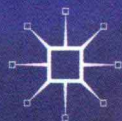


Employee-Driven Innovation



A New Approach

Edited by Steen Høyrup,
Maria Bonnafous-Boucher,
Cathrine Hasse, Maja Lotz
and Kirsten Møller



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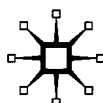
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Foreword

Innovation is a powerful and pervasive discourse in workplaces these days. In both private and public sector organizations, innovation is promoted as the critical engine of growth, or perhaps just survival, in hyper-competitive global capitalism. Policy documents stress innovation as a critical skill in the so-called knowledge economy. The most desirable employees are those who are innovative. The most important organizational activities are those dedicated to generating, capturing, institutionalizing and marketing innovation. With so much at stake, hierarchies have flourished in the divisions that are taken to exist between those elite designers valued as the *innovators* and those others who so often are assumed to be the *implementers* – that is, those who engineer, maintain and imaginatively negotiate a mass of everyday problem-solving to make innovations actually work.

But just what is ‘innovation’, and whom does it serve? In critical circles, important questions have been raised about this discourse for some time. What counts as innovative knowledge tends to be that which is considered novel, solves practical problems, and commands market value. But, of course, all this is determined by very particular interests that recognize and value most those ideas that yield maximum exchange value in networks of production. What tends to be overlooked are other forms of innovation. These include those everyday improvisations that workers generate all the time: small modifications to work processes, inventive solutions that emerge in practice, everyday openings for creative expression that workers somehow find and exploit, and even innovative approaches to well-being. What also tend to become obscured in organizational discussions of innovation are both creative *challenges* to the hegemonic discourses of profit, expansion and productivity driving the current global economy, and creative *alternatives* to received categories and processes.

The authors in this collection have adopted a unique vantage point from which to consider issues of innovation: the employee who ‘drives’ innovation. What constitutes innovation, from the employees’ perspectives? What do they value as innovation? The cases reported here show us glimpses of workers’ everyday activity, where innovation processes unfold in the very activities of practice. That is, the divisions between innovation and implementation, or between designing and using, are much more enmeshed than conventional portrayals of innovation have assumed. Further, these cases provide insights into workers’ motivations for innovating. While some employee-driven innovations may be subversive, most tend to be genuinely oriented towards seeding more productive, effective and sustainable

work processes. Indeed, many employees generate innovative work-arounds simply to make things work that wouldn't otherwise, or to stretch resources when they don't have the tools they need. In this sense, employee-driven innovation can draw necessary attention to problematic work conditions.

Broader questions raised in the discussions here about employee-driven innovation pertain to ownership. In a knowledge economy, innovative ideas are important capital. To what extent, and in what circumstances, do the employee and the organization respectively deserve recognition and material benefit from employees' innovative activity? Laws governing patents and copyrights are struggling to keep up with the issues posed by the co-production of ideas, products and processes involving employees as well as users and designers. The viral flourishing of virtual innovations, and the growing internet ethos of sharing creative material and ideas in a logic of open access, also raise interesting questions about the terms of exchange and dissemination of innovative property generated by employees.

At the broadest level, these chapters refocus the discussion about the purposes and nature of innovation in work organizations. What counts as good innovation, and when is innovation problematic? Whose assessment determines which innovations become amplified and extended, which are rewarded, and which are stifled? How do different organizational stakeholders – clients, trade unions, government, global markets, financiers, regulatory agencies, and so on – affect the processes of employee-driven innovation? Some authors draw attention to different forms of innovation, and suggest the need for new vocabularies with which to analyse and represent innovative activity. Some raise central questions about the 'goods' that are taken to be inherent in innovative activity, innovative products, and the current prevalence of the innovation discourse in work, policy and learning.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this collection causes the reader to question whose interests are served through this pervasive press for innovation in work, and the extent to which opportunities for employee-driven innovation benefit the workers doing the driving.

*Tara Fenwick
University of Stirling, UK
October 2011*

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Abbreviations

ABSWL	Adult Basic Skills and Workplace Learning
ANT	Actor Network Theory
Ba	a group context where knowledge is shared, generated and put into practice through collaboration
CEO	chief executive officer, managing director, the highest-ranking corporate officer
CERI/STI	Centre for Educational Research and Innovation/Science, Technology and Industry
CESifo	Centre for Economic Studies
DFEE	Department for Education and Employment
DUI-mode	Doing Using Interacting mode
EDI	employee-driven innovation
EDUADM	administration of educational affairs
EO	entrepreneurial orientation
ESOL	English for speakers of other languages
E-tools	electronic tools
EU	European Union
EWC	European Works Council
EWCS	European Working Conditions Survey
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HET	Suzhou Dushu Lake Higher Education Town
HR	human resources
IALS	International Adult Literacy Survey
ICMI	Innovation Capability Measurement Instrument
ICT	information communication technology
IDP	integrated development practices
IfM	Institut für Mittelstandsforschung (Bonn)
IR	industrial relations
IWB	innovative work behaviour
LAICS	leadership and innovation in complex systems
LLAKES	Centre for Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies and Societies, University of London
LO	Landsorganisationen i Danmark (The Danish Confederation of Trade Unions)
LSM	learning support managers
MBA	Master of Business Administration
MNC	multinational corporations
NACE	classification of economic activities in the European community

NS	not significant
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PC	personal computer
PVC	poly vinyl chloride
PVDF	a special kind of monomer renowned for its technical characteristics
QIA	Quality Improvement Agency
QPS	quality production systems
R&D	research and development
RBV	resource-based view
S&T	science and technology
SFL	skills for life
SIP	Suzhou Industrial Park
SME	small and medium-sized enterprises
SOADM	administration of social affairs
STS	Southern Transport Systems
UK	United Kingdom
ULR	union learning representatives
UNU-MERIT	United Nations University is a research and training centre of United Nations University and works in close collaboration with the University of Maastricht
VIS	visitation office

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Part I

The Nature of Employee-Driven Innovation