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DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES ON FACILITATOR'S NEUTRALITY IN INNOVATION MANAGEMENT

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Effective group facilitation is essential for successful New Product Development (NPD) and product innovation. Research shows that process support in the form of facilitation plays an important role in both creativity and ideation, as well as managerial decision-making. However, the majority of studies focus on the early stages of NPD process, and little is known about what contributes to effective facilitation at the later stages. Due to the changing project characteristics over the course of the NPD, the elements of the facilitator's role are likely to alter accordingly. In this paper, we develop a conceptual model for facilitation at early to late stage NPD. We analyse theoretically the relationships between the key elements of facilitation, including neutrality, responsibility and authority, and the two NPD project characteristics: uncertainty and level of constraint. We make suggestions as for how the mentioned elements of facilitation are likely to change with the decrease in the uncertainty and the increase in level of constraint in the project. Furthermore, we propose that the model should be further developed empirically through a multiple case study. This research contributes to the literature by extending the theory on group facilitation, NPD and innovation, and has important managerial implications, helping companies to better suit facilitation practices to the particular stage of the NPD process.

Keywords: group facilitation; neutrality; new product development; multiple case study; innovation management; conceptual model