Anchoring Corporate Innovation Communities in Organizations: A Taxonomy

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ABSTRACT

Whereas literature in the area of open innovation considerably advances the understanding of innovation community mechanics, little is known about how innovation communities need to be anchored within organizations to unleash the creative potential of employees. To contribute to this discussion, this article focuses on the still understudied link among organizational integration and its influence on innovation activities and outcomes of corporate innovation communities. Additionally, it identifies distinct types of transition strategies to anchor organizational integration of corporate innovation communities. To attain this aim, structuration theory is applied. Multiple in-depth case studies allow insights into antecedents of and transition strategies for corporate innovation communities. Results demonstrate that 1) cultural and structural integration are major antecedents for innovation activities and outcomes of corporate innovation communities, and 2) transition strategies offer valuable patterns to alter organizational integration.

Keywords: Case Study, Communities of Practice, Innovation Community, Online Community, Structuration Theory

SETTING THE STAGE

Organizations increasingly rely on corporate innovation communities as a means to unleash the innovative potential of their employees (Neyer, Bullinger, & Möslein, 2009; Möslein & Neyer, 2009). These communities are mostly supported by social software and are bound to organizational contexts in which they are integrated (Brown & Duguid, 1991). However, organizational integration of corporate innovation communities as a pre-condition for innovation to occur (Kodama, 2001) often remains limited. Whereas literature in the area of open innovation considerably advances our understanding of innovation community mechanics (Lakhani & von Hippel, 2003; Shah, 2006), little is known about how innovation communities need to be anchored within organizations to unleash the creative potential of employees (Roberts, 2006). First insights can be gained from corporate entrepreneurship literature which studies ante-
ecedents of dispersed innovation in the context of corporate entrepreneurial initiatives that occur throughout the organization (Birkinshaw, 1997; Hill & Birkinshaw, 2010). Also, previous research hints to a variety of reasons for failure of corporate innovation communities, ranging from lack of motivation (Fang & Neufeld, 2009; von Krogh, Spaeth, & Lakhani, 2003; Roberts, 2006) to failed knowledge exchange (Bechky, 2003; Peltonen & Lämsä, 2004). To contribute to this discussion, this article focuses on the still understudied link among organizational integration and its influence on innovation activities – i.e., the way employees cooperate in corporate innovation communities – and outcomes – i.e., expressed by the number of innovations generated – of corporate innovation communities. Additionally, it identifies distinct types of transition strategies to anchor organizational integration of corporate innovation communities.

To help facilitate this endeavor we apply structuration theory (Giddens, 1979, 1984; Gregory, 1989; Jarzabkowski, 2008; Jones & Karsten, 2008). This theoretical perspective offers an instrument to determine the nature of organizational contexts and to discover transition strategies to adapt these contexts to given conditions, such as organizational integration of corporate innovation communities, for two reasons: First, it builds on the premise that organizational contexts frame individuals’ activities and outcomes as they “[…] realize institutional orders within their day-to-day actions” (Jarzabkowski, 2008, p. 622). For instance, Orlikowski (1996) shows how the introduction of new software changes organizational contexts in which individual activities are integrated. She demonstrates that employees rearrange daily work activities as the software demanded additional electronic documentation. On the one hand, organizational contexts determine activities and outcomes of organizational members as they “[…] realize institutional orders within their day-to-day actions” (Jarzabkowski, 2008, p. 622). For instance, Orlikowski (1996) shows how the introduction of new software changes organizational contexts in which individual activities are integrated. She demonstrates that employees rearrange daily work activities as the software demanded additional electronic documentation. On the other hand, individuals’ activities and outcomes shape the organizational context by consciously or unconsciously applying specific transition strategies (Giddens, 1979, 1984; Gregory, 1989; Jarzabkowski, 2008; Jones & Karsten, 2008). Orlikowski (1996) indicates that changed work procedures result in adaptation of coordination mechanisms at the organizational level and change organizational

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Structuration theory emphasizes reciprocal interactions between organizational context and daily work activities and outcomes. On the one hand, organizational contexts determine activities and outcomes of organizational members as they “[…] realize institutional orders within their day-to-day actions” (Jarzabkowski, 2008, p. 622). For instance, Orlikowski (1996) shows how the introduction of new software changes organizational contexts in which individual activities are integrated. She demonstrates that employees rearrange daily work activities as the software demanded additional electronic documentation. On the other hand, individuals’ activities and outcomes shape the organizational context by consciously or unconsciously applying specific transition strategies (Giddens, 1979, 1984; Gregory, 1989; Jarzabkowski, 2008; Jones & Karsten, 2008). Orlikowski (1996) indicates that changed work procedures result in adaptation of coordination mechanisms at the organizational level and change organizational
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