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## **Editorial**

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## **1 Introduction**

This special issue focuses on interesting attempts to open up innovation and business development activities. The main objective of this special issue is to present new insights and experiences at the individual, project, and organisational level in open innovation. It has become increasingly recognised that, for many firms, managing the innovation process and, in particular, searching for external knowledge, is a necessary capability (Laursen and Salter, 2006). Thus, the previous dominance of an internal focus on innovation has been supplemented by a focus on the need to integrate external sources of knowledge, such as users or suppliers, to ensure successful innovation (e.g., Lichtenthaler, 2011; Chesbrough, 2003). Consistent with the open innovation concept, it has been argued that integrating external information during innovation development improves companies' innovativeness, and thus increases their competitiveness (Chesbrough, 2003).

Open innovation started to appear in the literature around a decade ago in the form of articles on open-source software development, and was soon seen as a production model based on the distributed intelligence of participants from different communities (Kogut and Metiu, 2001). The principles of open innovation are not just theoretical, however, since more and more firms are applying them in practice. For example, Nokia successfully adopted the principles of open innovation in developing new products and services (Dittrich and Duysters, 2007). And for small and medium-sized enterprises, which normally do not have the necessary internal resources for R&D-related activities, external exchanges of knowledge and collaboration may often be the only way participating in the development and/or application of new business opportunities.

For many companies, however, implementing open innovation is far from straight forward, since the process of integrating external knowledge is often a challenge (Laursen and Salter, 2006). One reason for this might be the fact that only a few studies focus on the individual level in the process of open innovation. Although it has long been recognised that the role of individuals is critical in open innovation, research has so far ignored this (Lichtenthaler, 2011). Fleming and Waguespack (2007) have emphasised the important role of leaders in integrating the community and mobilising its members while at the same time steering away from the danger of balkanisation. A recent in-depth study of the Italian cement industry, however, has shown that the transition from a closed to an open innovation paradigm can be a rather lengthy and complex process (Chiaroni et al., 2011).

The key issue here seems to be not so much a question of complete openness or closeness, but rather what is ‘in between’, i.e., the hybrid manifestations (Ulhøi, 2004) or the different degrees of openness (Lazzarotti and Manzini, 2009). Similarly, as also argued in this special issue (e.g., by Tranekjer and Søndergaard, in this issue), we now seem to have passed the ‘honeymoon days’ and begun to realise that openness also has potentially important negative aspects that need to be addressed.

Below, we provide a brief introduction of the seven papers in this special issue, and discuss their contribution to open innovation research.

## 2 The papers

This special issue of the 2011 Continuous Innovation Network Conference consists of seven papers which have been through a lengthy, but constructive, review process lasting three rounds. The papers not only represent current research on different and interrelated aspects of open innovation, but also involve different research methods, foci, and levels of analysis (see Table 1).

**Table 1** Summary of the special issue

<i>Authors</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Method</i>	<i>Sample</i>	<i>Core contribution</i>
Tina Lundø Tranekjer and Helle Alsted Søndergaard	Sources of innovation, their combinations and strengths – benefits at the NPD project level	Survey	Multi-industry sample of 182 firms in Denmark	Examination of combination opportunities of external knowledge sources and the importance of tie strength to enhance new product development project level performance.
Lars Bengtsson, Nicolette Lakemond and Mandar Dabhilkar	Exploiting supplier innovativeness through knowledge integration	Survey	Multi-industry sample of 681 firms in Europe and North America	Conceptualisation of internal knowledge capabilities to integrate supplier knowledge.

**Table 1** Summary of the special issue (continued)

<i>Authors</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Method</i>	<i>Sample</i>	<i>Core contribution</i>
Alex da Mota Pedrosa, Margus Välling and Britta Boyd	Knowledge related activities in open innovation: managers' characteristics and practices	Case study	Two manufacturing firms and Two service firms	Investigates managers' practices and characteristics in exploring, transforming, and exploiting external knowledge in open innovation
René Chester Goduscheit and Jacob Høj Jørgensen	User toolkits for innovation – a literature review	Literature review	Seventy-six papers	Examines the role of user toolkits in the field of open innovation.
Carl Wadell, Gunilla Ölundh Sandström, Jennie Björk and Mats Magnusson	Exploring the incorporation of users in an innovating business unit	Case study	Single-case company	Examines the role and personal qualities of incorporated users in innovation
Christofer Pihl and Christian Sandström	Value creation and appropriation in social media – the case of fashion bloggers in Sweden	Netnography	Eighteen internet blogs	Examines the role of commercial bloggers in open business models
Anna B. Holm, Franziska Günzel and John Parm Ulhøi	Openness in innovation and business models: lessons from the newspaper industry	Case study	Two largest media groups in Denmark	Examines the effects of an open business model in an industry undergoing disruptive changes.

The first paper, 'Sources of innovation, their combinations and strengths – benefits at the NPD project level', by Tranekjer and Søndergaard, investigates how external knowledge sources should be combined in new product development projects, and examines the importance of the strength of ties between the innovating firm and its partners. The authors find that different sources and combinations of sources are related to different project-level performance measures. They also show that close relationships and knowledge overlaps with open innovation partners are key drivers of new product-development project performance. In addition to identifying the benefits of integrating different external knowledge sources, the study also indicates that high degrees of knowledge overlaps can be harmful for new product-development project performance. The authors' recognition of the impact between different combinations of external knowledge sources and innovation performance is an important contribution to the open innovation literature. Managing open innovation requires firms to carefully choose their collaboration partner in order to maximise their benefits. Finally, the article adds to the open innovation literature by stressing the importance of managing different collaboration strategies, since each strategy affects different project performance measures.

Bengtsson, Lakemond and Dabhilkar's paper, 'Exploiting supplier innovativeness through knowledge integration', argues that innovation performance can be leveraged if firms develop internal knowledge integration capabilities. The authors conceptualise

internal knowledge integration capabilities as proficiency in supplier management and cross-functional decision-making, and examine how these factors moderate the relationship between supplier innovativeness and innovation performance. Their findings suggest that proficiency in involving suppliers in the product development process both directly affects firms' innovation performance and strengthens the relationship between supplier innovativeness and innovation performance. In addition, the study shows that a higher share of purchasing and longer supplier relationships can hamper the innovativeness and time-to-market of product and service innovation.

The third study, 'Knowledge related activities in open innovation: managers' characteristics and practices', by da Mota Pedrosa, Välling and Boyd, states that there is a limited conceptual and empirical understanding of the role of managers in absorbing external knowledge in open innovation. The authors address this gap by investigating the role of managers in absorbing external knowledge for new product and service innovation. The study provides insights into managers' characteristics and practices underlying the organisational phenomena of absorptive capacity in open innovation. The article adds to the open innovation literature by showing that open innovation is not necessarily limited to exploration activities. Rather, firms need to support their managers in transferring and exploiting external knowledge in order to sustain innovation.

Goduscheit and Jørgensen's paper, 'User toolkits for innovation – a literature review', argues that, although user toolkits have a distinct theoretical position, empirical evidence for the benefits of user toolkits for innovation is limited. The authors show that the identified studies employ only some of attributes of user toolkits for innovation. Furthermore, they show that most user toolkits for innovation are based on digital and virtual platforms, while toolkits for physical products and services are less prevalent. Finally, the article criticises the focus on specialised users rather than ordinary users in empirical investigations.

'Exploring the incorporation of users in an innovating business unit', by Wadell, Sandström, Björk and Magnusson, argues that incorporate users can assume different important roles in open innovation. Based on an in-depth single case study of incorporated users in a medical technology company, the authors present four such roles: user representative, idea promoter, networker, and change agent. The paper contributes to the literature by showing that firms which have difficulty in gaining access to the user environment can benefit from incorporated users. However, in order to fully exploit incorporated user benefits, firms must allow them to maintain contact with their former work environment. By addressing user involvement in open innovation, the study also shows that incorporated users need specific personal qualities to fulfil firms' expectations. On the whole, the authors conclude that firms must be clear about the role and profile of incorporated users in order to best support their innovation efforts.

Pihl and Sandström's paper, 'Value creation and appropriation in social media – the case of fashion bloggers in Sweden', examines the emerging phenomenon of commercial bloggers. Based on the content of 18 of Sweden's top fashion blogs, the authors suggest that fashion bloggers have evolved to provide knowledge and reduce uncertainty to fashion customers. The paper's contribution to the open business model is that it shows how fashion bloggers can improve transaction efficiencies for the fashion industry by bundling private and commercial content in their blogs. In this sense, the study's findings suggest that bloggers can be powerful intermediaries who often have better access to customers than fashion firms.

The final paper in this special issue, ‘Openness in innovation and business models: lessons from the newspaper industry’, by Holm, Günzel and Ulhøi, investigates the extent to which the internet and related technology developments have disrupted the long-standing business model of the industry. Their findings suggest that a ‘nuanced’ understanding of the term ‘openness’ is needed, since the opening of business models during technological dynamics may have far more multiform manifestations than have been reported in the literature so far. This research contributes to existing insights into open innovation and business model change in that it shows how openness to technological innovations and business model development may be associated with more non-uniform and far-reaching consequences than have been observed up to now.

### 3 Closing remarks

Innovation is critical to firms aiming at creating new markets, sustaining competitive advantage, and enhancing organisational performance (Volberda et al., 2010). The means to achieving these aims, as discussed in the studies in this special issue, include increased external focus, collaboration, integrative skills, and openness during innovation and business development activities. However, open innovation is both a relatively young and highly important field, and there remains much more to be explored.

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### Disclaimer

Both special issue editors have contributed equally to this editorial, which in no way reflects the opinions of others than the editors. The usual disclaimers apply.

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