

---

## **Editorial**

---

### **Séverine Le Loarne-Lemaire\***

Grenoble Ecole de Management,  
12, rue Pierre Sémart,  
38000 Grenoble, France  
Email: Severine.le-loarne@grenoble-em.com  
\*Corresponding author

### **Luca Gnan**

Università degli Studi di Roma Tor Vergata,  
Via Orazio Raimondo, 18 – 00173 Roma, Italy  
Email: luca.gnan@uniroma2.it

---

The innovation process in firms is a widely explored topic for a long time (Knight, 1967; Tushman, 1977; Van de Ven, 1982). However, despite the huge amount of contributions, research on the identity of individuals or groups of individuals who take part to the innovation processes remains underdeveloped. Indeed, most of the research on creativity and innovation is based on experimental studies with students or individuals who are not in real and concrete situations to take part to any innovation processes within a firm (Perry Smith, 2006) and, moreover, the other results are mostly based on case studies taken from the large groups (Amabile, 1988; Le Loarne, 2006), without considering SMEs or start-ups, which mostly contribute to the economic life. Such gaps led us to open a research debate on the social and organisational characteristics of the innovator/s within firms, and especially, by small and medium sized firms. One of the first contributions to such a debate reveals that a firm is innovative when it welcomes and invites different actors coming from different social groups, education systems (Amabile, 2005). Such results are consistent with the claim of politicians for better diversity by firms for a better economic growth (World Economic Forum, 2012). The term of ‘diversity’ implies different forms: diversity in terms of profession, national origins, ages, but also gender. Therefore, we propose to explore the role of gender within the innovation processes of firms and, moreover, of SMEs.

The debate on gender role within organisations is not a new one and the number of specialised journals in such a topic shows it. However, the question on the gender role within the innovation processes has been restricted to the topic of female entrepreneurship (De Bruin et al., 2006; Hughes, 2012). Its goal wants to explain the low rate of female entrepreneurs and to shed light on differences across genders on the way males and females respectively manage their business (Du Rietz and Henrekson, 2000). In this special issue, we propose, to enlarge this debate to the innovation process of the firm that remains underexplored (Owen, 1994). More precisely, given the high impact innovation has on the performance of firms, this special issue aims at questioning the specific role of females (and males) within the innovation processes and the creative processes: legendary figures in innovation and entrepreneurship are mostly those of

males. Does this mean that females innovate less? Would females also take less part – or would be given a less part – to the innovation process within any company? If no, how do they proceed? Does their creativity differ from those of males? Would there be any ‘glass ceiling’ of innovative ideas conducted by females? Furthermore, since we know that females tend to adopt a more democratic decision-making processes by firms (Carter and Allen, 1997; Cliff, 1998), can we consider that females also develop a more democratic innovation processes?

This special issue gathers seven different articles. Apart the intrinsic quality of the research evaluated thanks to the peer-reviewed process, they also have been chosen because they illustrate the diversity of the research that is currently carried out on the topic of innovation and gender: diversity in terms of research methods (from quantitative approach to ethnographic studies), diversity in terms of cultural approaches (Spain, Libanon, France, Sweden vs. other countries). Some of them also express the limit of studying the gender impact on innovation processes, claiming that other variables, such as the age, would explain more the propensity to innovate.

Therefore, this special issue is structured as follow and opens three main research debates that surround the place of the gender variable into innovation processes:

1 Is there any gendered way of finding ideas and perceiving innovation?

The first paper ‘queering all aboard’ written by Magdalena Petersson McIntyre and based on an ethnographic study reveals that women do not create the same innovative outputs as male and when women are to work on a boat, the shape and design of the results strongly differ. In the same vein, the paper by Gloria Haddad and Séverine Le Loarne brings one first explanation of this statement by proposing a model of opportunity identification for men and for women based on a research network approach. Martina McDonnell and Chantal Morley contribution states that such differences between men and women may at the same time be strengthened and reduced among the Y generation.

2 Are innovations developed by women more successful?

The second question of the debate is about the productivity and the effectiveness of women while entering any innovation process. Gianni Brighetti and Caterina Lucarelli state that, despite the claim, the innovative output cannot differ across gender since men and women tend to react the same way while facing risks. Thomas Schøtt and Maryam Cheraghi adopt a more critical approach regarding the gender effect on the performance of the innovation output by considering that culture and network better explain performance than gender.

3 What about gender diversity?

The last two papers enlarge the current debate on gender diversity and the impact on innovation from two different perspectives: while Fabrice Galia, Emmanuel Zenou and Marc Ingham state that gender diversity on board mostly lead to the development of radical innovations, Juan Fernández Sastre makes the same statement among R&D teams.

Finally, these seven complementary research outputs open a wide avenue of future research on gender impact on innovation by calling for more mixed research methods for consolidating the established research results and criticising the gender literature that

claims the female are more innovative but less successful than men: the role other variables plays within innovation processes conducted by individuals (such as age/gender, culture/gender, network/gender), should be better explored.

## References

- Amabile, T.M. (1988) 'From individual creativity to organizational innovation', in Gronhaug, K. et al. (Eds.): *Innovation: A Cross-Disciplinary Perspective*, pp.139–166, Norwegian University Press.
- Amabile, T.M. (2005) 'Affect and creativity at work', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 50, No. 3, pp.367–403.
- Carter, N.M. and Allen, K.R. (1997) 'Size determinants of women-owned businesses: choice of barriers to resources?', *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development: An International Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 3, pp.211–220.
- Cliff, J.E. (1998) 'Does one size fit all? Exploring the relationship between attitudes towards growth, gender and business size', *Journal of Business Venturing*, Vol. 13, No. 6, pp.523–542.
- De Bruin, A. et al. (2006) 'Advancing a framework for coherent research on women's entrepreneurship', *Entrepreneurship: Theory and Practice*, Vol. 31, No. 3, pp.323–339.
- Du Rietz, A. and Henrekson, M. (2000) 'Testing the female underperformance hypothesis', *Small Business Economics*, Vol. 14, No. 1, pp.1–10.
- Hughes, K. (2012) 'Extending women's entrepreneurship in new directions', *Entrepreneurship: Theory and Practice*, Vol. 36, No. 3, pp.429–442.
- Knight, K.E. (1967) 'A descriptive model of the intra-firm innovation process', *Journal of Business*, Vol. 40, No. 4, pp.478–496.
- Le Loarne, S. (2006) 'De l'idée d'offre à l'innovation produit au sein d'un groupe multidivisionnel', *Revue Française de Gestion*, Vol. 161, No. 2, pp.111–123.
- Owen, J. (1994) 'Women in science: token women or gender equality?', *R&D Management*, Vol. 24, No. 1, pp.102–103.
- Perry Smith, J.E. (2006) 'Social yet creative: the role of social relationships in facilitating individual creativity', *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 49, No. 1, pp.85–101.
- Tushman, M.L. (1977) 'Special boundary roles in the innovation process' *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 22, No. 4, pp.587–605.
- Van de Van, A.H. (1986) 'Central problems in the management of innovation', *Management Sciences*, May, Vol. 32, No. 5, pp.590–607.
- World Economic Forum (2012) *Global Report* [online] <http://www.weforum.org/issues/global-competitiveness> (accessed July 2014).