ENGLISH ABSTRACT

CREATIVE FACILITATION IN INNOVATION MANAGEMENT: FACILITATOR'S ROLE IN SHAPING TEAM PROCESSES

The aim of this thesis is to investigate how creative facilitation is enacted in innovation management and to develop a theoretical understanding of its key aspects. The current literature on the topic has been, to a great extent, experience-based and practice-oriented, and thus the specific mechanisms and processes behind facilitation have not been previously explained. Further, due to a number of disparate descriptions, the conceptualisations of facilitator's role often lack clarity and include many inconsistencies, posing challenges for both researchers and practitioners. In response to this gap, the main themes explored in this thesis are: facilitator's neutrality, as a central feature of facilitation distinguishing it from other similar roles, the mechanisms behind facilitation as a process, to provide a more in-depth understanding of the practice, as well as the influence of facilitation on teams during creative workshops within innovation, New Product Development (NPD) and design. These research topics are addressed through a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods within the three articles that constitute the core of this thesis. The qualitative research methods are prevailing because of their suitability for theory building purposes and gaining a thorough understanding of the phenomenon under study, and include a single in-depth case study and a multiple case study combined with a protocol analysis of conversation patterns. The quantitative methods include a repeated-measures experiment, conducted to test some elements of the framework proposed in the single case study. The findings confirm previous research on facilitation as well as offer novel contributions that extend the current literature and add to the development of the field. First, a new conceptualisation of neutrality in facilitation is proposed, which I term the 'pro-active' neutrality model, according to which facilitators are never entirely neutral but build a perception of neutrality over time by an active management of impartiality, equidistance and fairness across the three output dimensions: process, people and product (content). Importantly, while the criticality of neutrality in facilitation is acknowledged, it does not contradict the possibility of facilitators occasionally contributing to the content, which might often be inspiring and beneficial for the team. Second, facilitator's neutrality expressed as low equidistance and high impartiality is shown to have a greater positive impact on perceived trustworthiness and cooperative behaviours of team members as the determinants of team trust, compared to the opposite approach. At the same time, the effects of facilitator's approach to neutrality on members' trust to the facilitator and team potency were not significant. Third, the findings reveal a set of structures within facilitated creative workshops which are used by the facilitator to manage the process. A clear distribution of teamwork and taskwork between the facilitator and the team is displayed and the role of facilitator's positive affect in transitions between the two is emphasised. Overall, the thesis contributes substantially to extending the theoretical knowledge on facilitation, primarily in the creative contexts of innovation

and NPD, as well as offers a number of practical implications. It makes a first step towards establishing a comprehensive facilitation theory and supports the development of facilitation as a research field. Moreover, through the discussions of facilitation with respect to team processes and emergent states, it also adds to team research in general. Finally, by combining theories and concepts from different streams of literature, the findings can be considered rather universal and may be applied in other related fields such as mediation or leadership. From the practitioners' perspective, the importance of neutrality in facilitation as well as the awareness of facilitator's impact on the team are highlighted. Professional facilitators are also advised to use specific workshop structures as well as positive affect to enhance the process, while organisational leaders and managers are encouraged to look at both internal and external facilitation as equally viable options.