

Letter from Academia

Open Innovation & The emergence of a new field: Empowering Future Generations

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Abstract. Open Innovation has been attracting an increasing interest from academics and practitioners alike over the last decade. Companies are increasingly prone to engage in Open Innovation journeys, yet they face a myriad of challenges, including the fact that their workforce is not endowed with skills that are required to smoothly implement Open Innovation. Interestingly, despite the growing interest of all communities, education in the field is clearly lagging behind, as the analysis of existing innovation curricula reflects. While universities should empower young generations with tomorrow's required skillsets, they apparently disregard an essential component and neglect to adopt a foresight approach on their core business. In this Academic Letter, we argue that this may relate to the fact that Open Innovation is not yet recognized as a discipline per se and we discuss six forces that may help elevate it to this stage. Overall, we also aim to demonstrate that the journey to establish Open Innovation as a field of education is only beginning.

Keywords. Discipline, Emergence, Teaching, Research field, Professionalization, Open Innovation

1. Introduction

The European Union has placed innovation high on its agenda, since the Lisbon Strategy, aiming at making Europe the most innovative and competitive economy in the world, along with the subsequent EU2020 strategy, targeting a smart, inclusive and sustainable growth for its Member States. The implementation of those strategies has taken various forms and facets including the development of innovative funding instruments covering the whole spectrum from basic research to the diffusion of novelties. The Juncker plan is another recent mechanism to support the renewal, growth and competitiveness of European industries, as well as its transformation to address new societal challenges. As stated by the European Investment Bank, being the entity overseeing its implementation, the Investment Plan for Europe aims to revive investment in strategic projects around Europe so as to ensure that money reaches the real economy. This should unlock an additional investment of at least EUR 315bn over the next three years. (European Investment Bank website).

2. On the largest EU network for Open Innovation education

Among the variety of instruments and vehicles created by the European Union to

support Europe face its current and future challenges, is the Erasmus Programme. Originally focused on fostering the mobility of students and researchers, it nowadays covers a wider range of activities, including the set-up of large academic networks. Foreseeing the opportunity to leverage on a large, European-wide network to federate actors and establish Open Innovation as a field of teaching, the OI-NET proposal was submitted by Torkkeli. The purpose of this project, now funded under the Erasmus scheme, is multifold. Firstly, it aims to define a joint framework for curricula on Open Innovation on a European level. Secondly, it aspires to explore how such curricula can complement or supplement existing schemes offered by universities and higher education institutions, including its recognition in terms of educational credits, i.e. the so-called ECTS. Thirdly, it targets the development of customized modules, based on the peculiarities of the different structures of European economies. Fourthly, it addresses the elaboration of an online library of cases embracing all aspects of Open Innovation for educational purposes. Fifthly, its purpose is to build a sustainable community, with a shared interest in the field of Open Innovation, and self-reinforcing the awareness raising both among high education institutions, companies, associations, policy makers and civil society. Ultimately, the purpose of the project is to establish Open Innovation as a self-standing discipline per se. In practical terms, it started with a survey on Open Innovation practices implementation across the main industries of every European country involved. It further explored what skills are specific to Open Innovation implementation, covering explorative, exploitative, transformational categories of skills to name just a few. In parallel, case studies encompassing strategic concerns, i.e. why do firms engage into Open Innovation strategies; organizational questions, i.e. what modes and practices of Open Innovation are selected, how are those implement, and what are the obstacles and catalysts for doing so; and performance-related issues, such as what is the impact of Open Innovation practices on firm's performance. Concomitantly, a review of existing curricula, and to what extent they include Open Innovation distinctively, has been performed. Another team of Open Innovation experts built the structure of the curricula, defined indicators and progress markers as well as the learning outcomes. Next steps include pilot testing of the developed modules, as well as further development, involving multidisciplinary teams, to enrich this first basis. Gathering more than 50 experts across Europe and through a coordinated effort, the underlying purpose is to elevate Open Innovation to the status of a field of teaching and to establish it as a discipline per se.

3. Establishing OI as a field of education

Such initiative can be analyzed through the lens of Aldrich's view on the emergence of an academic field. According to Aldrich (2012), six forces create the institutional infrastructure to establish a field: social networking, publication opportunities, training and mentoring, funding sources, recognitions and rewards, globalizing forces. We will review the OI-NET initiative from the perspective of these forces. Social networking is achieved through the gathering of a wide community of academics and practitioners, from one of the leading worldwide economy, the European Union, thus building a community in itself. The interaction of this community with the wider innovation management community and the natural embeddedness, both at individual and at collective level with innovation management professional associations, leading groups and conferences, demonstrate the synergies between Open Innovation and Innovation Management. Yet, dedicated conferences, such as the World Open Innovation Conference, the Open Innovation Forum, the Open Innovation 2.0 Conference, as well as dedicated tracks during leading innovation events, provide evidence of the need to hold self-alone events revolving around Open Innovation.

Second, the number of Special Issues in leading academic journals such as R&D Management, Technovation and Research Policy, dedicated to Open Innovation, has grown drastically over the last decade. This Journal is also supporting the emergence of Open Innovation as an academic field, through this first Issue entirely dedicated to a single theme, yet addressed through multiple facets and lenses in line with our multidisciplinary philosophy. The number of books on Open Innovation is also booming, irrespectively of whether these are academically grounded or addressing a managerial audience. Training programmes are the core focus of the OI-NET project, and it complements and supplements other initiatives, such as professional workshops and PhD seminars (e.g. ESADE's PhD seminars by Henry Chesbrough). Funding of Open Innovation research certainly deserves further attention, as it currently seems to be included in wider funding schemes. Similarly, regular data collection on Open Innovation practices, through surveys similar to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor originally funded by the Kauffman Foundation (Aldrich, 2012). Currently, large-scale innovation surveys fail to capture the multifaceted nature of Open Innovation. More specifically, the Community Innovation Survey, which is the harmonized instrument to collect information about innovation inputs, practices, and outcomes, across Europe and most OECD countries, includes a few questions, which reflect inbound Open Innovation practices but disregards the outbound side at this stage. Awards for Open Innovation exist (see e.g. The American Leaders), yet in the eyes of these Authors, much remains to be done in order to nurture the recognition of the research and the achievements in the field. Globalizing forces take various forms for Open Innovation research: it has now significantly departed from its original scope (defining, characterizing and depicting the phenomenon), geographical and sectoral areas for empirical investigations. Nowadays, Open Innovation research covers all industries and adopts a worldwide approach, even if there is a predominance of US and European-based research. Yet, there is no doubt that this will be changing shortly.

4. Perspectives

This journey is only at its beginning. Current literature is still extensively debating about the relevance, usefulness and applicability of Open Innovation. Numerous scholars have expressed their concerns and criticisms about Open Innovation, have questioned whether it should be considered as a concept, paradigm or simply a (relatively) new managerial fad. By challenging Open Innovation, these criticisms induce new reflections, thoughts and actions, so as to constructively contribute to this vibrant debate on what Open Innovation entails and to what extent it is valuable to depict economic and managerial phenomena. To raise Open Innovation to the status of a discipline, to convince universities and decision-makers to invest into the development of dedicated curricula and trainings will still require lots of effort and dedication. Our conviction is that Open Innovation needs to be debated in different arenas from a multidisciplinary perspective, and most importantly, with insights from thought leaders, policy makers and the civil society. As we conclude in "Open Innovation: a multifaceted perspective" (Mention & Torkkeli, 2015), Open Innovation requires to astutely combine eight O's, "Openness is central, and embodies the overall philosophy of the innovation process as seen nowadays. Openness entails the ability to listen to different, even divergent, Opinions, so as to be receptive to other mindsets, cultures, environments and to transform these into Opportunities. Individuals, teams, firms, organizations, nations, societies should capture Opportunities in a meaningful, productive, efficient and effective manner so as to create value. Value creation requires the ability to achieve a perfect Orchestration of capabilities, both individual and collective abilities and capabilities. Such Orchestration may benefit from Observation, conducted by third parties,

providing impartial and fair advice, or from Observation of third parties, such as competitors, suppliers, customers and all stakeholders involved in the value constellation. Optimization is the Holy Grail and may, at least partially, rely on the technological progress, which is still booming nowadays. The use of technologies, as well as the reshaping of ecosystems, requires more and more Operability and interoperability between firms and systems. And only Optimism and willingness to engage into an Open Innovation journey can lead to fruitful and mutually rewarding relationships, ensuring that innovation delivers its intrinsic mission of building a better future while achieving societal impact.”

5. References

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The usual disclaimer applies.