

Getting Started

Assignment 1

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Innovativeness contested – discrepancies between managerial ideals and employee identities

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Outi Vanharanta's dissertation *Innovativeness contested - discrepancies between managerial ideals and employee identities* caught my eye for two main reasons. First, in her thesis, Outi explores specific managerial methods and their justification to increase employee innovativeness and employees' reactions towards them whereas I study how different leadership practices influence employee creativity. As concepts creativity and innovation are closely bound and creativity is regarded as the antecedent for innovation. Both innovation and creativity literature justify their importance by arguing that either of the concepts is essential for organizational growth and survival in contemporary society.

Second, Outi focused on employee innovativeness in a variety of fields that are not necessarily regarded as creative to start with. In contrast, I target on a profession (i.e., architecture) which is creative by nature and creativity is an expected part of the work, not something external to the core task. I am intrigued to understand the differences how people from creative and non-creative fields approach to work tasks requiring creativity or aiming at innovations.

In addition, Outi did a qualitative study consisting of semi-structured in-depth interviews and non-participant observations, which are the methods I am planning to use in my study as well. Outi's philosophical approach (social constructionism) also echoes in me even though I feel I have not yet chosen my philosophical stance. However, I am not familiar with discourse analysis which was Outi's methodological approach, so I was curious to learn more about it as well.

Outi's thesis consists of four articles and a kappa. Her main research question was: How, and with what consequences, do managers and employees discursively construct conceptions of innovativeness? She approached the overarching main research question through three sub questions: 1) What kinds of innovative subjectivities are constructed in the managerial discourse of innovativeness? 2) What kinds of meanings do employees ascribe to innovativeness and how do they relate to the managerially imposed innovative subjectivities? 3) What kind of pragmatic consequences do the subjectification efforts have on the innovative pursuits initiated by the managers? Furthermore, each separate article naturally had their own precise research questions. As an architect, I was delighted to see that one of the articles handled the research questions from the perspective of a spatial chance.

Based on the findings, Outi argues the managerial approaches seem to draw on simplifications concerning the drivers underlying innovative behaviour. She builds on

literature of practice scholars who have highlighted the complexity of innovation processes in contrast to the mainstream innovation management literature which depict innovation as an unambiguous and linear process. It is easy to agree with Outi and her findings. For me, creative and innovation processes seem so complex that I am not surprised to find out that they cannot be easily steered with few simple managerial tricks.

I read Outi's dissertation with admiration and thought it was cohesive and answered the research questions. Therefore, I was surprised to learn about her eventful thesis process, which was not very traditional in the field of Organizations and Management. Initially, she started working as a project manager in Tuta in a research project which studied radical innovations. Even though doing a PhD had been in the back of her head, she did not intentionally pursue towards it in the beginning. After few years she applied for the PhD position but basically continued her work as project researcher.

In her process, she did not have a solid research plan but jumped from a project to another over the course of years. Thus, the research projects in which she worked, influenced the direction of her study and what kind of data she had. In the end, she had two articles of innovations and two of organizational change and Outi depicted it as a challenge to create the story which bound the articles together. Furthermore, Outi mentioned that only the solo article was intentionally written to be part of her dissertation.

That said, during the years in different projects, Outi had gotten interested in innovation speech. Another important milestone in her process was when one of her co-authors introduced her to discourse analysis which Outi depicted as a somewhat life changing experience. The combination of innovation speech and discourse analysis became the frame of reference for her dissertation.

Henri Schildt was Outi's supervisor in the final stretch of her dissertation. Whereas Outi highlighted Henri's role as nominal in carving out the innovation theme, Henri depicted his role as supportive. According to Henri, Outi had critical and fresh ideas related to innovation and she only needed a little push to get over a sort of writer's block. From Henri's point of view, once Outi started writing her kappa, the mental knots started to open and it required a few iteration rounds to get finished.

In the interviews with Outi and Henri, we discussed about the different paths in making a PhD. Outi depicted her dissertation process as non-linear nor ideal. Henri pointed out that Outi's process is pretty typical for Tuta where the client organizations and external funding steer the research. In the Business School on the other hand, doctoral candidates often get to develop their topics more freely due to the differences in the funding system. After figuring out the topic, doctoral candidates choose the setting, but in Outi's case, it was the other way round. However, as Henri commented, in the end it does not matter which comes first, the topic or the setting, what matters the most is their fit. Nonetheless, Outi thinks the current doctoral education system in the Business School enables a more systematic approach to the dissertation process. It raises an interesting question of how dissertations are likely to develop in different, perhaps more personal directions, when doctoral students are not so dependent on selling their idea to external funders or are not bound to specific

organizations already in the early stages of the process. It makes me also wonder how it influences one's motivation whether the topic is intrinsically or extrinsically driven.

Since I am approaching the empirical phase of my thesis, I was especially interested in hearing about Outi's data collection in the organizations. From research ethics point of view, I do not want to strain or exploit my research participants. I also fear what reactions my research may awake if I bring forward critical perspectives on leadership practices. Therefore, it was nice to hear about Outi's experience. According to her, people are generally favourably disposed towards researchers from universities, and it is easy to win research participants trust. Outi also addressed my worry regarding the critical perspectives by saying that when one does not identify single individuals but bring out phenomena on general level, people do not get a chance to get personally offended.

The interview with Outi made me think that dissertation, like life itself, is a sum of somewhat random coincidences along the way. It is the people you meet, the articles you read which influence and inspire you. In another time and place the dissertation would likely to be different. "Instead of treating knowledge as derived from the nature of the world as it really is, knowledge is understood to be created and sustained by social processes" (Burr, 2015; as cited by Outi).