

Innoversity Working Paper #2 by Susanne Justesen, Innoversity Research - Spring 2001

FIVE INNOVERSITY DRIVERS OF INNOVATION

From among a range of different theoretical fields and scientific traditions, treating different aspects of diversity and innovative practice, I have identified what I perceive to be the five most important virtuous drivers of diversity, i.e. aspects of diversity that actively contribute to and drive innovative practice within organisations. I label these drivers 'Innoversity drivers' because I perceive them as 'dynamics seen to drive innovative practice -- which are directly enhanced by diversity'.

INNOVERSITY DRIVER #1: ABSORPTIVE CAPACITY

The first driver, absorptive capacity, is a well-known capability described within the fields of organisational learning and innovation, and introduced by Cohen & Levinthal (1990). This driver was identified and included due to it describing both the ability to learn and develop new knowledge, and how this capability will be enhanced in a context characterised by what I label multiple-paths

INNOVERSITY DRIVER #2: REQUISITE VARIETY

The second driver, requisite variety, was found within the natural sciences – but has already been applied to knowledge creation (for instance by Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995) due to its focus on the importance of internal variety – which in this context is described as variety in techne and cognition, and how such variety may influence problem solving and decision making

INNOVERSITY DRIVER #3: NETWORK VARIETY

The third driver, network variety, stems from network theory, and describes how internal diversity usually also means external network variety, due to networks typically being demographically aligned. In this way organisational diversity allows for increased access to outside knowledge, due to the access to a wider variety of network connections.

INNOVERSITY DRIVER #4: CREATIVE DESTRUCTION

The fourth driver, creative destruction, is one of the most important – originally developed within marketing theory and is about the importance of destruction, which is often necessary before construction can take place. Diversity drives creative destruction by providing for diverging perspectives, which fosters questioning and reflection.

INNOVERSITY DRIVER #5: PROBLEM SOLVING

Finally, the last driver, problem solving, was inspired by Leonard (1998), and her emphasis on the importance of shared problem solving – where diversity of perspectives is argued to enhance problem solving routines and processes.

Viewed in this perspective, diversity may be seen to work as a locomotive driving different aspects of innovative practice by potentially igniting these five mutually interdependent dynamics/drivers, seen to advance and enhance innovative practice. I thereby argue that the benefits of diversity primarily reside in these five innoversity drivers.

When each of these drivers have been elucidated, we change the focus to see how they may influence overall organisational performance. In a discussion of organisational performance, this causal rationality however becomes rather hypothetical, because if the interaction between diversity and innovative practice and how it is mediated by the context in which it is embedded.