



The INNOVERSITY Model explained

The INNOVERSITY Model was developed by Susanne Justesen in her Ph.D. project with Copenhagen Business School, and describes a unique approach to leveraging diversity for innovation

The INNOVERSITY Model describes a new approach to studying, analysing and managing work-group diversity in innovation practice. The model represents an integrated approach to innovation management, diversity management and knowledge management within organisations, and builds on theory from a range of different disciplines besides the three fields mentioned above, notably social psychology, network theory, identity and learning theory.

The INNOVERSITY Model helps us understand the important role of diversity in innovation, and how to use this understanding to navigate the complex paradoxes of diversity in innovation practice.

A NEW KNOWLEDGE-BASED APPROACH TO DIVERSITY

The model defines diversity as "the availability and use of multiple knowledge-able identity domains". In the model, each domain is defined as consisting of a unique set of perspectives and heuristics, coated with an outer layer of identity. The model describes how to first identify and map the available identity domains in each group, primarily based on functional, disciplinary, and demographic diversity criteria.

The INNOVERSITY Model evolves from a three-year research study, based on an ethnographic approach to studying innovation practice in six different groups in six different organisations. From this study, groups were found to be actively constructing diversity in their innovation practice in three different ways: 1) by ensuring awareness of

available domains, 2) by legitimising the relevant available domains, and 3) by actively managing the construction of multiple domains.

HOW TO MAKE INNOVATION PROCESSES INNOVATIVE

In the model, innovation practice is defined as the exchange and combination of domain-specific perspectives and heuristics between knowledgeable identity domains in the group. Such a definition thus requires for multiple knowledgeable identity domains to be constructed (made salient) simultaneously in the group; and thus the use of diversity in innovation practice is defined as happening in the process of exchanging and combining perspectives and heuristics between domains.

The third part of the model focuses on the use of diversity to enhance innovation practice, by exploring how such exchange and combination is found to take place in the groups studied. The Model then identifies five different aspects of their practice providing for the use of diversity in innovation practice. These five are: 1) aggressive exchange and combination between domains, 2) multiple domains engaged in decision-making, 3) diversity makes humble, 4) talking-over, and 5) multiple management.

AVOIDING HOMOGENEITY IN THE INNOVATION PROCESS

One of the most significant and somewhat surprising findings in the above described research project was the strong propensity of groups involved in innovation practice to become increasingly homogeneous as the innovation process evolved. Homogeneity in the INNOVERSITY Model is defined as the dominance of a single knowledge domain, which prevents the available diversity in such a group from being constructed and used.

According to the research, the conscious leverage and use of diversity is a constant struggle uphill. If a group "caved in" to homogeneity and the dominance of a single domain, even for just a minute, homogeneity could and often would be re-created instantly. The surprise was not that homogeneity was constructed, since conformity is a well-known and well-studied aspect of group psychology (Gross, 1992; Sabini, 1992).

What was surprising, was the overwhelming degree to which the groups studied, engaged in such homogeneity-construction, given the fact that 1) every one of the six groups studied had a high degree of diversity available (functional, demographic, disciplinary); and 2) the task given was to be specifically innovative, and hence to benefit from the available knowledgeable identity domains in group, e.g. the group diversity.

These groups had all been particularly "casted" for composite diversity, but found it increasingly difficult over time to construct, activate and use that seemingly available diversity in their innovation practice. Some of the aspects describing how such homogeneity was used in innovation practice were identified as being: 1) preference-based decisionmaking, 2) strong identification with salient domain, which seemingly makes it difficult to disagree, 3) relating to customers as ingroup and 4) relating to customers as outgroup.

THREE TYPES OF COLLABORATION IN INNOVATION

Based on this analysis of homogeneity and diversity in innovation practice, three types of collaboration in innovation processes were identified: Type 1) innovative collaboration practice; Type 2) not-innovative, but competence building collaboration, and Type 3) neither innovative, nor competence-building collaboration in groups.

These three types of collaboration in innovation illustrate the two most significant aspects of the INNOVERSITY Model: First of all how complex, tough and almost painful is it to make innovation processes innovative (type 1); since it requires a constant leverage and use of diversity. Secondly, how innovation groups are likely to engage in not-innovative collaboration and group behaviour, because without the necessary means or motivation for leveraging and using diversity, innovation groups may naturally engage in co-constructing homogeneity instead of diversity, thus making innovation practice non-innovative (type 2 or type 3).

USING THE INNOVERSITY MODEL IN PRACTICE

The Model provides a unique departure point for mapping out the available knowledge diversity within a group, team, department or even an entire organisation - and provides unique and very simple measures as to how the mapped diversity can be leveraged and used directly for innovation. By both managers and employees interested in becoming more innovative. Please contact INNOVERSITY COPENHAGEN if you would like to know how the INNOVERSITY Model can be applied and used in your organisation.