

Innovative Ideas through Collaboration with Potential Users

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Abstract : Organizations increasingly use environmental stimuli and ideas from users within participatory innovation processes in order to tap new sources of knowledge. The research presented in this article focuses on users who shape the distant edges of markets and currently are not using products and services from a domain- so called potential users. Those users at the peripheries are perceived to contribute more novel information, by which they better reflect shifts in needs and behavior than current users in the core market. Their contributions in collaborative and creative problem-solving processes and how they generate ideas for discontinuous innovations are of particular interest. With an experimental design, we compare ideas from potential and current users and analyze the effects of cognitive distance in collaboration and the utilization of explicit and tacit knowledge. We find potential users to generate more original ideas, particularly when they collaborate with someone experienced within the domain. Their ideas are most obviously characterized by an increased level of surprise and unusualness compared to dominant designs, which is rooted in contexts and does not require technological leaps. Collaboration with potential users can therefore result in new ways to leverage technological competences. Furthermore, the cross-fertilization arising from cognitive distance between a potential and a current user is asymmetric due to differences in the nature of their utilized knowledge and personal objectives. This paper discusses implications for innovation research and the management of early innovation processes.

Keywords : user collaboration, co-creation, discontinuous innovation, innovation research

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