Network based intermediation in logistics innovation communities

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Abstract

The aim of the paper to investigate how a network organization; in this case by the name of Sweden Logistics, working primarily in the area around the city of Borås in Sweden, can develop its role as an intermediary in a logistics innovation community. The board of the network organization has taken several intermediating initiatives. Two of them are described in this paper. We refer to the first as a pooled initiative, and to the second as a systemic initiative. The first was pooling project resources in order to develop certain common logistics solutions in the area of distance trade return logistics. The second was aiming for a more long term and open distance trade innovation community, centering though in the first step on information support systems for distance trade. With its base in systemic theory and network theory, the paper starts up by a literature review distilling the roles of intermediaries in logistic and other types of innovation communities. On the methodological side the paper investigates the possible roles of systemic meetings as a tool for innovation community organizing. Systemic meetings were used in both of the initiatives. In the first initiative a systemic meeting proved useful for providing consumer insights and for developing ideas on how to shape return logistics in distance trade. In the second initiative a systemic meeting was used to recognize patterns in the existing distance trade innovation community, this in order to find ways to strengthen and develop this for the area important community. The second systemic meeting proved to be more problematic and the paper therefore focuses on a discussion on the possible uses of systemic meetings as a tool to develop long term and open innovation communities.

Key words – Intermediaries, systemic meetings, open innovation, user driven innovation.

Introduction


New networked economy characterised by open innovation (Chesbrough, 2003) and user driven innovation (Franke and Hippel, 2003) call for the reduction of the complexities that hinders the collaborations between the different system actors. Intermediary framework has emerged as a new way to connect the different system actors called: intermediaries (Watkins, 1986), third parties (S.J.
Mantel, 1987), Bridgers (Bessant and Rush, 1995), Knowledge brokers (Sutton, 1997, Hargadon, 1998, Lomas, 2007), innovation brokers (Klerkx and Leeuwis, 2009), superstructure organization (Lynn et al., 1996), Innomediaries (Sawhney et al., 2003), infomediaries (Cillo, 2005) and innovation intermediaries (Howells, 2006).

**Intermediation in innovation communities/networks**

Intermediaries or knowledge brokers emerged as a result of the knowledge complexities and cognitive distance between the contexts (Cillo, 2005) and play different roles in innovation (Diener and Piller, 2009). They can be seen acting in the midst of the user and producer of Knowledge (Smedlund, 2006), as a member of the network enabling other system actors to innovate (Winch and Courtney, 2007), diffuse and transfer of technology (Howells, 2006), overall product development (Sutton, 1997) creating networks for the information flow (Howells, 2006) and also as Knowledge Intensive Business Services (Muller and Zenker, 2001).

Innovation intermediary defined by (Howells, 2006) as: “An organization or body that acts as an agent or broker in any aspect of the innovation process between two or more parties. Such intermediary activities include: helping to provide information about potential collaborators; brokering a transaction between two or more parties; acting as a mediator, or go-between; bodies or organizations that are already collaborating; and helping find advice, funding and support for the innovation outcomes of such collaborations.”

The intermediaries is mainly on one-to-one networking of the system actors and lack the complex relationships among them (Howells, 2006). Intermediaries can form heterogeneous networks (Callon, 1994) working primarily with the SME’s (West et al., 2006) which lack the Knowledge base, less financials (Kirkels and Duysters, 2010) and limited networking only with large companies (Rothwell and Dodgson, 1994). An intermediary framework has emerged as a new way to connect the actors to accelerate the innovation and knowledge sharing process.

Literature on innovation communities takes stand of communities mainly dealing with the commercialization of the products (Lynn et al., 1996, Lynn et al., 1997). The main focus of the innovation communities was on the different ways for the product to the market in the final stages of the value chains. Innovation communities have a lot more to offer than simply dealing with the commercialization of the products. Innovation communities provide the platforms where knowledge is created and transferred to the community members and help building the innovative capabilities of the companies.

With growing attention of systemic approach to innovation (Sawhney et al., 2006), systemic intermediaries (Klerkx and Leeuwis, 2009) are playing important role in the regional (Asheim and Coenen, 2005) and international innovation systems (Lundvall, 1992). The holistic approach to innovate and intermediate will open the new ways of learning in innovation communities. The lack of tools for intermediation in innovation communities hinders reaching their full potential dealing with the complexities. This paper will present the systemic meeting as a tool for intermediation in innovation communities that has been successfully tested in health care and food sector (Lagnevik et al., 2010).

**Innovation community development in the area of Borås, Sweden**

The Borås area, in the south eastern part of Sweden, is an old stronghold for clothing and mail order businesses. The area is still one of the major textile industry areas in Sweden, still active in fashion, although textile production is mainly for industrial purposes. It has also developed into one of the major distance trade centres of Sweden.
Efforts have been made by the network organisation Sweden Logistics to develop a logistics innovation community in the area, focusing largely on distance trade logistics and fashion logistics. Sweden Logistics has been active for some 10 years, and steps have been taken to build bridges between
- the University of Borås,
- the industry in and around Borås,
- city, area and region officials, and
- Incubators and other types of regional innovation initiatives.

Innovation community researchers have also participated in the developments, and the authors to this paper are two of them. The paper accounts for an effort to develop the innovation community:

- from a level of pooled innovation on specific subject matters (like returns management and e-logistics support systems)
- to a more open and user driven, what we call systemic, innovation community

Systemic meetings were used as a tool to make moves in this direction. This paper describes (a) the theory behind the systemic meeting, (b) how it works, (c) what the results were in this case and (d) some suggestions on how to proceed.

The theory behind the systemic meeting, and the way it works

Management theory – and ditto practice, ditto methods, ditto systems – as we know them today are based on the idea of complexity reduction or avoidance. Simplifying models are used for management planning and control. Suggestions have been made to revise management theory, based on the idea of complexity acknowledgement. This involves ways to deal also with phenomena such as self organisation and emergence, phenomena that central to open and user driven innovation communities.

Innovation communities are not primarily organisational constructs, but emerging phenomena, based on self organisation. Companies today, and also universities and political authorities, need to work in complex networks of cooperation and collaboration (Lagnevik et al., 2010). Big companies can control some parts of their supply chains, which is one type of network. But they also need to cooperate on a wider basis with universities, authorities, NGO’s and many other types of supply chain, regional and global stakeholders. Most of all, and on top of these macro systemic complexities, they also must find ways to deal with the micro complexities of end consumer interactions and values, and also with the time complexities of change and innovation.

The systemic meeting is used to make this complex kettle of interrelationships and interdependences possible to grasp for individuals all through a certain network, and to help them develop working theories, or mind sets, on how to deal with all the opportunities stemming from them.

The systemic meeting has been used extensively in Swedish health care, for example, as a way to bridge stakeholders on an open innovation and user driven innovation community basis. By that we mean connecting “seekers and solvers” (Chesbrough, 2006) in many ways characterized by self organisation, but also in ways that are supported by intermediating initiatives. For example, systemic meetings have been used in the area of Kungälv, Sweden in order to foster collaboration between health care actors in the four communes surrounding Kungälv hospital with the hospital actors and also the primary care actors in the four communes (ref). In a user driven innovation community the primary seeker is the patient, and in an open innovation community all levels in the community participate as solvers to patient problems or challenges. The same view can be applied to distance trade, with the end consumer as the primary seeker, and all levels in the distance trade community as solvers.

The systemic meeting is based on the idea of storytelling as a way to deal with complexity. Story telling has been used for ages (Brown et al., 2005) as a way to pass on knowledge and insights to new
generations. It has also been used in more recent times as a way to communicate developmental ideas in a more holistic, emphatic and individual-connective way, compared to that of point by point arguing, economical calculations and other uttering of traditional management planning and control.

In the more recent uses of storytelling we find carefully edited stories, stories that communicate the specific developmental idea as good as possible. The systemic meeting uses unedited or spontaneous storytelling, stories accounting for real life events that have taken place in the life of the story teller. In the pooled innovation community focusing on returns management and return logistics, three stories of youngsters placing and returning e-business orders were used as a base for a systemic meeting between returns management stakeholders. The idea behind the systemic meeting in this case was to develop consumer insight among systemic meeting partakers, and to do it in a knowledge-connective way so that new common solutions could be developed on a project basis. The story telling at the initial part of the meeting is thus followed by story recognition and story creation.

The basic six step process of the systemic meeting is illustrated in exhibit 1.

In this case end consumers had the roles of story tellers. They were seekers and the rest of the systemic meeting participants, including distance trade return logistics developers, but also distance trade consultants and distance trade researchers, were solvers. This systemic meeting proved quite valuable to the solvers in finding ways to deal with seeker problems, misunderstandings and preferences of all sorts. It gave them some consumer insight, and it gave them some ideas on insight based distance trade and return logistics solutions.

**The second story and its role in developing intermediation in innovation communities**

The running of the meeting forms what we call a second story, the story of what has taken place during the meeting, but a story that also tells something about how the innovation community is working. The first story is that told as a base for the systemic meeting. It is a story of events that have taken place somewhere else. The second story is the “story” (not told but experienced) of what has taken place during the meeting, at the place of the meeting.

While the first story was used in the systemic meeting just described in order to create consumer insight, the second story could have been used to create (innovation) community insight. This was not an issue in this case though. In this case the innovation community was a closed community working the traditional management planning and control way, although by pooling resources, in order to come up with certain common return logistics solutions.
In the second case however, the second story of primary importance. It was used in the second systemic meeting as a way to recognize current innovation community patterns, and as a way to recognize intermediary choices for the creation of improved innovation community patterns.

In the planning and control framework logistics development is focusing on new and better logistics processes. In the complexity acknowledging framework it is focusing on new and better stories. The theory behind the systemic meeting can be explained by the ladder of innovation levels shown in exhibit 2:
The systemic meeting shoots for changing the big story of people lives, through in this case better little stories as they evolve in placing and returning distance trade orders. The stories are dependent upon the placement and return products\(^1\), as communicated to and used by the distance trade customers; and the products in turn are dependent upon their underlying processes.

The aim of the pooled innovation effort was staying on the process/product level. The aim was to develop better placement and returns processes and products. The systemic meeting moved the attention one and two steps upwards, into the area of end consumer complexities. But basically the focus of this closed innovation community was centring on the process and product levels. The systemic meeting took the participants one or two steps up, but they were soon to return to the two first steps of the ladder.

Now to the theory behind the second story of the systemic meeting, focusing upon the capacity of the community as a whole (not just the systemic meeting partakers) to take on the challenges of open and user driven innovation.

The systemic meeting works in a second step, after the initial storytelling and clarification step (clarification through questions asked by systemic meeting partakers) with pattern recognition and recognition of choice. The capacity for such two step recognition is dependent upon personal insight and personal knowledge. People who have personal insights on what happens when distance trade orders are placed and returned will have a capacity to identify, name and talk about the patterns inherent in the specific end consumer stories, as told in the first case of the three youngsters. They have the experience and the language needed, and they have the personal engagement. Their concern for better placement and returns processes and products becomes visible in the systemic meeting. And so does their knowledge on how to create better processes and products, and their action spaces for actually doing so. They recognize customer choices as part of their pattern recognition, but they also recognize their own choices. They come up with ideas on how they can improve the processes and products, and these ways also the little and big stories.

The second and wider idea of the systemic meeting, the one behind the second systemic meeting, and the one connected to what we call the second story of the meeting looks at what takes place in the meeting as a story telling how the innovation community as a whole is working. Again we find a little story connected to a big story. The little story is the one taking place in the logistics innovation community as a result of the meeting. The systemic meeting can be thought of as a product that can be used for innovation community development. It creates little stories on, in the first case, placement/returns process/product developments. And it creates, as intended in the second case, a big story of innovation community development.

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\(^1\) Note that we use the term product here to account for the ways the placement and returns services are arranged
In order to lessen the confusion on the four different “story” concepts used in the text above, we summarize the idea of the four stories in exhibit 3.

Exhibit 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story</th>
<th>Little story</th>
<th>Big story</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First story</td>
<td>Placement and returns of distance trade orders</td>
<td>Role of distance trade orders in customers lives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second story</td>
<td>Innovations emerging from systemic meeting</td>
<td>Role of systemic meeting in innovation communities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to use the second story as a way to develop the big story of the innovation community also the second story has to be worked on though the steps of pattern recognition and recognition of choice. And also now the patterns and choices identified by the meeting partakers will depend on their personal insights and personal knowledge, now on innovation communities, not on placement and returns processes and products.

Results so far

A group of distance trade logistics community member will not necessarily have much knowledge on innovation communities. They for certain will have personal insights on working in innovation communities. But they might have their insights from a certain type of such communities; that created by the management planning and control logic. We call this logic the type A logic, distinguishing it from the type B logic of open/user driven innovation communities. They have insight and knowledge on how to run type A in-house projects, and that insight and knowledge can be used also for type A pooled projects. But they may not have insights and knowledge on how to work in larger and open/user driven type B innovation communities, for the simple reason that they may not have done that very much. They have no personal experience that they can consult in identifying, naming and talking about the patterns and choices of such innovation communities. They don’t have the language, and by and large they may not even have the concern. They may participate in in-house and pooled innovation communities and in the latter they want them to function as much as possible along the lines that they are used to; i.e. along the type A project lines. Pooled innovation communities are essentially about pooling resources in order to come up with and finish projects that they cannot come up with and finish on their own.

In the returns logistics community project the systemic meeting was used for the narrow purpose of coming up with developmental ideas that could be transferred into projects developing common placement and returns processes and products. For this narrow purpose the systemic meeting functioned well. It gave new insights into customers’ placement and returns experiences, and it developed new ideas for these processes, and products.

The second story of the second effort was different though. The second effort was trying to develop the pooled innovation type A community on logistics support systems into an open and user innovation type B community. The basic idea behind such a development is to invite community members on a broader basis, ranging all the way from distance trade customers, like the three youngsters telling their stories on the first systemic meeting, to in this case people specialising in logistics support systems for e-businesses. The former becoming members of the community will provide the base for user driven innovation, and the latter becoming members will provide the base for open innovation.

This means transforming the community from a closed community, incorporating only certain invited members, into an open community, with a free invitation to everyone that may have a stake in logistics
support systems for distance trade. The web of course is a primary source for this. Distance trade customers can be invited through social media types of web communities, and logistics support systems specialists can be invited through freeware or wiki types of web communities.

Distance trade, like many other businesses, is rapidly becoming a “cloud” business. Streamlining distance trade processes is moving from in-house projects to purchasing, or free use, of process products or services made available through the web, and also developed through the web. This move involves not only the first two steps of our “ladder of innovation levels”, but also the second two steps, the two complexity or story steps.

In this “cloudy” business environment the story levels will be the two guiding levels. With a metaphorical language the two upper levels will be the ALL IMPORTANT levels and the two lower levels the POTENTIALLY SIMPLE levels. When processes, like the placement and returns processes of e-business, can be developed through incorporations of cloud services or products into the business the attention can move to what the processes and products achieve on a holistic basis, and this in turn can be captured through the concepts of the little story and the big story.

“Going there in person” or “being there in person” will be the discriminating factor, if we are allowed to go on with the metaphorical language. “There” is where the business is decided, in the homes of the e-business customers, as visualized through the first story of the systemic meeting. But “there” is also where the business is developed, and this also takes place in a sort of a cloud, although not in a cloud of readymade web services but in a cloud of personal understanding and personal “rooms of opportunities”, as visualized in the second story of the systemic meeting.

The idea of the systemic meeting is to make both the first set of (little and big) stories available to the cloud or community people, but also the second set of (little and big) stories, i.e. how the cloud or community as a whole is functioning, as a cloud of innovation or as a community of innovation.

The second story patterns that could be recognized in the second effort (open innovation) systemic meeting, or rather meetings (because there were two of them) will now be accounted for.

The first systemic meeting of the second effort, that of creating an open community, was run in triangles where each of the 25 headed participants told his or her story of entering the community. Some presented the (big) story of their professional life careers, and how they thought the community would fit in that career, while others focused on where their companies stood in their e-business developments. The meetings were held so that the A person told his or her – uninterrupted – story, while B and C were listening. Then B asked questions to clarify the story told by A, with C listening. The final step was C reflecting on the patterns and choices that he or she had recognised in the thus clarified story, inviting also B to participate in the reflections, and in a second step also A. Finally the 25 group as a whole reflected upon the patterns and choices prevalent in the group.

This proved to be a good way to have the group members get to know each other and the companies they represented. It also clarified the challenges lying ahead in the community building effort.

The second systemic meeting was the main systemic meeting intended to organize the community building effort. It was run in two steps the first day, and then in two other steps on two following days, with a couple of weeks in between, all with an invitation to all in the 25 count, and some that was missing in that count. All and all the meeting was run in four steps.

The second systemic meeting was based on a story told by the president of one of the e-business companies. The 25+ count included five other e-business companies and a number of logistics, e-business and innovation researchers from the University of Borås, together with a similar number of consultants in the three areas. The story told dealt with some problems that the story telling company had experienced in entering the German market. The story telling company is today delivering lamps through a number of German e-business channels, and many placement and return problems emanate
from the direct shipping contacts being made between the end customers and the story telling company. The story told demonstrated the need for better logistics support systems, but also for a clarification of roles in the sales and delivery systems.

The secondary story of the second systemic meeting, as it progressed over the three meeting days, demonstrated the following patterns:

- Lack of trust as hesitation from the e-business companies to reveal their e-business plans to other e-business companies in the community was quite clear.
- a rivalry between the consultants and the researchers
- a creation of direct contacts between e-business companies and consultants/researchers

The community to be thus deteriorated into a number of traditional consultancy relationships. A base was not created for building and open innovation/user driven innovation platform that was originally intended.

Lessons learned include:

- an open innovation/user driven innovation community and platform has to be visualized to the founding sub-community, through the use of front-running examples
- the systemic meeting, although a good way to get to know each other and to surface problems and challenges, is in need of Meta reflection meetings, connecting insights stemming from failures or shortcomings such as the ones described with knowledge on innovation communities

This article can be seen as such a Meta reflection. Let us therefore provide some insight and knowledge creating conclusions.

**The point of going there yourself**

You visit places in order to experience something, and perhaps learn something, that you couldn’t really imagine before going there. Just reading about places gives you just a fraction of the impressions that you get by actually going there. And you must go there yourself; sending someone will be just like reading about it.

But, you can also visit places without experiencing or learning anything. You can pass a village in your car, not being able to say anything about the village, not even directly after your passage, because your mind was somewhere else while passing.

And, you can visit places year after year and still not knowing much about it, and not even recognizing things. In her street casting for the Danish TV-series Pusher Pernille Lembcke for some time visited Norrebro in Copenhagen, in order to scout for some role characters. “It is a pity that the Danes passing by this place, also on a daily basis, don’t experience the uniqueness of it”, she said in an interview².

The difference is in (a) observation, (b) reflection and (c) knowledge. And also in (d) participation, taking part in what is going on, if only by talking to some people. You must observe things while visiting the place if you are going to experience things and learn things. And you must reflect on what you see. And you will benefit also from knowledge available about the place. And if you start doing things while there, perhaps selling something, taking pictures for publication or whatever, you may also reach new domains of understanding.

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² The Swedish TV-program Kobra, 2010-03-16, TV1
A systemic meeting is like going to places yourself, and doing it with all four cylinders working. At least the form of the meeting invites you to it. You get to observe things, to reflect upon them together with others, to take part of their knowledge, and to make impressions yourself. Systemic meeting takes its members to an “insight safari” in the real and complex world, where participatory observations in a form of a socialization (NONAKA et al., 2001) followed by the collective reflections in a metaphorical or common language will help internalise the abundant knowledge available in and on the innovation community (see Exhibit 4).

You don’t go to arbitrary places through systemic meetings. As mentioned the meeting is based on storytelling, and the story teller will tell a story of some significance to herself, and – as she perceives it – to others in the meeting. She will tell what we call the first story. This will make you go to places on an imaginative basis, but it will still be different from just reading about it. The three youngsters for example, telling their (little) stories about their e-purchasing, and in doing so also some of their (big) life stories, took the meeting participants on an imaginative trip to for their e-businesses very important places, in fact so important that they were of a decisive nature for the successes of their businesses. They didn’t depend only on the three youngsters of course, and two of them as it turned out had become e-business resistant, so they didn’t give their businesses any money at all. But going to their places, if only in this imaginative way, is all the same quite different from taking part of however sophisticated customer surveys. Again, reading about Norrebro won’t do it. Even if you read tons of highly knowledgeable material about the place, going there yourself will make all the difference for understanding the place, and creating a personal relation to it.

The story needs to be an account of something that has actually taken place in real life though. If the story teller just summarizes things, perhaps restricting himself to characterizing some of the problems that he has experienced, like in the second systemic meeting referred to above, the meeting participants will have difficulties in making the imaginative trip. They will start thinking on the problems, and even more on their solutions. The meeting will then turn from being a systemic meeting into being more of a problem solving meeting. Not entirely, because story teller attitudes, his accounts of events that may clarify his problems, the reactions among other participants, and their questions and ideas and solutions, will give some of the insights of a more episode relating story. But the meeting will certainly be different in many ways.

It will be different when it comes to the interpretation of the second story; that made up from what is taking place at the meeting.

Also the second story makes the participants go to a place, in this case the place of the meeting room which they are just in. You may see a lot in this meeting room, and all your senses may participate. You may be irritated by its smell, its noise, its heat. You may laugh at comments: You may be bored. You may take the first opportunity to leave the room. You may let your thoughts wander around. Anything can happen along the full scale of social encounter.
But if asked to tell as story about what took place at the meeting you may end up in summarizing things, telling who were there, what was discussed, and what the results were. You may end up in having gone to the place without having seen much. If by that we mean having seen the place and the meeting as a mirror of an innovation system, or an innovation community. And as mentioned, this was the head idea of the systemic meeting in the second case.

Now the imaginative trip is more difficult, because what does the “place” of an innovation system or innovation community look like? To start with it is an outspread place. It stretches from the local or regional university, in this case the University of Borås, out into in this case a number of e-businesses and e-business consultants. It also covers the grounds of many public stakeholders, and it has its links to national and global innovation stakeholders. In the second meeting it stretched all the way into German households, although here the imaginative trip was blurred by the internal problems of the story tellers business.

It is an outspread place, but it is also a place that may have few reference points to the observer. Making imaginative trips to virtual and outspread places is different from making imaginative trips to concrete and local places, like the homes of the story telling youngsters. The participants of the systemic meeting may not have much to refer to and associate to. They may not even recognise the second story taking place at the meeting. It would be like being so trapped by a series of events that you are not able to see the story unfolding by the events.

Or it would be like going to Norrebro without seeing its architecture; if that is the lens we are talking about. There was a focal lens of the systemic meeting participants at the second (three day) systemic meeting, and that focal lens was e-business logistics support systems, not e-business innovation communities.

Knowledge, or at least theory, is a way to switch to a new focal lens, to see new things at places, to experience new things, to learn new things.

There is an abundance of knowledge on innovation systems (Lundvall, 1992, Edquist, 1997) and innovation communities (Kadama, 2002) and knowledge communities (Henry and Pinch, 2000). The idea of going places is to make knowledge personal (NONAKA et al., 2001), to make it part of your personal skills. Normally knowledge on innovation systems, like regional innovation systems (Asheim and Coenen, 2005), is used for policy purposes, or regional reforms, or financial support to the region. Policies, reforms or financings are then used in a special sort of innovation system, for the innovation of an innovation system also takes place in an innovation system. Let’s call this system innovation system type A. That is the type of innovation system that we are used to. We recognize problems or challenges, we make investigations and suggestions and we come up with solutions. Innovation systems type A are WE type innovation systems. The mindset of the second, as well as first, systemic meeting was that of innovation system type A. Pooled innovation communities typically are type A innovation communities. The WE group is set out to identify problems or challenges, to make investigations and come up with suggestions and solutions that can be used by everyone in the WE-group.

Open innovation/user driven innovation communities are different. They are built on the idea of type B innovation systems, on ME type innovation systems. Now the innovation logic is different. Each member of the community is now supposed to benefit from community participation, but each his or her own way. Common WE solutions are not the main idea of the community. It may well produce lots of common solutions, or cloud/wiki types of solutions, but these solutions are all ME based rather than WE based. Each member of the community contributes his or her own way, according to the laws of self organisation.

Our idea of the second systemic meeting was to create a type B or ME type innovation community. In such communities systemic meetings of different sorts plays a vital role, just like agenda based meetings of different sorts have done in the type A or WE type innovation communities.
Stories are different from problem summaries in that they open up for many types of concurrent observations, reflections, knowledge and participation. They can get the logistics support system programmer started on his or her ME innovations, and in the same time the e-business manager on his or her ME innovations, and in the same time the innovation system researcher on his or her ME innovations etc reaching out to every part of the innovation community. But you have to go there yourself; you have to go to all the places that are important for your developments. That is the thing with type B innovation systems.

Conclusions

This paper has made a distinction between traditional innovation management planning and control, as demonstrated by the return case, and a community based approach, as demonstrated by the support system case. The systemic meeting proved its value in the first case. Its use in the second case turned out to be more problematic, as singled out in the difficulties connected to “second story” interpretation.

The idea behind second story interpretation from systemic meetings is to diagnose the current patterns of an existing innovation community, in order to find ways to improve it.

Innovation communities can be seen as organisational constructs, like in the case of the (closed) innovation community pooling resources for common return logistics solutions. But they can also be seen as existing phenomena, which was the view taken in the case of the (open) logistics support system community.

Several arguments can be made for the latter view:

- “Clouds” of logistics support systems already exist, making purchasing of logistics support system services, as an alternative to solitary in house or pooled project developments, a choice for especially SME:s

- The distance trade SME:s in and around the city of Borås can be seen to form a cluster, and this in turn can be seen as an open innovation community, not the least through the supply of skilled knowledge workers in the cluster, and through the role of the university in developing such a work force

- Several of the stakeholders in the logistics support system community have chosen a community strategy in their developments:
  
  o As reported by (Sarv and Khan, 2010) one of the participating companies, Centiro, base its developments on close “band knitting’s” both upstream (to Microsoft and other knowledge suppliers) and downstream in the “knowledge chain” (to customers and customer’s customers)
  
  o At the university the informatics department, another stakeholder in the logistics support system community, works through several communities in its “prototype” labs.
  
  o Likewise the logistics department uses the community approach in its research and teaching, as demonstrated by the return logistics case.
  
  o Also the innovation management department is much involved in a number of innovation communities connected to the university, like for example the textile cluster “Smart Textiles” and the regional development community “Innovativa Mark”

3 The concept of knowledge chains is explained in the paper on Oatly by Sarv and Khan 2010
- Also in several other ways the distance trade SME:s are exposed to a large number of community linkages in their developments, through the Web in general and more specifically in their networks of business partners.

The approach taken by the second effort, to build on existing sub-communities in developing a larger open community for distance trade logistics can therefore be seen as valid.

The point of actually “going there” (on a safari) primarily concerns the place of the end consumer. If all in the supply chain, and its wider network of researchers and others, are to focus upon the end consumer – and at least the supply chain members say they want to – end consumer insight is a prerequisite. It involves going there, but it also involves going back to the own drawing board to make the alterations or innovations suggested by the insight. This paper has presented a “safari” method, a method that also allows the intermediaries of an innovation community to safari their own innovation landscape. Such a safari also provides valuable insights on the real world landscape, and also in this case a return to the own drawing board is needed. All kinds of knowledge on innovation communities can be used at this drawing board, but without real world insights the designer of the intermediary services will be lost.

Systemic meetings have previously been used as a tool for innovation community evaluations and foresights, as reported by (Lagnevik et al., 2010). The second effort was built upon those experiences. It surfaced some difficulties in trying to link the several sub-communities. A wider scope has to be developed and communicated to the participating stakeholders. This wider scope can be approached through an evaluation/foresight framework. This involves identifying existing patterns and choices (through evaluation) as well as outlining potential future patterns and choices (through foresight). This paper can be seen also as such an evaluation and foresight effort.

References


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