Exploring Team Drivers of Improvisation in New Product Development

Kyriakos Kyriakopoulos
ALBA GBS
Marcel van Birgelen
School of Business and Economics, Maastricht University

Paper from the EMAC Regional Conference, Athens, Greece, September 27-29, 2023

Exploring Team Drivers of Improvisation in New Product Development

Abstract

Improvisation is an important competence in product innovation as firms increasingly face inherent uncertainty in new product development (NPD) process and frequent jolts in the external environment. While there is some empirical and conceptual work on the value of improvisation for several new product outcomes, there is lack of empirical research on the antecedents of improvisation in innovation studies. We attempt to address this gap by studying the role of team variation and team convergence traits in the occurrence of improvisation in NPD teams from manufacturing firms. We focus on several team convergence features—team trust, team support, procedural memory, declarative memory, and memory dispersion—as drivers of improvisation. We also focus on team variation features as drivers of improvisation: functional diversity, external information flows, and supervision autonomy. We explore our hypotheses with data from a survey among NPD teams from 118 Dutch manufacturing firms. We show that both team convergence and team variation factors are crucial drivers of improvisation.

Keywords: *improvisation, team convergence and variation, product innovation*