

Facilitating innovation in networks composed of non-mandated relations

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This paper explores the processes of transforming a network of non-mandated exchange relations into a cohesive and innovative partnership. The question this paper attempts to answer is how to speed up innovation processes in such networks. The paper demonstrates that transformation of networks is a consequence of participants' ability to set the agenda and provide the justification necessary to mobilise others for shared ends. However, to utilise the individuals' interests in worthwhile directions requires facilitation able to bridge local discourses by nurturing inquiries and comparison of the differences among the present operational contexts. This calls for grammatical inquiries in which the participants examine the different ways of wording a phenomenon as a means to build a shared language from within their everyday conversation. The paper builds on a seven years research project of constructing and developing an inter-firm network among eight SMEs in the electronics industry in Norway. The paper concludes by outlining four recommendations for facilitation that aim to speed up innovation processes in networks consisting of non-mandated exchange relations.

Key words: facilitation, business network, innovation, power, dialogical inquiry

Introduction

The concept of networking has gained significant attention from those involved in the comprehension of innovation processes. The ability of inter-