

Innoversity



A Study of the dynamics inherent in the relationship between
innovation and diversity

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“Den aandelige Fuldkommenhed kan ligesom den physiske Væxt kun fremmes derved, at Individet jævnlig smelter sammen med, hvad der er fremmed for det, og tilsynsladende opoffer sig selv for at vende beriget hjem igjen til sig selv”

Poul Martin Møller, 1837

"Spiritual maturity, just as physical growth, can only be nurtured by the individual frequently embracing what is foreign, and in appearance, sacrificing his own self, in order to return enriched to his own individuality."

Poul Martin Møller, 1837

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Innovation and the ability to create new knowledge constitutes an important competitive edge for organisations in the 21st century, and diversity within organisations offers interesting new perspectives for innovation and may increase the ability to create new knowledge. Understanding the dynamics of the relationship between innovation and diversity, and thereby how innovative practice may benefit from diversity, thus becomes important to organisations wanting to increase their competitive edge; especially in a decade where changing demographics are affecting, or about to affect, most all organisations.

However, existing theory indicates that diversity is more likely to impair innovative practice, and provides very little support to findings from practice indicating that innovative practice may instead benefit from the potential of diversity. But by making use of a Community of Practice Framework, this thesis provides a theoretical explanation to the findings from practice, - thereby addressing the theoretical void arising from such inconsistency between theory and practice.

The theoretical explanation provided in this thesis to address this theoretical void centres on two new theoretical findings. Firstly, how diversity may potentially ignite five innovers' drivers seen to enhance different aspects of innovative practice, such as: absorptive capacity, requisite variety, network access, creative destruction and problem solving. However, these drivers are difficult to ignite due to diversity also giving rise to intergroup anxiety, miscommunication and goal incongruence – thereby impairing coherence, which is important for innovation to occur.

The second part of the theoretical explanation therefore focuses on understanding the context within which it is possible for the innovers' drivers to ignite. This understanding is obtained by viewing diversity and innovation as embedded in communities of practice, as opposed to traditional teams and workgroups. This Community of Practice Framework establishes how the necessary coherence is obtained – not necessarily from perceived similarity – but instead from the mutual engagement in a shared practice field.

This thesis has therefore substantiated the potentials of diversity for innovative practice, and demonstrated that the existing theory predicting vicious outcomes from innovation in a diverse setting does actually have a virtuous counterpart: innovers' – both in practice and in theory.

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