Innovation in Services and Stakeholder Interactions: Cases from Facilities Management

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Services are increasingly becoming a crucial driver of the economies of developed countries. At the same time, innovation is not only recommended, but also required, to ensure survival and growth of organisations, within the manufacturing as well as the service sectors. Given globalisation and the development of information and communication technologies, more and more heterogeneous parties are and might be involved in innovation processes; meaning that both manufacturers and service providers shall take into consideration a more diverse set of needs and expectations when developing new offerings. Within the service context, specifically, empirical evidence and existing research suggest that interactions between stakeholders are an important element of innovation processes. Therefore, when managing and studying innovation in the service context, interactions between stakeholders should be taken into consideration. So far, the literature on innovation in services has addressed some of the aspects of interactions between stakeholders, such as customer involvement and open innovation practices. Nevertheless, when looking at innovation processes in services, scholars have typically adopted a firm-centric approach and taken into consideration only the perspective of the service-providing organisation. The perspective of the beneficiary of the service, however, as well as that of other stakeholders, is a crucial element for the understanding of innovation in services and related interactions. In fact, given the recognition that services are characterised by interactivity between stakeholders, the perspective of the service beneficiary determines the way an outcome is co-produced. This dissertation investigates how interactions between stakeholders unfold throughout innovation processes in services, and how service organisations and their stakeholders navigate and manage such unfolding to reach successful outcomes. Grounded in the literature and theories on innovation in services, this dissertation adopts a qualitative approach and emphasises the empirical context of facilities management services. Facilities management services are a set of support services. They are meant to ensure that the employees of an organisation can carry out the tasks and activities related to the core business, without having to worry about, for example, the management of the workplace, catering and cleaning, security and safety. Facilities management services are categorised as task-interactive services, i.e., are centred on the close interaction between demand and supply, and were selected as empirical field of investigation because they allow to transparently observe interactions between stakeholders throughout innovation processes. To reach the research aim, this dissertation includes five papers with different objectives and questions, which touch upon various aspects of innovation in services while maintaining a dedicated focus on the interactions between stakeholders. As a consequence, I combined a shared qualitative approach with a varied research approach (inductive, abductive and deductive), which includes a literature review and four empirical papers. The empirical work for this dissertation includes an explorative study, three mini case studies and an in-depth longitudinal case study. The collected data range from interviews to archive data and passive observation, and the data analysis was carried out through a systematic approach to coding supported by the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti (v.6). Overall, this dissertation offers several contributions to theory and practice. First of all, this work stresses the role of stakeholder management for the success of innovation processes, and outlines a series of methods and tools that might support dealing with heterogeneous parties when aiming for innovation. Furthermore, and perhaps more interestingly, this work underlines that interactions between stakeholders are one of the driving and characterising elements of innovation processes in services. In short, the organisation trajectory, i.e., the development over time of the business model of an organisation, is dependent on changes in the business model of its stakeholders. But interactions between stakeholders play a crucial role in all types of innovation processes, not only business model innovation: tensions and conflicts between diverse parties are one of the driving forces behind innovation processes in services. Therefore service organisations should carefully identify and, when possible, select their stakeholders to maximise the potential of interactions. Moreover, service organisations should evaluate how each set of stakeholders should be involved in different types of innovation processes, and manage interactions through change and expectation management.

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