

Chapter 21

Open Social Innovation

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ABSTRACT

Social innovation and open innovation are two concepts that have gained prominence in the last decade. Small social innovations have the potential to change the global system, expanding through a collaborative process. Furthermore, the collaborative process is the main characteristic of open innovation. Social and open innovations are relevant and emerging; their relationship with each other has been neglected in the literature. Based on the study of social innovation and open innovation, this chapter proposes a framework about the “open social innovation” and demonstrates how it can be implemented through examples in Brazil and the US. Based on the literature review and these examples, it is evident that “open social innovation” is already a reality in many regions and is a combination of the two original concepts converging in collaborative process.

INTRODUCTION

In the global context, the concept of innovation has been considered highly important in economic development. Initially linked to the economic field and related to new technologies, in the last decade, innovation has gained prominence in new formats. These include social innovation in order to meet social needs or cause changes in social practices, and open innovation, to achieve efficiency and effectiveness.

Studies on social innovation are relevant to the current context in which theories on social management, localism (Schaffers et al., 2011),

the expansion of the public sphere, citizen participation, and social movements have emerged in public administration. Studies on open innovation have accompanied the global demand for efficient methods to generate effective innovations.

At the governmental level, both have been discussed as means to stimulate new democratic practices, such as the use of open innovation to promote social innovation by the Obama administration (Parvanta, Roth, & Keller, 2013); social innovation and the optimization of localism (Schaffers et al., 2011); and various initiatives like the European Commission’s Social Innovation Europe and Innovation Union programs (Wobbe,

2012). Governments have realized that it is necessary to innovate socially in order to confront crises in the public sector, public budget cuts, and poor policy performance (Murray, Caulier-Grice, & Mulgan, 2010; the application of the PrizeIdea Platform of the government innovation).

The themes of social and open innovation are present in practical cases in which there is collaboration between public and private actors in the pursuit of meeting the social needs of communities. However, the relationship between the two concepts is still neglected in the literature, as there are few articles related to the topics. Further studies on the applicability of open innovation methodologies in various contexts are necessary (Huizingh, 2011); on the other hand, the study of social innovation is also necessary in order to determine what effectively generates innovation in social practices as well as the current mechanisms for the resolution of social problems (Paulini, Murty, & Maher, 2013).

Recently, Chalmers (2013) introduced the two concepts together, proposing that open innovation can reduce barriers to social innovation; the author proposes the “Open Social Innovation” concept, but this remains open for future discussion. Examples are necessary for its consolidation and the research problem persists: how can open innovation contribute to social innovation?

Aiming to fill the gaps left by Chalmers (2013), this exploratory qualitative study (Collis & Hussey, 2005) proposes to explore the “Open Social Innovation” concept as a junction between social and open innovation. To this end, we present a literature review on innovation, social innovation, and open innovation. Following is an “Open Social Innovation” section, which synthesizes these concepts in a comparative framework to explain the concept while uniting the characteristics of these two types of innovation. Examples of “Open Social Innovation” concept techniques will be presented. In the next section, the concept of “Open Social Innovation” will be discussed, as related

to other work in the field. Finally, conclusions are presented, including research limitations and several assumptions to be tested in further studies.

INNOVATION

The ability to innovate is an intrinsic characteristic of human beings (Simms, 2006). The concept of innovation was initially linked to the economy, especially in the work of Schumpeter (1961). The author defines innovation as “the commercial or industrial application of something new – a new product, process, or method of production; a new market or source of supply; a new form of commercial, business, or financial organization” (Schumpeter (1961), p. xix). This definition shows the close link between innovation and the ability of firms to develop processes that are appropriate for the capitalist context.

The ability to innovate has also been considered in several other important fields, including the technological and managerial fields. In 1996, the European Commission, in the Green Paper on innovation, showed that innovation is more than an economic mechanism or a technical process; it is also a social phenomenon, in which the individual needs are combined with their creativity for generate innovations. (Commission, 1996). In the Green Paper, the innovation is” synonym for the successful production, assimilation and exploitation of novelty in the economic and social spheres. It offers new solutions to problems and thus makes it possible to meet the needs of both the individual and society” (Commission, 1996).

Thus, the innovation aims of meeting needs and, according to Schumpeter (1961) the innovation is:

1. A new or improved product or process, and
2. A commercial or industrial application of that product or process.

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