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Papers 3 – Innovation

How Autoethnography Enables Sensemaking across Organizations

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Building on participatory innovation, and taking a personal and analytical autoethnographic approach we set out to investigate how innovative initiatives emerge in the interaction of multiple stakeholders across different organizations. As researchers, we are interested in understanding the lived experience of the lead author, as an inquiry into how new initiatives across organizations are shaped in the interaction between different stakeholders across field sites and organizational levels. The project evolved as a cross-institutional initiative; bridging health-care and engineering education, and while the lead author was initially involved as design consultant, his engagement later resulted in the initiation of cross-disciplinary collaboration between two different local institutions. This paper is thus an attempt to investigate how emerging organizational initiatives and multi-stakeholder innovation become enabling to recognize and act upon emerging opportunities; through active personal involvement and by the use of an autoethnographic research approach.

The aim of the paper is to address the following research questions: How does the involvement of multiple stakeholders across different field sites and levels enable or constrain the emergence of innovation?

And how can autoethnography, as a method, enable us to navigate within the sensemaking process in the field of participatory innovation? The contribution of the paper is grounded in the analysis of real encounters across multiple field sites, and provides insight into how the themes of trust and power are crucial in understanding how new meaning evolves as a result of local interactions and on-going negotiations between multiple stakeholders.

Our goal is to discuss how innovation can be understood, not only as a process leading to a tangible and commercial outcome, but as a dialogical process of relationships, emerging in the interactions of different stakeholders. With autoethnography we have achieved a deeper level of insight into such process, which challenges traditional notions of innovation and ethnography.

Keywords: Autoethnography, Complex Responsive Processes, Participatory Innovation

INTRODUCTION

Participatory Innovation has in recent years evolved as a cross-disciplinary research field, which sets out to bring together different stakeholders and users in the process of developing new business opportunities that take into account the various interests and intentions. Combining the three research fields of Design Anthropology, Participatory Design and Lead User Innovation (Buur & Matthews 2008), Participatory Innovation has traditionally focused on observing, analyzing, challenging (Boer 2011; Larsen & Bogers 2014) and optimizing (Bogers & Horst 2014) what is going on in the interaction between different stakeholders, toward creating a meaningful outcome. Ethnography has, in this setting, acted as a key component in documenting and reflecting upon these phenomena to investigate

how others innovate. In this concern ethnographic praxis has increasingly grown to become an essential pillar of the innovation process as a way to understand the people involved, as well as their practice. It is our understanding that it has not yet been perceived as means to understand the researcher's own engagement and underlying intentions and assumptions of the innovation process in the on-going involvement with the stakeholders. This paper thus aims to provide an understanding of how autoethnography as a method can be involved for the purpose of shedding light on how innovation emerges between multiple stakeholders, and the implications for the researcher's on-going facilitation of, and involvement in that process. Our argument focuses on analyzing how lived experiences (Chang 2013) can contribute to an understanding of how new initiatives across organizational settings are formed. In light of complexity theory (Stacey 2011), we investigate the local interactions between multiple stakeholders and how collaboration over a longer period of time affect one's ability as practitioner to act in certain situations, and thus enables one to recognize and act upon emerging opportunities.

Contextualizing Emerging Innovation

The paper draws upon personal encounters from a four-year long involvement in a project emerging between multiple stakeholders. The goal has been to develop the practice and mindset of nursing students towards becoming more innovative, and to enable them of staying responsive to the on-going changes of their professional practice. The lead author of this paper took part in expanding the initiative to include the local university, at which he was employed. We make use of qualitative empirical materials, which include email conversations, personal narratives and observations in an effort to explore how ethnographic praxis can take into account the striking moments, which Stacey & Griffin (2005) describe as the notion of gaining new insight and sensemaking of experiences in the on-going daily practice of the research setting. Rather than describing the empirical findings in this paper as traditional ethnographic data, the material is a reflected analysis of the on-going interactions between the different stakeholders involved. In this sense, the analysis becomes an autoethnographic inquiry into the material.

Shaping of Human Relations

As we are dealing with several stakeholders in this research, it has become crucial to understand what it means to collaborate across organizations, how people navigate within that complexity, and how innovation in this respect emerges as a result of that. Within organizational theory there has been an increasing interest toward understanding complex responsive processes. Stacey (2011) essentially describes organizations as processes, where humans relate to each other through ordinary everyday interactions, in which they inevitably need to cope with the complexity and uncertainty of organizational life. Under these terms people continually relate to each other and it is in these interdependent relationships where notions of power and trust are constituted. Through communicative action between people an on-going social shaping takes place, and meaning emerges as interplay between gestures and responses, which cannot be separated in their communicative form (ibid). Rather than understanding organizations as systems, here they are perceived as temporal processes of relations between people. In those local interactions happening between humans we will

inevitably affect each other, which means that the relationships will be interdependent. Larsen (2014) argues that we each create our own understanding of these complex processes and are free to act as we wish, while at the same time being dependent on the relations we have, due to our collaborative effort to build the future. This interdependency both limits and enables us, as we are developing ourselves as well as the situations we are in. Stacey (2011) argues that through our local interactions, such as conversations, with others we are co-creating meaning. He explains that the way conversations take form is a result of a historical development within the community in which the local interactions are taking place. With time, gestures and the responses thereby become a reflection of the history of relations between people within the community.

Emerging Identities

Stacey (2011) describes the human identity as being socially constructed, in the on-going local interactions. These interactions result in the formation of relationships between people, which again influence the individual. This also affects how people perceive themselves in relation to others, due to being driven by self-enhancement, and thus leading to the manifestation of power relations. This could therefore be framing the way people interact with each other and how they lead conversations in respect to turn-taking and their gestures/responses. Buur and Larsen (2010) elaborate on the influence of power relations within organizational communities, by stating that spontaneity basically challenges power relations, as these are primarily nurtured when people speak or act in the way they are expected or not expected to. Trying to push the boundaries that are socially constructed may disturb the social stability of the community, which could eventually lead to confrontation. Such different situations of interaction between people increasingly require one to master the skills of improvisation, which again indicates the complexity of human relations.

Autoethnography – Why, How and What?

Our method approach in this paper is autoethnographic. To understand this method, we must first see it in the light of traditional ethnographic fieldwork. Ethnography as it was originally described within the frames of anthropological research, seeks to describe people and their culture or practice, as well as their understanding of what they do (Wolcott 1999). As such it can be perceived as a methodology with which we, through observations and interactions, seek to understand the distinctive nature of people's social and cultural life, whether it being a rural culture or the practice of an organization. On the other hand, ethnography encompasses a practice of doing fieldwork, which is both related to taking distance from the informants; and at the same time asking questions and re-framing one's own interpretation of the empirical materials.

In recent years, ethnographic research has expanded towards including a more subjective form, which has been coined autoethnography (Chang 2013; Ellis et al. 2014). Ellis et al. describe autoethnography as both a process and a product, as it challenges the way one normally conducts ethnographic research and helps one produce a written autoethnography that highly focuses on the analysis of one's own cultural experience. In a pragmatic sense, researchers who work with autoethnography thus write about moments that have had an impact on their daily experiences, and which have been formed through their involvement in

a specific culture. Following Brinkmann (2012) autoethnographic writing is a method of inquiry into qualitative research, and thus becomes an intrinsic part of the research methodology. However, for it to essentially be framed as autoethnographic research, one needs to work on two different levels. While traditional ethnography aims to detach the author from the final analysis, autoethnography highlights the involvement of the author present in the text and seeks to systematically analyze the author's own experience of being involved in the research context. In this case the lead author had no choice but being involved as a key player in shaping the activities and making decisions, meaning that it would not be possible to do traditional ethnography, and acting as a fly-on-the-wall. In this matter the lead author is here a character in the account and his role is acknowledged. This is different from traditional ethnography, where the researcher does not include himself in the ethnographic account. The outcome of this writing process is therefore a piece that engages others in the personal experiences of the researcher, and helps the researcher himself become more distant from the writing to understand the experiences in a different way. Solomon (2010) argues that an auto-ethnographic approach can show different nuances and new associations due to the greater access to levels of data which then challenges the original way of carrying out ethnographic research, since it questions the researcher's ability to truly encounter or understand the experiences of the informants. In relation to the more objective nature of traditional ethnographic fieldwork, the autoethnographer carries out his research anywhere he re-encounters his material; such as memories, objects and photos (Chang, 2013).

Autoethnography and Its Relation to Multi-Stakeholder Innovation

At EPIC in 2010, Keren Solomon (2010) used autoethnography as a way to change perspective, from a traditional, observant ethnographer, towards an involved researcher taking part in her own research, writing field-notes and analyzing her own practice. In this study she notices how autoethnography enables her as researcher to empathize with the subjects of study, taking on the role of self-inquiry. An inquiry which we in traditional ethnography would apply to those being researched; such as keeping diaries, responding to interviews, inviting the researcher into their practice etc. In the study presented in this paper, we set out to investigate the role of autoethnography from a different perspective. Not as a planned agenda to inquire into the research context and to study our own practice, but as an emerging method of autobiographical reflection on how one's own practice can be analyzed to gain a deeper understanding of innovation emerging in our interaction with various stakeholders. Drawing on Adler (1987), Anderson (2006) distinguishes between two different approaches to conducting research as an Autoethnographer, "opportunistic" and "convert" research. "Opportunistic researchers", are already members of the group, which sets the frame for the research and as such, group membership precedes the research agenda towards researching the group. "Convert researchers" will initially start with an objective agenda and a research context to focus on, but eventually finds themselves being immersed in the research context through their own involvement. The autoethnographic research approach presented in this paper is "opportunistic", as it was not chosen prior to engaging in the research context. As such, the research context and the group being studied were not actually defined as research material, until the first conversations about this paper took place. However, one of the authors has been collecting ongoing samples and continuously reflected

upon the context and the interactions within it. For the past 2-3 years the lead author of this paper has been experimenting with different approaches to autoethnography, namely in relation to his own practice in different entrepreneurial contexts (Oorschot and Gottlieb, 2015; Gottlieb, 2015; Gottlieb, 2016). In this sense, the continuous reflection on own practice in the shaping of relationships and emergence of new initiatives, has been nascent for a longer period of time. Keeping the emergent in mind the author has been attempting to capture “stumble data”, which Brinkmann (2014) defines as instances that we stumble upon in the environment we engage in, and that are not constructed on the basis of theoretical understandings; but that could be defined as data once we ask questions of reasoning. This is essentially a breakdown-oriented research approach, where the researcher attempts to frame everyday life experiences as a mystery, which one needs to resolve through sensemaking. It mainly includes three different steps, going from making the familiar strange, to searching for underlying rules and routines and lastly challenging the taken-for-granted assumptions to understand underlying norms in the context of study. Similar to Brinkmann’s notion of stumble data, Stacey & Griffin (2005) describe the idea of researching with a complex responsive process mindset as a means of using the opportunities emerging in one’s daily practice in the research context, through different conversations and ordinary meetings with people. Stacey et al. use the term “striking moments” to ascribe to situations of which the researcher gains new insight; when one has an experience where new meaning emerges, something which might change one's own identity, who you are or what you are doing. Buur and Larsen (2010) also refer to this as an intuitive sense of when new meaning emerges. Building on Fonseca (2002) and Gottlieb et al. (2013), new meaning emerging in people’s interactions can be understood as innovation, in the lens of complex responsive processes. Taking this into account, the last couple of years have been an attempt to be aware of and collect such hunches as pieces of autobiographic data. Personal narratives, scribbled notes, photos and email correspondences with key peers. In particular, to get closer to the lived experience of innovation and to that of being an entrepreneur. Also, to build a deeper understanding of how such experiences can become part of understanding how innovation is shaped in the interaction of multiple stakeholders.

RESEARCH METHOD

As previously elaborated, the research has been grounded on an autoethnographic approach focusing on qualitative data that has emerged from experiences during the period of work described. The data has not been collected through a series of planned research activities; rather they are reflections of one of the authors’ personal narratives in his interaction with the different stakeholders. We acknowledge that in this case it is clearly not possible to obtain objective detachment from the case, which presents us with the paradox of detached involvement (Stacey, 2005). The argument of the paper is thus built upon the continuous personal narratives supporting the emergence of burning themes related to innovation. We recognize that this research cannot be separated from the practice relating to the case presented, as the sensemaking process takes into account personal and emotional engagement. In this type of research, Brinkmann (2012) emphasizes the importance of being able to make sense of situations that include a certain level of uncertainty. Through an abductive process, the researcher aims to find reasonable answers to why the situations we experience might turn out differently than expected, and thereby build an assumption that

allows for further exploration. This basically differs from the more traditional approach of deduction, which focuses on building a testable hypothesis from existing theories, and induction, which seeks to build general knowledge on the foundation of a number of cases. The latter would typically be more present in quantitative research. In comparison, abduction is much more centered on exploration of everyday life experiences. The process of analysis of our own lived experience is what we refer to as sensemaking.

We understand sensemaking as an ongoing way of understanding and reflecting upon our continuous interaction with the world. In line with Laura McNamaras “perspective post” (2015) on the EPIC website, we use sense making as a scholarly way to reiterate our lived experience, through reflection and writing.

CONNECTING THE PIECES THROUGH INNOVATIVE ENCOUNTERS

In order to set the scene, the lead author will reflect upon his experiences through first-person accounts. As we as co-authors attempt to collaboratively make sense of this case, we will continuously shift between a third and first person perspective. We will inquire into two different experiences from the case material, reflecting the notions of power and trust to elaborate on how innovation is shaped in the interactions of multiple stakeholders.

The Case – An Overview through Personal Narratives

In 2012, I became involved in a project at a small Danish incubator environment for entrepreneurs. Located in my home town Sonderborg in Denmark, this environment would serve as a co-working space for small startup businesses. At this time, I was (and still is) engaged in a tech-startup. As entrepreneurs, my partners and I involved ourselves in the activities going on in this environment and investigated the opportunities to make use of the space for our own business.

At the same time the incubator was running a project in collaboration with the local nursing school. An ambitious attempt to introduce nurses to innovation practice and design thinking. The project was called ‘Innovation Camp’ and ran for four days. The nursing students would be working with a specific theme, generate and evaluate ideas, build a prototype and finally perform a “sales pitch” concluding the four days. The incubator was looking for externals to assist the nursing students in building a physical prototype of their conceptual ideas. This initial involvement was the beginning of my relationship with the nursing school organizers as well as with the incubator environment. During the next two years, I was hired as external consultant to plan and facilitate workshops as well as lecturing courses in innovation and creativity at the nursing school.

My ongoing engagement with the nursing school and the incubator continued as I started my PhD study. I would be involved in a research project as well as in teaching and supervision of students, but I also found time to nurture my relationship with the nursing school and to spend time on their projects. Although this did not relate to my own research I had a strong feeling that these interactions could contribute to some interesting collaborations and improvement of skills.

In the spring of 2014, I was planning activities for the coming semester. At the university I would be supervising a class of interaction design students in their semester project and was investigating different themes around which we could stage the project. In

collaboration with my fellow supervisor, we discussed working with the theme of welfare technology. Within the same timeframe, I received an email from my contact at the nursing school, asking if I once again would be interested in facilitating their next Innovation Camp. In these ongoing interactions across different field sites I discovered an opportunity, which would eventually bridge the two educational institutions. Still, this epiphany stands to me as emerging immediately while sitting at my office desk. The following outtake is transcribed from the email which I immediately sent to the nursing school upon realizing a potential for cross- organization collaboration.

To [Innovation Camp organizers]

(...) and then I got an idea, while looking across the water at [the incubator environment]. How about combining the camp and the entire concept of generating ideas and building prototypes, with the start of the semester project for our interaction designers? Instead of the current approach where we invite a group of “prototypers” from the university, we will bring in our interaction designers who are all skilled in concepts and prototypes. But who also has a focus on bringing projects further and establishing a relation to those with the relevant knowledge, the nurse students. In this way we could use the camp as a starting point for an entire semester project, resulting in a final concept. (...)

This email initiated the shaping of a new concept of the Innovation Camp initiative, which eventually went beyond my initial thoughts about collaborating across the three institutions; the university, the nursing school and the incubator environment. As researchers we come to reflect on how a gesture as this email can be a stepping-stone for innovative initiatives. With our autoethnographic analysis, we seek to understand how a relationship built on trust and knowledge, shaped through the researcher’s long term involvement across different field sites and on different organizational levels, becomes enabling for initiating new interactions with stakeholders from diverse contexts. From the involved perspective of the researcher, the following narrative investigates how trust is experienced as emerging in the ongoing relationship between the author and the staff from the nurse school. This is important when we later on seek to understand how the conditions for this new initiative, starting with the aforementioned email, came into being.

Building Relations on Trust

We are now back in the fall of 2013 as my involvement as an external lecturer at the nursing school was taking form. In my interactions with the nursing school faculty, they had seemed to recognize my skills of facilitating innovation related activities. Upon my first involvement with the nursing school in 2012 and the incubator environment, I had during the summer been facilitating a workshop with the aim to develop welfare technology concepts for patients suffering from Parkinson’s disease. Following the Parkinson’s workshop which was hosted by [Nurse 1], I received a mail from [Nurse 2], whom I hadn’t previously met:

“Hi [Author]. My colleague [nurse 1] recommended you. (...) I need a lecturer for 30.9.2013, 4 lessons. A person who can contribute to innovation and creative thinking. (...)”

I quickly accepted the offer after a short meeting with [Nurse 2] in which she introduced me to her approach towards involving me. My role would be to wrap up on [Nurse 2]’s

innovation project with the students. I would be supporting the students in converting their ideas into conceptual mock-ups and finally present them to the rest of the class. I was on my own in terms of planning and facilitating the class; the nursing school staff had trust in me. A few students approached me afterwards and said they had found the class inspiring, which was and still stands as a motivating experience. Following this first lecture, I received the following mail from [Nurse 2]:

“Hi again, [Author]. Today, the students gave a beautiful and creative presentation. And every group mentioned (“... as [Author] has taught us” etc.) :) You have really taught them something. Thank you. (...)”

Since this first guest lecture at the nursing school, I have more or less systematically been engaged as an external lecturer in the nursing school program. At other times also in other instances, acting as a judge during presentations of their concepts or facilitating the idea generation phase towards their final bachelor theses. Our understanding of trust as a theme in this case, starts with a reflection about setting the conditions for the approach to collaborate between the two organizations. What we refer to as “an epiphany” becomes one of the striking moments. As we turn to a different theoretical approach, namely complexity theory, we become interested in investigating how the role of trust in the ongoing shaping of relations becomes an important theme in setting the conditions for innovation in the interplay of crossing intentions. With autoethnography, we allow ourselves to inquire into personal experiences which assist us in reiterating how the formation of relations becomes key in establishing trust between multiple stakeholders.

Going back to the experience from my early interactions with the nursing school staff enables me to reflect upon how trust being established between us as collaborators has been key in taking the later steps of establishing the cross-institutional initiative. Revisiting my past experiences from the context, has triggered my own sense of how important these initial interactions with the nursing staff were. These interactions have been key in establishing the trust necessary to initiate larger experimental initiatives. Inherent in my own understanding of trust is also the close relationship emerging between us as collaborators, which has made it interesting to take the steps I took. The possibility to do something interesting is simply a crucial factor for me, as a practitioner. As we as researchers turn to autoethnography as our methodology, we allow ourselves to give meaning to these reflections and thereby identify them as significant in setting the conditions for innovation. Within complexity theory, trust is a theme that helps to understand what goes on in the interactions between us as collaborators. Eventually, we claim that these interactions are in themselves, an essential part of innovating towards the outcome, which became the cross-institutional Innovation Camp initiative.

Power as Interdependent Relations

A recurring theme in organizational theory, is the role of power in the shaping of relations. Traditionally, power in organizations is often perceived as “the possession of some and not of others” (Stacey, 2003). As such, power becomes prevalent in the discussion of what constitutes organization. In the lens of complexity theory, power is, just as well as organization, a social construct in our relationships. Drawing on Elias (1939), Stacey describes power as enabling constraints. Relations “impose constraints on those relating

while at the same time enabling those who relate to do what they could otherwise not have done” (ibid). In this light, power is interdependencies between the ones relating. What awakens our interest as we inquire into the case is how such interdependencies take shape in the micro-interactions of the different stakeholders. With autoethnography, we aim to analyze how power is at play in the interactions which in this case sets the stage for innovation.

This brings us back to the case. In the fall of 2014 the Innovation Camp initiative had been completed. As organizers we had been asked to submit a review of the camp to the head of institute at the university. This was a natural response to an initiative, which played a role in the education of all 3rd semester engineering students on campus. The four-day workshop had also had an impact on many of the teachers. But we had heard rumors suggesting that some of the students found the camp childish and useless, which basically was bothering top management. Revisiting our response to management I find that we directly aimed to address this particular theme. As a response we submitted an overview of how the camp played out and included some initial reflections, conducted with the participating engineering students. The following outtake represents our response to our head of institute:

“Using the methodology from [the authors’ research group] has led to comments such as “I felt like being in kindergarten, clapping hands” which we consider a natural reaction to an approach, which was so different from their daily practice. Methods and professional activities seem to have been perceived as positive. Some students have however stressed that they would like more insight into the different professionally relevant methods; through references, curriculums e.g. This is naturally an issue which can be handled in the follow-up but will also be considered in further development.”

In our response to management we expose this theme and acknowledge the students for their reflection. We attempt to relate it to their daily practice as engineering students. We frame the general reflection from the students as positive and recognize their enthusiasm to obtain more documentation of the used methodology. Lastly, we bridge this insight towards future development of the Innovation Camp initiative. As such, we articulate that we are aiming to continue with this approach in the future. As researcher and autoethnographic narrator, I become interested in how the conditions for this response was enabled. My interest is awoken as I revisit the response to management. It enables me to objectify my own interactions but it also drags me into the personal experience when these interactions took place, the landscape which is only accessible to me, as autoethnographic author (Chang, 2013). This self-inquiry enables me to navigate in the landscape of relationships, to investigate how our previous interactions with management, in regards of the Innovation Camp, played out. Again, the autoethnographic approach becomes a time travel in the conversations. In line with the metaphorical sense of time traveling and the paradox of how changing the past will impact the present, going back in time changes my own understanding of how processes of human relations and our identities took form in the communicative negotiation in those processes.

In light of complex responsive processes, we as researchers take up the theme of power, to investigate how the relationship across different levels in the organization, in this case the university, is highly interdependent between the different participants involved in the

conversations. What awakens our interest as we inquire into the case, is how such interdependencies take shape in the micro interactions of the different stakeholders.

We are now back in the final two weeks before the Innovation Camp workshop is about to unfold. Management had already given us verbal green light for initiating the Innovation Camp and approved of the required budget. However, many issues were still not settled in regards of the how our initiative would affect other colleagues in terms of planned teaching and curriculum. The Innovation Camp would mean that the first four days of the semester for every second year student would be restrained by us. A few days after getting verbal approval from our Head of institute, we received the following message:

“Dear both. Unfortunately, the plan affects many students and staff e.g. [course 1], [course 2] and [course 3] and we cannot simply replace this teaching with a different activity, which (maybe) does not have coherence with the planned activities. (...)

>>A list of criteria which he considered unresolved<<

(..) In general, I think we should wait until next year with this workshop because we simply do not have enough time left for planning these activities.

Best regards

[Head of Institute]”

I recall this response as the final blow to our project. Our manager had pulled the plug and asked us to postpone everything until next year. I did not have a close relation to our Head of institute and did not perceive his message as an invitation to negotiate. But my fellow supervisor who had been employed at the institute for more than 10 years, quickly replied to his mail:

“Dear [Head of institute]

I would like you to stay calm.

Of course we will have time to execute the workshop now - but maybe not in the way you see it. It does not have to be as complicated this year, we can arrange most issues internally and still follow the rules.

>> A detailed response to each point on his list<<

I cannot see any reason for postponing until next year, since the mountains you expect us having to climb, are merely bumps on the road. Most issues are already resolved just by helping each other :). I am so fortunate to have really helpful colleagues, for which I am truly grateful.

I think we should continue, as everything is mostly planned! It would be very unfortunate to quit now, so close to the goal!

What do you think [Head of institute]?

(I hope and cross my fingers for a “Go for it boys!”)

A few hours later, our Head of institute replied, in a brief response:

“Ok, you are free to continue - (...)
Give it a try and evaluate later - a good idea, de fakto.”

Best regards
[Head of Institute]”

Thus, we had the final approval from top management. I was deeply impressed by my fellow supervisor’s way of negotiating with our manager and I recall how I, in a conversation with the other workshop organizers, mentioned her as a person who “crushed problems as if they were oreos”.

These micro interactions become key as I, as autoethnographer, seek to recall how the emerging relationships have been important in supporting the Innovation Camp initiative. “Power” is in this case not something which is in the possession of some and not of others, but a characteristic in the emerging relationship between the participants. I find myself realizing this when recalling my initial thoughts on the negative response from our manager. As I experience my colleague’s reply and the following interaction, I find that my own perception of power within our organization is shaped. And this is reflected in the post-Innovation Camp reflection sent to our manager.

Innovative Outcomes

The Innovation Camp initiative, which was enabled through the ongoing collaboration between the stakeholders has been continued as a built-in element in the study programme across the two involved institutions.

With the nurse students, the Innovation Camp initiative has transitioned from involving the first semester students without experience as nursing practitioners, towards involving late stage students on their 7th semester who at this stage have had a total of 1-year experience from practice in a hospital. In regards to the engineering students, the concept has been tweaked to only involve students from one particular engineering programme per camp.

A breakdown of this construct can be found in Olsen and Petersen (2015). Following the first camp Olsen and Petersen initiated a “project on evaluating the students’ entrepreneurial attitudes in the on-going teaching innovation experiments” (ibid). The lead author is the aforementioned colleague who took the initiative further. They used the insights from the camps to develop an elective course for the nursing students towards developing and implementing welfare technology ideas into their own practice. This elective is run in parallel with the engineering students. In a joint start, the students will collaborate in a 3-day workshop, similar to the initial Innovation Camp initiative. Following the initial ideas from the Innovation Camps, the nurses will contribute with knowledge from practice in a welfare context. The engineering students will have a role as facilitators and participants and will be encouraged to take the ideas from the initiating workshop further as their semester project.

To identify a particular “tangible” innovative outcome of the years of collaboration between the lead author and the other stakeholders, this new formalized construct between the two institutions is key. The active implementation of multi-disciplinary project facilitation embedded in the engineering programme is a whole new way of preparing the students for their future engineering practice. This construct enables both engineering and nurse students to actively engage with and navigate in a context which reflects many of the

encounters they will have as future professionals. We argue that the transition from the initial Innovation Camp construct at the nurse school towards a formalized, parallel course between to different institutions is indeed “an innovation”.

A different perspective to identify innovation could be to zoom in on the individual group outcomes of the executed camps; the innovations produced by the students, the new ideas. The nurse students has in collaboration with the engineering students through the different camps, developed numerous concepts and prototypes solving different practice-oriented problems and meeting the needs of different patient groups. Many of these are innovations in themselves, some even taken towards commercialization. In this concern, innovation emerged on different levels, starting from building the foundation by involving different stakeholders in the creation of new meaning, leading to the development of the two different study programmes, which in the end supports the development of new ideas and products that can innovate nursing practice in Denmark.

One of my favorite examples from the first Innovation Camp, was built by a group of Interaction Design Engineers. Upon collaborating with the nurses in the Innovation Camp, they continued to pursue a project towards developing a wearable device for Multiple Schlerosis (MS) patients, coined TimeMe. Through a semester of iterations this project was developed in close interaction with healthcare relations from the nursing school and patients suffering from MS. The concept is similar to a wristwatch, but introduce a novel way for the wearer to input and receive simple reminders during one’s day. A key user need discovered through their studies. Insight to these studies can be found in Mosleh et al. (2016). As such, this project exemplifies a tangible of outcomes from the collaboration between engineering and nurse students throughout the innovation camps.

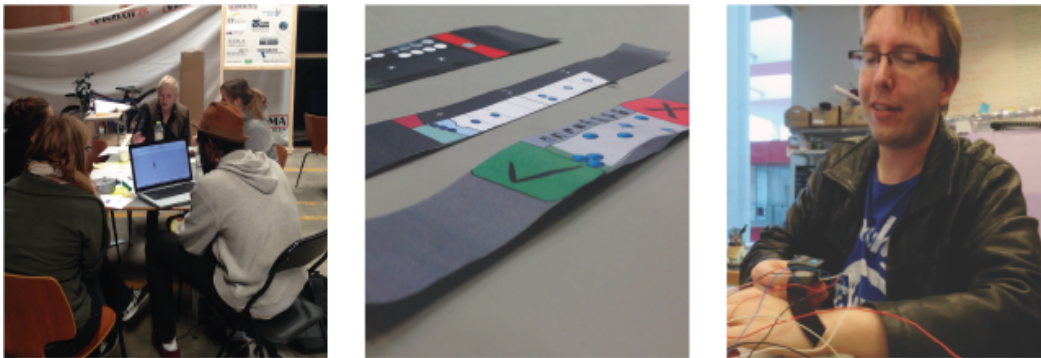


Figure 1. Nursing students and engineering students collaborating during Innvation Camp. Figure 2. Conceptual paper mockups of wearable concept, developed by engineering students. Figure 3. MS patient testing functional prototype of wearable concept “TimeMe”.

Looking back, our aim with this paper was to discuss “innovation” from a different perspective, namely “innovation” as the new meaning which emerges in the interactions of stakeholders with crossing intentions, rather than solely being a linear process. We agree, that it only makes sense to discuss “innovation” if there is an outcome of novelty which affects more people than those initially involved. Thus there are numerous ways to perceive and argue for the concept of innovation. We have chosen the lens of complex responsive processes and with the method of autoethnography we have attempted to investigate how

conditions for new meaning emerging between collaborating stakeholders is enabled, through building trust and continuously negotiating relations of power.

DISCUSSION

How Autoethnography Can Be a Tool for Sensemaking in Organizations

Throughout the paper we have aimed at drawing upon instances that highlight how the lead author has been able to make sense of his own experiences in the context of multi-stakeholder collaboration, as a way of presenting how innovation can be understood through the light of an autoethnographic approach. By personally being involved in collaborating across the institutions an extensive access to data has been present (Chang, 2013), both in terms of understanding how the emerging relations of trust continually have evolved as a result of local micro-interactions and how power can play a significant role in enabling or constraining innovative initiatives from developing.

In this light, we set out to explicitly show how the acknowledgement of personal experiences can support us in identifying striking moments (Stacey, 2005). As previously described we have applied autoethnography as a method that helped us gain new perspectives and understandings of complexity theory and innovation as emerging meaning between multiple stakeholders. In this sense, we see potential in using autoethnography as a way of looking back at a lived experience that was not intended to be a research context, but rather enabled the collection of stumble data that later can be used as a foundation for sensemaking. Reflecting on one's own practice is thereby essential to both identifying and understanding the striking moments that have had an impact on the gestures, responses and identity of those involved (ibid). One challenge in using this kind of inquiry into qualitative research can, however, be that the researcher might not be aware of some moments that could have been crucial for understanding the emergence of innovation, due to being too involved in the context himself. This could thus be a theme for further investigation.

Why is Trust Key in Multi-stakeholder Innovation?

Using writing as a reflective inquiry into the research material, we have allowed ourselves to re-iterate how the conditions for engaging in the Innovation Camp initiative were enabled, through an ongoing shaping of relationship across the different institutions. It is in the writing, which we come to find how the notion of trust has evolved between the participants. Thus, we are now better enabled to discuss how this theme had an impact towards setting the conditions for innovation. With Fonseca (2002) we find that the emergence of trust in people's conversations is a requirement for innovation, or new meaning, to emerge. Fonseca builds his argument on how the ongoing negotiation of understanding and misunderstanding in our conversations provokes us as participants in the communicative practice, to search for new ways of being together. Which correspondingly, makes it impossible to stage conditions which will produce innovation. Towards participatory innovation, Buur and Larsen (2010) state that innovative themes emerge and become allowed to emerge in the crossing intentions of participants in an innovation context. We recognize this in our case in the ongoing negotiation which takes place between the participants. In this paper we have chosen to zoom in on such particular interactions,

which makes it challenging to unfold the full spectrum of the intentions of the different participants, which leaves room for further inquiry from this perspective. But we do argue that autoethnography can be understood as a contribution towards understanding participatory innovation from a complex responsive process perspective. Through analyzing the lived experience of the lead author we are coming closer to understanding how trust and power are themes of innovation.

As such this way of understanding innovation has serious impact on fields such as innovation management, where designing specific models of innovation processes based on objective empirical research is the norm. In our analysis of the case, we recognize how innovation between the participants evolves, not as a planned agenda, but as a result of ongoing local interactions and negotiations.

Larsen and Sproedt (2012) points out that trust in organizational life is central to understand innovation in organizations. Lack of trust might constrain the freedom to act and for individuals to explore opportunities. In our case, the autoethnographic account has enabled us to gain a deeper insight into how the notion of trust becomes enabling when innovation emerge between multiple stakeholders. Trust is key to understand how anxiety provoking conversations are or are not taken up (Larsen and Sproedt, 2013). This makes us reflect on how the initial step taken by the lead author (to share the idea about the camp initiative), to which we ascribe trust as enabling, would have been different if there had not been such a close relationship across the different institutions? Would the idea not have emerged at all? Would the lead author have been more keen to avoid such an inquiry, due to anxiety? In this perspective, trust plays a role, both in the process of interacting with others, as well as in being able to act upon innovative initiatives.

What Is the Role of Power in Emerging Relations?

In the case we set out to investigate how the notion of power plays a role when taking innovative initiatives. Power constitutes how we as individuals, become enabled and constrained, at the same time, to act in our interactions with others. Buur and Larsen (2010) points to spontaneity as key to understand how power relations are continuously challenged in our communication. It is by taking spontaneous risks in our gestures and responses in which we might allow for new meaning or “innovation” to emerge.

Change in organizations happens in the negotiations of power (Larsen and Bogers, 2014). Such changes take shape in small incremental steps. In relation to our case, this is what we understand as “micro-interactions” which we explore using autoethnography. Larsen and Bogers (ibid) state that risk-taking and spontaneity in our interactions is critical to whether or not changes in an organization take place. In this sense, relations built on trust allow us to take risks, wherein power is continually negotiated.

In our autoethnographic analysis we have attempted to take these perspectives as we break down the lead author's experience of “a striking moment” and investigate, through personal reflections, how the interplay of different participants has been key in shaping his own perception of power, namely within his own organization.

We find that this emerging conceptualization of power, becomes continuously enabling and constraining for the participants in the Innovation Camp initiative. By analyzing and reflecting on the correspondence between the lead author, colleagues and management we have found that the interdependent relationship between the participants is not static. Power

is not fixed. Quite the contrary, we find that an “act of power” becomes “an invitation” as the university management suggests to stop the emerging initiative. Instead of accepting, the lead author's colleague takes this invitation to elaborate and challenge the manager. And taking part in these interactions shapes the author's own perception of power within the organization.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The paper set out to investigate how a personal and analytical autoethnographic research approach can provide an understanding of how innovative initiatives emerge as a result of ongoing collaboration across organizations. In this matter, we acknowledged the role personal experiences play in giving access to data that might not otherwise have been evident, and the fact that the research context was opportunistic.

Findings show that social constructs, such as power and trust, can influence the potential of instigating innovative acts in collaboration with others. Stumble data opened lines of inquiry into identifying those, and thus helped us recognize their importance as well as influences in the emerging relationships between stakeholders. We argue that innovation evolves in our constant search for meaning in our ways of relating to other people, and that we continually negotiate the conditions through which we collaborate; this in the end indicates that innovation cannot be predicted, rather it becomes a result of those negotiations, provocations and gestures as well as responses between people. Autoethnography has in this light helped instigate a sensemaking process for us to essentially understand how these influences on a longer term affects the potential for innovation.

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