



Special Issue Call for Papers: Playing the Political Game of Innovation

Guest Editors

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Motivation and Objective of the Special Issue

The ideation, development, and market introduction of innovations is associated with substantial degrees of uncertainty and complexity within a firm and its environment. While firmsⁱ cope with these challenges by managing cross-functional innovation processes (Markham and Lee, 2013), high degrees of uncertainty and actors' different interests can create political battlefields within the boundaries of a firm (Markham, 2000; Sethi et al., 2012; Roeth et al., 2019). These battlefields are characterized by actors' political behavior, referring to "activities [to] use power and other resources to obtain one's preferred outcomes in a situation in which there is uncertainty or disagreement about choice" (Pfeffer, 1981).

However, innovations not only face internal contestation, but can provoke tensions between firms promoting the innovation and external actorsⁱⁱ who push their own political agendas to shape the fate of innovations (Fleming and Spicer, 2014; Sandberg and Aarikka-Stenroos, 2014). For example, an independent watchdog recently questioned the adequateness of seemingly staggering prices for a novel Novartis gene therapy for cancer (MDM, 2019). Adaptations in rental laws in NYC and tax enforcement in France severely affected landlords, who consequently withdrew their properties from the Airbnb platform (Waters, 2018). E-scooter sharing services were banned from some city centers (Shanahan, 2019). Car-hailing apps, such as Uber and Lyft, fought legal quarrels about classifying drivers as employees, as such classification would impact the cost structure of their business models (Ovide, 2020).

While these examples stress the crucial role of external actors and their political behaviors that influences innovations, we know little about how firms play the political game that innovations provoke across their firm boundaries. Research frequently investigates political behaviors within firms to understand how coalition building, framing, bargaining, and withholding information promote or challenge innovation projects (Kaplan, 2008; Radaelli et al., 2017). This perspective investigates political behaviors' antecedents, such as power and political capital (Fleming and Spicer, 2014; Ocasio et al., 2020), as well as specific political tactics (Cyert and March, 1963; Sethi et al.,



2012). Although case-evidence indicates that the interaction with external actors can support sub-groups of organizational actors to push their agenda (Roeth et al., 2019; Brattström and Faems, 2020) and achieve the legitimacy of their innovative activities (Bunduchi, 2017), the literature offers less insights on the enablers, specific mechanisms, boundary conditions, and outcomes of political behavior between internal and external actors (Davidsson et al., 2020).

Moving beyond firm boundaries, a growing body of management literature on inter-organizational collaboration (Birkinshaw et al., 2007; Brattström and Faems, 2020) and stakeholder management (Dorobantu et al., 2017; Gupta and Briscoe, 2020) emphasizes political behavior at the intersection between firms and external actors. This literature indicates that firms differ in their openness to external actors' political influence attempts and their ability to manage this political battlefield. Open politics – defined as “associations of groups with evolving interests and resources that operate within the constraints and opportunities afforded by a formal organizational system” (Weber and Waeger, 2017, p.886) – offer the opportunity to understand how external actors' interference with innovations is translated into the firm's internal political dynamics, affects organizational outcomes, and, in turn, provokes additional external politics. This might offer a novel perspective on innovation research. For example, customer interaction into the innovation process might not only help identify needs and solutions but can be used politically. Early signals of interest in a new product/service by existing customers increase top managers' commitment to providing the required resources (McDermott and O'Connor, 2002; Schweitzer et al., 2020) and influential customers seek to shape suppliers' innovation activity opportunistically (Ulkuniemi et al., 2015).

It also provides the opportunity to connect to broader research on the social shaping of technologies and industries (Maguire et al., 2004). For example, social media debates and discussions about forthcoming innovations can shape technological frames, which in turn affect the evolution of an innovation (Seidel et al., 2018). Further, institutional entrepreneurship literature highlights the relevance of early legitimacy-building and of collective action with external actors to steer an innovation through adverse market conditions (Garud and Rappa, 1994; Kukk et al., 2016).

While prior research provides many interesting insights, it remains unclear how different actors interact internally, with external actors, and vice versa in a politically laden environment to realize, respond to, and shape innovations. It is also interesting to explore if political behavior of internal and external actors varies with different types of innovations. Differences might, for example, exist between digital and non-digital innovations, as well as incremental and non-incremental ones, with the latter referring to discontinuous (Weber et al., 2019), radical (Slater et al., 2014), and disruptive innovation (Christensen, 2000) of products, services, and business models.

Aim and Scope

Against this backdrop, understanding the political battlefields within and beyond the firm can contribute to existing conversations about the innovation process and inform novel ones. We welcome research that seeks to explore how the antecedents, behaviors, and boundary conditions of politics within and beyond the firm shape internal as well as external innovation outcomes. Contributions



might, for instance, address the antecedents of political behavior, such as political skills, leadership, trust, power (Ocasio et al., 2020) or show its interrelation to organizational and external actors' political tactics and strategies (Kaplan and Tripsas, 2008; Roeth et al., 2019). Connections to related bodies of research on political ideologies, social movements, (digital) communities (Seidel et al., 2018; Gupta and Briscoe, 2020), and open innovation (Bogers et al., 2017; Schweitzer et al., 2021) would also be encouraged. We are looking for contributions that refine established theoretical lenses and develop novel ones at different levels of analysis to advance our knowledge on how the political battlefields shape the fate of technologies and innovations.

This special issue is open to conceptual, methodological, quantitative, and qualitative contributions to improve our theoretical understanding of organizational reality and to provide practitioners with guidelines and tools based on academic research. Some exemplary relevant themes and questions that illustrate the intended scope of this special issue include, but are not limited to, the following:

Topic	Questions
Foundations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we advance the methodological means to measure the antecedents, mechanisms, and consequences of political behavior? For instance, how could scales measure different political behaviors and tactics, such as withholding of information, legitimacy building, and framing, in quantitative research? What suitable proxies can assess power dynamics and subsequent behaviors within and beyond the firm? • How can experimental designs enhance our understanding of the contextual complexity of the political behavior that shapes innovations? How can we understand the antecedents and effects of political behavior on multiple levels? • How can we conceptualize and investigate the temporal interdependencies between the antecedents, behaviors, and outcomes of politics? For instance, how does the political behavior of external actors provoke firm reactions and, in turn, how do external actors react to these reactions? • Do political behaviors differ with stages of the innovation process (e.g., front end, development, and market introduction) and types of innovations (e.g., incremental vs. non-incremental innovations, digital vs. non-digital)? • Why are some corporations' innovations hit hard by external political behavior while others are more resilient? Does the political behavior of internal and external actors vary towards different types of firms (e.g., start-ups vs. incumbent firms)? How do industry characteristics shape corporate and external actors' political behavior?



Topic	Questions
<u>Within</u> firms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which individual antecedents (e.g., political capital) promote or impede innovation efforts? What contextual factors can explain potential differences (e.g., organizational climate, culture, control systems)? • How is political behavior related to functional and dysfunctional innovation outcomes? Which organizational designs, leadership styles, and social factors can control for its dysfunctions while leveraging its functional effects? How could managers act to avoid internal battlefields from erupting or react to reduce their detrimental effects? • Are some types of innovation more likely to provoke deleterious political behavior inside firms than others? What specific patterns of internal political behavior do digital (vs. non-digital) innovations follow in different industries? For instance, what type of internal political behaviors happen in more versus less successful digital transformation processes of traditional manufacturers? • How do different external actors' (e.g., customers, grassroots organizations, lead-users) behavior create or arbitrate internal battlefields? Can co-creation with customers or other external actors help to identify and remedy political behavior within firms? When does co-creation help and when does it hurt?
<u>Beyond</u> the boundaries of the firm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do organizational and external actors' characteristics (e.g., power, reputation, mindsets, and networks) interact to act politically when innovations are developed, introduced, and diffuse? Do different market-entry strategies, marketing instruments, and communication strategies influence external actors' political behavior differently? Why? • How do circles of action and reaction between internal and external actors evolve throughout the development, market introduction, and diffusion of an innovation? How can firms work with external actors to use political opportunities in the environment proactively and to anticipate political behaviors before they heat up? • What are the reasons why innovations create political battlefields between internal and external actors? When are such battlefields beneficial versus detrimental for innovations, industries, and society at large? • Which political behaviors of business partners could jeopardize the success of innovations? What tools and strategies can firms utilize to avoid opportunism? • When and how do firm actors give up a specific market because of political pressure? How do they adapt innovations to bring them elsewhere? When do they stay, fight, and win/lose?



Submission Deadline and Anticipated Publication Timeline

Milestone	Date
Call for papers announcement	June 2021
Virtual ideation session (optional)	September 2021
Submission deadline	April 15, 2022
First round decisions	September 1, 2022
Paper development session (for authors with invited revisions)	November 2022
Revision due	February 15, 2023
Second round decisions	June 1, 2023
Second revision due	September 1, 2023
Final editorial decisions	December 2023
Anticipated publication date	Summer 2024

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ⁱ We chose the term 'firms' to refer to different types of organizations. In this special issue, we are interested in research on incumbents, start-ups, family firms, small and medium sized firms, as well as large corporations.

ⁱⁱ External actors can include, but are not limited to, suppliers, customers, competitors, social movements, institutions, policy makers, and regulators.