

# INNOVATION MANAGEMENT AS NEXIALISM

*Innovation management understood as the ability to ensure  
exchange and combination between multiple domains of  
knowledge*

## INTRODUCTION

This paper evolves from a longitudinal, real-time study of innovation practice in six different groups, and introduces a new approach to analyzing and managing group diversity in innovation practice.

By applying a social constructionist approach, the paper integrates social psychology with innovation management theory and defines diversity as “the availability and use of multiple knowledgeable identity domains”. By defining each such domains as consisting of a unique set of perspectives and heuristics, coated with an outer layer of identity; innovation is described as taking place when domain-specific perspectives and heuristics are being exchanged and combined between knowledge domains that have not previously been combined. The resulting innovation practice itself is however only described as *innovative*, when such combination represents a perturbation of the focal domain. Based on this approach to the analysis of diversity in six different innovation groups, three types of innovation practice were identified: Type 1) *innovative* innovation practice; Type 2) not-innovative, but competence building innovation practice, and Type 3) neither innovative, nor competence building innovation practice.

While describing all three types of innovation practice, the paper in particular focuses on *innovative* innovation practice (Type 1), and the role of innovation management in managing innovation processes in practice. Another key finding in relation to this shows how groups in this study were found to be actively constructing diversity when innovation management was able to 1) ensure awareness of available domains, 2) legitimize the relevant available domains, and 3) actively manage the construction of multiple domains. By relating these findings to the allegory of nexialism, as it was introduced by sci-fi writer Ian Vogt in 1950<sup>1</sup>, the implications of these findings on the innovation management are analysed and discussed.

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<sup>1</sup> In his famous novel “The Voyage of the Space Beagle Ian Vogt defined nexialism as “the science of joining in an orderly fashion the knowledge of one field of learning with that of other fields” (1950)