

ePub^{WU} Institutional Repository

Katharina Jarmai and Heike Christiane Vogel-Pöschl

Meaningful collaboration for responsible innovation

Article (Published)
(Refereed)

Original Citation:

Jarmai, Katharina and Vogel-Pöschl, Heike Christiane (2019) Meaningful collaboration for responsible innovation. *Journal of Responsible Innovation*. pp. 1-7. ISSN 2329-9037

This version is available at: <http://epub.wu.ac.at/7026/>

Available in ePub^{WU}: July 2019

ePub^{WU}, the institutional repository of the WU Vienna University of Economics and Business, is provided by the University Library and the IT-Services. The aim is to enable open access to the scholarly output of the WU.

This document is the publisher-created published version.



Meaningful collaboration for responsible innovation

Katharina Jarmai & Heike Vogel-Pöschl

To cite this article: Katharina Jarmai & Heike Vogel-Pöschl (2019): Meaningful collaboration for responsible innovation, Journal of Responsible Innovation, DOI: [10.1080/23299460.2019.1633227](https://doi.org/10.1080/23299460.2019.1633227)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23299460.2019.1633227>



© 2019 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 03 Jul 2019.




Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Meaningful collaboration for responsible innovation

Katharina Jarmai  and Heike Vogel-Pöschl

Institute for Managing Sustainability, Vienna University of Economics and Business, Vienna, Austria

ABSTRACT

Many innovative businesses have discovered an added value in collaborating with experts, users or other stakeholders in developing innovative products or services. Not all collaboration with stakeholders, however, corresponds to the criteria for opening up an innovation process to the needs of societal actors under the terms of responsible innovation. The question of what makes collaboration meaningful in the sense of responsible innovation was presented and discussed in a 75 min workshop at the European Science Open Forum (ESOF) in Toulouse, France in June 2018. Identified success factors and challenges for making a collaboration process meaningful for the collaborating parties highlight the importance of competent process preparation and facilitation, investment of time and effort to enable mutual understanding and the development of trustful relationships as well as the collaborating partners' willingness to implement changes that result from the collaboration process.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 18 February 2019
Accepted 14 June 2019

KEYWORDS

Responsible innovation;
meaningful collaboration;
public engagement;
stakeholder engagement;
ESOF 2018

Introduction

Many innovative businesses have discovered an added value in collaborating with experts, users or other stakeholders in developing innovative products or services. Not all collaboration with stakeholders, however, corresponds to the criteria for stakeholder engagement under the terms of responsible innovation. The question of what makes collaboration with stakeholders 'meaningful' in the sense of responsible innovation was at the core of a 75 min workshop at the European Science Open Forum (ESOF) in Toulouse, France in June 2018.

In the first part of the workshop organized by the Institute for Managing Sustainability, our understanding of meaningful collaboration for responsible innovation (see section 'Collaboration as an essential element of responsible innovation') was presented through five short input presentations by international experts from research and industry. In the second part of the workshop, the 40 workshop participants were invited to discuss challenges and success factors of meaningful collaboration with one of the five speakers at five different tables. The group of workshop participants included European research and innovation policy-makers, academics with diverse backgrounds and

CONTACT Katharina Jarmai  katharina.jarmai@wu.ac.at  Institute for Managing Sustainability, Vienna University of Economics and Business, Welthandelsplatz 1, Building D1, 2nd floor, 1020 Vienna, Austria

© 2019 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

representatives of small as well as of large companies from sectors including information and communication technologies, cybersecurity and e-health. At each table, a facilitator moderated the discussion and captured agreed success factors and challenges on a flip chart by means of large post-it notes. The workshop was concluded by short presentations of success factors and challenges by each of the five facilitators.

After the workshop, the authors clustered success factors and challenges identified at the five discussion tables according to common themes. These themes and the authors' conclusions drawn from the discussion are presented in sections 'Success factors and challenges of meaningful collaboration and Conclusions', respectively.

Collaboration as an essential element of responsible innovation

Opening up research and innovation processes to the needs of societal actors other than the immediate beneficiaries is central to the concept of responsible innovation. This element of responsible innovation is discussed under different terms in the academic literature; including public engagement, stakeholder engagement, public participation, community involvement or stakeholder involvement (Marschalek 2017). Activities range from integrating non-experts in research and innovation projects to involving representatives of the general public in agenda setting and policy-formation. In responsible innovation, such engagement with stakeholders can be a means to ensure inclusion and a democratic approach. Inclusion of 'new voices in the governance of science and innovation' (Owen et al. 2013, 1571) in responsible innovation processes aims to increase legitimacy of the process and its output, on the one hand, and attempts to increase the diversity of perspectives, on the other. The former aspect concerns the prevention of public resistance, while the latter can be described from an innovation perspective, which postulates that the combination of diverse perspectives, when complementary, are conducive to innovation. A democratic approach is inherently contained in the fact that citizens are included in decisions about (technological) developments that will shape society and people's daily lives (cf. Powell and Colin 2008).

To fulfil these requirements, we understand that engagement for responsible innovation needs to be of collaborative nature (cf. Senge et al. 2007; Arenas, Sanchez, and Murphy 2013). Stakeholders need to be involved in continuous manner that goes beyond mere consultation (cf. Brand and Blok 2019) and provided with the information, power and opportunity to play a role in decision-making; in order to create what Cavallaro et al. (2014) refer to as a 'mutually beneficial interaction' (14). We further draw on two contributions from outside the responsible innovation discourse (ISEA 1999; Jeffery 2009) that describe capabilities a company needs to possess to conduct meaningful collaboration processes: According to these contributions, an organization aiming to conduct meaningful collaboration needs to, first of all, be prepared for change that may result from engaging with stakeholders. Second, it needs to possess the ability to run an open, clear and transparent process with a diverse group of stakeholders; in which most stakeholders will have diverging opinions, perceptions and desires. Vital tasks include an adequate briefing of stakeholders to enable them to develop their own well-informed opinions, encouraging them to express their views and disclosing sufficient information to enable them to comment on the collaboration process. When put into practice in a professional matter, these capabilities will allow an organisation to implement an open and

transparent collaboration process that facilitates the exchange of information, views and opinions between a diverse set of stakeholders and becomes ‘meaningful’ to all parties involved.

Success factors and challenges of meaningful collaboration

Success factors and challenges identified by the workshop participants were collected and clustered into categories, which are presented in order of decreasing quantity of factors included in each category; starting with the one that contains the most points raised by the discussants.

Success factors

The largest group of success factors of meaningful collaboration describes criteria for a clear and well-organized collaboration process. This includes success factors such as transparency as well as the clarity of roles and power or spheres of influence on both sides. The workshop participants emphasized the need to organize rather than to improvise a collaboration process. Organisations can achieve the latter through project and collaboration plans as well as the usage of established methods. Finally, organisations need to create physical or virtual spaces that allow for collaboration and communication.

The second largest group of success factors can be summed up under the term ‘mutual understanding’. Success factors in this group include the development of a common language and understanding. They also go beyond the aspect of communication and information to the will to try to understand each other’s logics; and the training necessary to achieve this capacity. Such a training would need to take place on both sides in order to enable people to bridge the world of organisations to the world of stakeholders.

The next group concerns contextual factors that were considered favourable for a successful collaboration process. Businesses are subject to influences from their surroundings, i.e. customers, suppliers and the general public, which provide companies with incentives to act in a certain way. This is reflected in the identified contextual factors for meaningful collaboration; namely civil society pressure, (economic) incentives and (expected) reputational gains.

The final group contains loosely connected aspects that concern basic company strategic orientation. It includes engagement with societal values, the aim to include diverse perspectives in collaboration, a participatory, bottom-up approach to collaboration as well as the objective to take action in order to achieve actual change.

Challenges

To enable meaningful collaboration, it is crucial for a company to face a set of challenges and react to them in an appropriate way. Four thematic groups of challenges could be identified among the collected points of discussion. These are again presented in order of decreasing number of elements per group.

The largest group combines challenges that can be summed up under the phrase ‘differences between the collaborating parties’. It addresses both differences in content as well as differences in the communication of content, which refers to the phenomenon of different

collaborating parties using different terms and phrases or framing issues differently. The latter can have a major impact on how issues are perceived by the respective other party. The challenge in this regard is for each collaborating party to try to understand other collaborators' contexts, rationales and framings. In addition, the participants highlighted different working modes and speeds of businesses in comparison with individuals as an additional challenge in the set-up of meaningful collaboration processes. Participants also pointed out issues on the relationship level, which include diverging stakeholder expectations, different objectives and a lack of trust in each other.

The second group of issues concerns the distribution of power in the collaboration process. Like in any social interaction, power plays an important role in collaboration as it can have severe impacts on the outcomes of working together. The workshop participants pointed out how keeping a power balance – so one side is not overpowered by another – as major challenge for meaningful collaboration. In this context, participants emphasized how unequal access to information between the collaborating parties and pre-defined ownership of results can influence the distribution of power; and that the levels of transparency and openness in communication shape power structures in the process.

The next group concerns challenges that we classify as 'generic' business constraints. This group includes general time constraints of for-profit entities, budgetary limitations dependence on external influences in the form of technological developments and perceived market needs. These generic aspects constitute challenges for any collaboration process; meaningful or not.

Challenges connected to the identification and recruitment of the 'right' stakeholders for collaboration make up the fourth group. Issues pointed out include the challenge of identifying those stakeholders that will be able to contribute to the specific goal of the collaboration process and providing them with incentives that will motivate them to take part in the collaboration process.

Conclusions

The success factors and challenges identified by workshop participants enrich our understanding of meaningful collaboration for responsible innovation. Overall, the identified success factors and challenges connect well to the previous literature on (meaningful) collaboration. What was interesting to see is that the identified issues put particular emphasis on the importance of investing time and effort into designing and carrying out a collaboration process in order to make it meaningful to all parties involved. This aspect received a surprising amount of attention and turned out to be the largest cluster of success factors. It concerns all phases of the collaboration process and includes preparatory and follow-up work. It also addresses the development of physical or virtual spaces dedicated to stakeholder interaction. Competent preparation and briefing of all participants is as crucial as professional process facilitation and comprehensible documentation. This connects to what Jeffery (2009) referred to as the capacity of companies to implement a collaborative process with a diverse group of stakeholders; but goes beyond in the way that, in order to make the collaboration meaningful to all parties involved, a company will not only need the ability to do this but to do it *well*.

Organisations aiming to implement meaningful stakeholder collaboration further have to make sure that stakeholders have enough time to develop trusting relationships. This emphasis on trust can be found in the literature (ISEA 1999; Jeffery 2009; Arenas, Sanchez, and Murphy 2013) and was repeatedly highlighted by workshop participants. Trustful relationships will support mutual understanding, while a lack of trust will keep interaction at a superficial level.

Another main conclusion we draw is that one of the main challenges of meaningful collaboration can be found in exactly this interaction between different groups of stakeholders. To make a collaboration process meaningful it is vital to invest time and effort into discovering rationales and contexts of the respective collaboration partner. This connects to the importance of creating space for relational work described by e.g. Senge et al. (2007) and Bolz and de Bruin (2019). In their least complex form, these differences will arise in the form of diverging opinions about a particular matter. Discrepancies become more difficult to grasp, however, when collaborating parties use different vocabulary to discuss the same matter or when they place it into completely different contexts. Varying speeds and work modes of for-profit companies compared to individuals or other types of organisations can further reinforce misunderstandings.

The requirements for meaningful collaboration addressed above are challenging to reconcile with the fact that businesses are generally constrained in the allocation of time and resources. Similar tensions in applying responsible innovation in a business context have already been described by Brand and Blok (2019). While it would go beyond this piece to suggest how to alleviate these tensions, we conclude that *if* organisations want to engage in collaboration that is supposed to be meaningful to all participants, they will be well advised to invest time and effort into planning, ensure expert facilitation and develop the capacity to deal with diverging rationales.

Finally, the collaboration will only become meaningful if its outcome has not been determined beforehand by only one of the collaborating parties. While this might sound trivial, it became clear, when following the workshop discussions, that it can actually be considered courageous for an organization to open up, be clear and transparent, and allow external influence on internal decision-making processes.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This work was supported by the European Commission under grant number 710543 and grant number 787991.

Notes on contributors

Dr. Katharina Jarmai is a research fellow at the Institute for Managing Sustainability at Vienna University of Economics and Business. Her areas of interest include responsible innovation, European research and innovation policy, innovation systems and social learning processes. She has been collaborating in European projects in the areas of sustainable development, European research and innovation policy and responsible innovation; providing profound experience in quantitative

and qualitative empirical research methods, with particular emphasis on case study research and the preparation, conduction, and analysis of expert interviews. She is currently coordinating the Horizon 2020 project ‘COMPASS – Evidence and opportunities for responsible innovation in SMEs’. She holds a doctoral degree from the Vienna University of Economics and Business and has been attaining additional qualifications in the areas of group dynamics, moderation, and organizational development at the Alpen-Adria University Klagenfurt (Austria).

Heike Vogel-Pöschl, M.Sc. is a research fellow at the Institute for Managing Sustainability at Vienna University of Economics and Business. Her work focusses on Responsible Research and Innovation and sustainability standards. She has experience in the field of sustainability management and reporting, as well as sustainable supply chain management. She studied social economics at the Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nuremberg (DE), combined with a study abroad to the Universidad de Guadalajara (MX). She then completed the international master’s program in Sustainable Resource Management at the Technical University of Munich (DE). Through her work in the environmental departments of companies and consultancies, she has gained valuable experience in the practical implementation of sustainability in companies.

ORCID

Katharina Jarmai  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6631-4270>

References

- Arenas, D., P. Sanchez, and M. Murphy. 2013. “Different Paths to Collaboration between Businesses and Civil Society and the Role of Third Parties.” *Journal of Business Ethics* 115 (4): 723–739.
- Bolz, K., and A. de Bruin. 2019. “Responsible Innovation and Social Innovation: Toward an Integrative Research Framework.” *International Journal of Social Economics*, doi:10.1108/IJSE-10-2018-0517.
- Brand, T., and V. Blok. 2019. “Responsible Innovation in Business: A Critical Reflection on Deliberative Engagement as a Central Governance Mechanism.” *Journal of Responsible Innovation* 6 (1): 4–24.
- Cavallaro, F., Obach, M., Schroeder, D., Chennells, R., Snyders, L., Steenkamp, A., and A. Kumar. 2014. “RRI and End Users” Deliverable D4.2 of the FP7 project PROGRESS. http://www.progressproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/ProGReSS-D4_2-RRI_and_End_Users-20141031_1200_final.pdf.
- Institute of Social and Ethical AccountAbility (ISEA). 1999. “AccountAbility 1000 (AA1000) framework. Standard, Guidelines and Professional Qualification”. <http://www.dea.univr.it/documenti/OccorrenzaIns/matdid/matdid728652.pdf>.
- Jeffery, N. 2009. “Stakeholder Engagement: a Road Map to Meaningful Engagement.” Doughty Centre ‘How to do Corporate Responsibility’ series. <https://www.fundacionseres.org/lists/informes/attachments/1118/stakeholder%20engagement.pdf>
- Marschalek, I. 2017. “Public Engagement in Responsible Research and Innovation. A Critical Reflection from the Practitioner’s Point of View”. PhD diss., University of Vienna. https://www.zsi.at/object/publication/4498/attach/Marschalek_Public_Engagement_in_RRI.pdf.
- Owen, R., J. Stilgoe, P. Macnaghten, J. Gorman, E. Fisher, and D. Guston. 2013. ““A Framework for Responsible Innovation”.” In *Responsible Innovation, Managing the Responsible Emergence of Science and Innovation in Society*, edited by R. Owen, J. Bessant, and M. Heintz, 51–74. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.
- Powell, M. C., and M. Colin. 2008. “Meaningful Citizen Engagement in Science and Technology. What Would it Really Take?” *Science Communication* 30 (1): 126–136.
- Senge, P., B. Lichtenstein, K. Kaeufer, H. Bradbury, and J. Carroll. 2007. “Collaborating for Systemic Change.” *MIT Sloan Management Review* 48 (2): 43–53.