
Editorial

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The increase in cooperative alliances over the last 20 years reflects a qualitatively new stage of external cooperation. A greater number of agreements among companies have been reached, a wider range of very different industries have become involved, and many more international cooperations can be observed. Companies need to rethink traditional forms of knowledge generation and ownership, opening themselves up to new forms of cooperative innovation projects.

Within the service sector, cooperative arrangements are also gaining importance. Different networks and cooperative activities can be observed. The increasing tradability of services and innovations promotes decentralisation, specialisation, and thus the division of labour in service and industrial activities. In these networks, services take over the functions of logistics, planning, controlling, coordinating, and monitoring. The system's complexity and the many different network actors require new forms of governance structures, which are essentially carried out by service companies.

Knowledge intensive service businesses play a particularly important role as knowledge brokers in innovation activities. For example, they absorb knowledge from the environment and place it at their partners and customers disposal for the partner's innovation activities (e.g. research firms, engineering companies, and consultancies). The service companies themselves are tied up in a knowledge and innovation network and play an important role in the learning processes of other companies. Service-providing companies can also be active as network operators and establish new value-added services based on physical and mobile communication networks, especially following the deregulation of the telecommunications market.

Today, services can be better understood as networks rather than as 'producing' systems. In this respect, services can be seen as the increasing complexity of an evolving

network rather than as the shifting-out of a company's internal function through, for example, outsourcing or off-shoring.

This special issue of the *International Journal of Services Technology and Management* investigates collaborative service development and its organisational structures with an emphasis on innovative services.

New innovative services are increasingly developed in close collaboration between different organisations. As part of this development, competing firms have begun to collaborate with each other. Ritala, Blomqvist, and Hurmelinna-Laukkanen present an explorative case study based on Finnish mobile television service development with a focus on inter-firm 'coopetition' (simultaneous competition and cooperation).

The risks of collaborating with existing and possible future competitors are also discussed by Hipp and Bouncken - they discuss, in particular, knowledge spill-overs, which are facilitated by the intangible nature of service output. The empirical study by Hipp and Bouncken provides evidence of a direct link between innovation partnering and the use of a broad range of intellectual property practices within service-intensive companies. The results show that informal protection mechanisms partially compensate for incomplete formal mechanisms and largely prevent imitation and uncontrolled knowledge spill-overs for the duration of the partnership.

González-Moreno and Sáez-Martínez discuss how cooperation benefits specific corporate entrepreneurship activities in service firms (innovation, proactiveness, and strategic renewal) and how corporate entrepreneurship activities have a different impact on different environments. Their analysis is based on the Third Community Innovation Survey (CIS 3) carried out by the Spanish Statistical Institute (INE) in 2001.

The papers of Skiba and Herstatt and Schultz focus on the collaboration of service firms with customers. Skiba and Herstatt discuss the usefulness of the lead user concept for radical service innovations. Schultz takes a deeper look at service familiarity as a key determinant for active collaboration with business and end users within service production and innovation processes, investigating a sample of patients and physicians as users of a specific innovative healthcare service (telemonitoring).