

What about the Emotional Part of the Service Innovation Story?

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In literature about service innovation and service innovation processes there is practically no discussion about emotional features. Creating service innovations is generally described as a rational and cognitive-functional process. Consider, however, what actually happens in the organization when new innovations are created. Innovation induces a change of some sort. The mere innovation process and activities mean that some parts and persons in the organization are involved in trying to change current practices, structures and offerings. This might contain feelings of joy, enthusiasm, and hope for some. At the same time the process may potentially raise concerns, fear, and anger among others in the organization.

Not only the change process, i.e. the service innovation process, but also the outcome, the service innovation itself (which has to be performed by the organization when implemented), is loaded with emotions. Furthermore, reason and emotion are not independent; both are involved in decisions and activities performed during the service innovation process. Thus, they are “commingling forces” (Zaltman, 1997) driving the innovation process.

In this paper we like to open up the thinking and the previously not much discussed emotional side of service innovation processes. More specifically, we are focusing on the emotions within the service innovation project team as well as the emotional aspects of the interdependencies between project team members and other key actors. More specifically, we explore the following questions: Is it possible to understand more about service offerings and service innovations by revealing emotions? What difference does it make if we understand emotional aspects of service innovation processes?

We draw on an ethnographical, longitudinal case study based on participant observational data of project meetings during an entire service innovation process. During a 13-month period we observed how emotions influenced the progress and direction of the service innovation process. These changes in the service innovation process are based on both emotional intensity and duration. We suggest a framework covering motivation and perceived risk that can be used to map out four categories of emotional content in innovation processes.