



Call for papers – Special Issue

Knowledge Communities as innovation and creativity levers

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Since the pioneering works of Lave and Wenger or Brown and Duguid in the early 1990s, the notion of knowledge communities is intimately linked to Innovation. The aim of this special issue is to analyze the complementarity of these two concepts in the broadest sense.

In a context of intense competitive intensity, increasing complexity of technologies and emergence of new technologies, open innovation strategies come across as essential for companies. Their competitive advantages and their innovation capacity increasingly rely on their ability to integrate external knowledge and develop the creativity of their teams. Recent research has shown the importance of various forms of knowledge communities to stimulate and nurture these capacities: communities of practice; epistemic communities, social collectives, user communities. They increasingly develop within favorable spaces of innovation such as co-working spaces, co-design spaces, or creative territories.

Such communities are informal groups of people (from various origins and/or functions) sharing the same expertise or common goal (such as improving their professional practice, developing better products or services) and who commit to working together and contributing to the activities of the community (Wenger, 1998). Such communities act as true social networks linking individuals based on the same professional location or across geographically distant sites. Through their continuous interactions, members of a community create or adopt a shared repertoire of resources (Wenger, 1998) composed of tools, processes or artifacts (e.g. platforms, internet site, product, procedures) which ease up their exchanges both internally and with external actors. Recent research shows how these communities enable to capitalize on best

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practices, solve problems more efficiently and generate new ideas about next generations of innovations (Sarazin, Cohendet & Simon., 2017).

An increasing number of firms and organizations have realized the importance of these communities for their performance and have adapted their management practices to exploit their potential (Cohendet et al., 2006). Among them, we can mention: Hewlett-Packard with its *Learning Groups*, Xerox with its *Family-Groups*, British Petroleum with *Peer Groups*, IBM Global Services' *Knowledge Networks*, Schneider-Electric's communities of practice, Decathlon's user communities, or EDF's *KM club*. In France, a recent survey published by FNEGE in 2015 (The French Foundation for Management Education) identifies innovation, knowledge management and communities of practice as one of the biggest topics for management research. All these works highlight that knowledge communities represent considerable sources of value creation, innovation and performance for firms and organizations.

More recently, the literature stresses the link between knowledge communities and the development of favorable spaces for innovation (Cohendet, Grandadam & Simon, 2010). Such spaces can develop within a city (creative cities such as Montreal or Barcelona) or an organization (co-working space). For example, Ubisoft develops its capacity to capture existing knowledge and ideas (artistic and cultural) circulating in Montreal to accelerate innovations in the video game field. As a creative city, Montreal is a favorable space for innovation stimulating the creativity of Ubisoft's developers. The impact of such communities is therefore not limited to multinational firms. It is therefore interesting to investigate the value of communities for cities with multiple levels of social embeddedness and proved local practices.

However, while knowledge communities can leverage rich innovations, they raise various challenges to organizations and firms. Autonomous, self-organized and with specific identities, they rely on coordination mechanisms that significantly differ from those of firms (Wenger, 1998; Brown et Duguid, 1998). Such intrinsic characteristics raise a paradox. On the one hand, their autonomy and self-organization capacity constitute assets on which firms can build to "outsource" the tasks of developing and transferring knowledge. But on the other hand, they are a source of constant tensions related to their lack of control and difficulty to anticipate its innovation potential for the firm.

This paradox concerns knowledge communities existing both within organizations and across organizations and raises several research questions:

- What is the impact of the increasing importance granted by firms to communities? Can this interest jeopardize their development?
- To what respect can a self-organized and autonomous community be "managed"?
- What is the value of a community? How can it be assessed?
- How can an organization access the resources of a community (e.g. investments on its absorptive capacities)? How can communities exploit other coordination mechanisms (fablabs, co-working spaces) ?
- What is the impact of digitalization and social networks on communities?

Authors are invited to submit articles covering the above research questions and management issues. Research contributions can cover various forms of communities as well as favorable spaces for innovation existing both within organizations or in a creative geographical territory (creative city).

The editors of this special issue are open to any form of article dealing with the role of communities in the firm's innovation and management processes, even if it does not fit precisely into the proposed theme. We welcome all types of methodological approaches.

Timetable for submission and acceptance of papers:

- **25/05/2018:** Deadline for complete manuscripts through online paper submission: <http://www.editorialmanager.com/innovations/default.aspx>

Guideline for authors: http://www.cairn.info/docs/Instructions_for_authorsGB110816.pdf

- **30/04/2019:** Final notification for acceptance

Submit full paper to: florence.crespinmazet@kedgebs.com