Managing service innovation: firm-level dynamic capabilities and policy options

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This PhD thesis reflects the ‘werdegang’ of my own thinking over the years on the topic of service innovation. Since the mid 90s I have had the opportunity to be involved in many national and international projects to better understand, define and measure, analyse and manage service innovation, both from a firm as well from an innovation policy perspective. First at TNO Strategy, Technology and Policy, from 1998 onwards through Dialogic Innovation & Interaction and since 2008 through the Amsterdam Centre for Service Innovation (AMSI). Although I do have additional professional interests, service innovation has grown into my most beloved and intense ‘professional hobby’.

Especially three projects for the European Commission (over the period 1996-2006) and a multi-annual project for the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs (1998-2003) provided the necessary continuity for working regularly on service innovation. Some of the concepts and notions, typologies and policy perspectives on service innovation were developed as part of these projects. By co-operating with many fine innovation researchers in these and many other projects, I have been able as an innovation researcher working mostly in a non-academic setting, to contribute modestly to theory building in service innovation research and codify some of the conceptual and empirical service innovation research, mostly as a by-product of the project work. Although I was tempted (and pushed by colleagues and friends) over the years to do a PhD in service innovation, it was Professor Mark de Jong who in 2008 persuaded me to combine working on a PhD with building up the Amsterdam Centre for Service Innovation (AMSI). After more than a decade of banging on the doors of policy-makers and academia to take the topic of service innovation seriously, I felt he had made me an offer I could not refuse. It also offered me the opportunity to do a typical mid-career maintenance stop or investment, away from the intense project work at Dialogic.

Writing this PhD thesis was like an unusual act of reverse engineering. I wanted to use some of the materials codified over quite an extensive period, codify some of the empirical research already performed and at the same time invest in (further) developing a sound and balanced theoretical framework. Working from a business school now and noticing that both senior management dealing with service innovation and innovation policy-makers were in need of a management perspective regarding service innovation, I decided to develop this perspective as a logical focus point. So I literally went on ‘strategy safari’ and was introduced to the wilds of strategic management (to paraphrase Mintzberg and colleagues). This subfield of business studies I experienced is much more diverse and lively in terms of academic debate than anticipated. I hope that by combining the various traditions in service (innovation) management, the Resource-Based View/Dynamic Capabilities View of the firm and the innovation systems approach, this thesis adds to the academic discourse and the world of both service innovation managers and innovation policy-makers. This is for others to judge.
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In the first place I would like to thank my two promoters. Mark de Jong, you always had faith in me and share my passion for service innovation. On many occasions when I had difficult decisions to make, you were there to help me out. Tom Elfring not only guided me through the RBV and DCV literature, but challenged me to be more to the point, to write in a more Anglo-Saxon style and pushed me to articulate precisely where the ‘Pim den Hertog-factor’ is in all this. Thank you both and I look forward to expanding AMSI together with you in the coming years. I would further like to thank all the other members of the PhD Committee, Dr. Wietze van der Aa, Prof. Lorike Hagdorn, Prof. Dany Jacobs, Prof. Rick Maes, Prof. Ian Miles and Prof. Luis Rubalcaba. It is an honour for me to defend my thesis before such a diverse and experienced committee. Wietze van der Aa, I would like to thank you especially for our ongoing discussion on the number of dimensions in a multi-dimensional service (innovation) model, for sharing your view on the world as well as your tricks of the trade on how to deal with students and education in general. Thank you also for pushing me to have a conversation with Professor David Teece while in Berkeley (April 2009); this gave me the necessary energy boost to apply the DCV perspective to managing service innovation which continued for at least six months.

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