatially clustered business networks provide a source of competitive advantage (Greve, 2009; Håkansson & Snehota, 2006).

Access to external knowledge is a necessary but ultimately insufficient condition for innovation. Firms require absorptive capacity to understand, acquire, and use external knowledge and information (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990). Boundary-spanning organization members with sufficient absorptive capacity (Tortoriello, 2015) who go beyond their prescribed duties (Qiu et al., 2009) are most likely to access external knowledge. Interorganizational learning—the application of external knowledge—is more likely to occur when the firms' knowledge bases are sufficiently different. However, interorganizational learning will not occur if the cognitive distance is too great (Maskell, 2001).

Clustered organizations exchange extramural and industry-specific knowledge, norms, practices, and technologies. This cluster-specific knowledge differentiates the cluster from the wider industry (Doloreux, Shearmur, & Guillaume, 2014). Knowledge is more easily disseminated within clusters because organizations have greater absorptive capacities for cluster-specific knowledge and because the cognitive distance is shorter among cluster organizations (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990; Maskell, 2001). However, the current research does not sufficiently explain how this knowledge transfer and acquisition occurs. ICB may be the missing link.

An example of a sector where the cognitive distance is not large is the sports industry. Sports industry clusters include a large variety of organizations (Gerke, Desbordes, & Dickson, 2015). These organizations comprise private companies that provide different types of equipment, services, media, or designs as well as professional and amateur sports organizations, governing bodies, and education/research institutes. Clusters contain many interorganizational linkages, each offering the potential for knowledge exchanges (Chetty & Agndal, 2008). This research examines ICB in a sailing industry cluster (Autry et al., 2008; Gerke et al., 2015; Skinner et al., 2009) in addition to the role of cooperation (Dyer & Singh, 1998; Tuomela, 1993) and collaboration (Astley & Fombrun, 1983; Vlaar, Van den Bosch, & Volberda, 2006) for developing ICB.

The sports industry is a fruitful context to study spatial clustering and its benefits. Previous empirical studies on spatial clustering include several sports industries: sailing (Chetty, 2004), surfing (Stewart, Skinner, & Edwards, 2008), and skateboarding (Kellett & Russell, 2009). Conceptual research also exists on sports clusters, but none focuses on innovation (Gerke et al., 2015; Shilbury, 2000). Most studies on sports innovation focus on the end user as the innovation source (Hyysalo, 2009; Lüthje, Herstatt, & von Hippel, 2005; Schweisfurth & Herstatt, 2016).

2.1. Citizenship behavior, interorganizational linkages and innovation

Citizenship is the strongest form of interorganizational behavior and is stronger than both collaboration and cooperation (Keast, Brown, & Mandell, 2007). Previous research investigates citizenship in the context of organizations (Organ, 1988, Podsakoff et al., 2014), supply chains (Autry et al., 2008; Skinner et al., 2009), interfirm projects (Braun, Müller-Seitz, & Sydow, 2012; Ferreira et al., 2013), intrafirm networks and cross-functional teams (Im et al., 2013; Qiu et al., 2009), and firm-customer relationships (Langner & Seidel, 2015; Nambisan & Baron, 2009). In the context of supply chains, ICB are "interfirm behavioral tactics, generally enacted by boundary personnel, that are discretionary, not directly or explicitly included in formal agreements, and that in the aggregate promote the effective functioning of the supply chain" (Autry et al., 2008, p. 54).

ICB occurs between different types of cluster organizations. The cluster literature distinguishes between vertical and horizontal cluster members. Vertical cluster members conduct related activities and are typically in a buyer-supplier relationship. Horizontal cluster members have similar and often complementary activities. Horizontal cluster members can include supporting institutions, universities, trade associations, and other cluster stakeholders (Bell, Tracey, & Heide, 2009; Malmberg & Maskell, 2001). Individuals belonging to different cluster organizations engage in ICB.

Clusters provide members with easier access to resources and tacit knowledge, which are crucial for innovation. Cooperation and collaboration are levers for knowledge transfer in interorganizational linkages (Bell et al., 2009; Knoben, 2009). Malmberg and Maskell (2001) refer to the civic nature of economic agglomerations to capture institutional, social, and cultural characteristics that facilitate information and knowledge transfer. This paper extends their argument by investigating whether ICB facilitates information and knowledge transfers as well as innovation.

ICB is neither enforceable nor based on formal or contractual agreements. The prevalence of ICB results from an organization's permanent decision-making process through its agents within interorganizational dyads and networks (Autry et al., 2008). This study argues that ICB facilitates the innovation process in heterogeneous networks of relationships through cooperative and collaborative activities that do not respect or require formal organizational boundaries (Araujo, 1998).

The dimensions of ICB are advancement, altruism, conscientiousness, constructiveness, compliance, loyalty, and tolerance (Autry et al., 2008; Organ, 1988; Skinner et al., 2009). Advancement is behavior directed at constantly improving operations and outcomes in the cluster by improving relationships, knowledge bases, and the integrated processes linking two or more organizations. One example of this behavior is collaborating on product development. Altruism is behavior that is directed at helping other cluster members acquire skills, knowledge, or resources. Organizations engage in a selfless effort to assist others. Examples include sharing acquired knowledge and providing advice, warnings, and recommendations. Conscientiousness occurs when people perform interorganizational tasks with higher than normal levels of forethought and effort. Examples include overseeing of clients'