

ORGANIZING INNOVATION

How policies are translated into practice

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AKADEMISK AVHANDLING

För avläggande av ekonomie doktorsexamen i företagsekonomi som med tillstånd av Handelshögskolans fakultetsnämnd vid Göteborgs Universitet framlägges för offentlig granskning lördagen den 14 juni 2008, 13.15 i CG-salen vid Företagsekonomiska institutionen, Vasagatan 1, Göteborg.

ABSTRACT

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Language: English
ISBN: 978-91-7246-264-9
Doctoral thesis, 2008
289 pages

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Innovation is commonly seen as a driver of economic growth, which in turn is regarded as necessary for societal prosperity. Government agencies therefore prepare innovation policies and programmes in efforts to stimulate economic development. Following an organizing perspective and ethnographically inspired research techniques, this thesis explores how such policies are translated into practice in organizing a microwave innovation initiative.

The views on innovation have shifted over time and the latest fashion is to focus innovation systems, clusters and triple helix constellations, which all highlight inter-organizational relations as the locus of innovation. These theories are central to international and Swedish policymaking. This thesis begins with studying how such theories of innovation-producing arrangements are translated into a Swedish agency for innovation systems and inscribed into policy aimed at developing regional innovation systems and clusters. Theories are thus combined and edited as hybridized innovation scripts, or programmes-for-action, for how innovation initiatives should be organized. These innovation scripts are then prescribed in programme competitions where government agencies evaluate and fund winning innovation initiatives.

One such competition triggered the establishment of a cluster and innovation system initiative called Microwave Road (MWR), which aimed to further collaborative microwave technology development. In organizing MWR, microwave related companies, research institutes and public organizations were grouped together in an inter-organizational arrangement, as the innovation scripts were seen as prescribing. Once established, representatives for MWR organized meetings and seminars, and engaged in efforts of continuous recruiting of members, and government support and funding. However, organizing a microwave network resulted in a structural precedence where form was prioritized over content, and MWR struggled to initiate its desired technology development activities. Two technology initiatives were consequently launched. One aimed at grouping microwave and automotive companies to stimulate joint technology development, but the automotive representatives showed little interest and the group dissolved. The second built on local experiences and practices and was more successful as it focused work in a specific field of microwave technology, as opposed to organizational structuring. The two initiatives thus followed different organizing scripts: one focusing structure and one action.

This study shows how the innovation scripts became organizing scripts as they were enacted in MWR, resulting in inertia as organizational structure was focused rather than innovation activities. However, when the scripts edited and adjusted to the local setting, they afforded collaborative innovation work. This suggests that innovation policy should facilitate innovation initiatives, not impose structural prescriptions on how to organize.

Key words: innovation policy, cluster, innovation systems, network, microwave technology, organizing, practice, script, translation, structural precedence, editing, plans, action.