

# Practising open innovation: a framework of reference

Practising  
open  
innovation

Cinzia Battistella  
*University of Siena, Siena, Italy, and*  
Alberto Felice De Toni and Elena Pessot  
*University of Udine, Udine, Italy*

1311

Received 17 November 2015  
Revised 26 October 2016  
Accepted 3 November 2016

## Abstract

**Purpose** – This work provides new insights into possible managerial choices and development directions for practising open innovation (OI) in companies. The purpose of this paper is to explore the different practices, actors and tools adopted for opening up the innovation process, in particular, by small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that are still facing difficulties in its implementation.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The paper is based on a literature review and an exploratory survey of a sample of 85 European SMEs.

**Findings** – The study identifies a total of 23 practices, 20 actors and 11 tools involved in the OI processes of companies. It highlights, through literature and empirical evidence, how different combinations of practices, actors and tools are put into practice.

**Research limitations/implications** – The developed framework offers new insights both from OI literature and from practitioners' point of view into the supporting decision-making processes regarding which practices to implement, tools to adopt and actors to collaborate with. A wider investigation is recommended to include more variables to define the differences among the combinations of practices, actors and tools in terms of types of innovation (e.g. product, process, etc.), the openness degree and other contextual factors.

**Originality/value** – The originality of this paper is based on the fact that it focusses on a practical perspective of OI implementation, building a framework of reference from previous literature and empirical investigation.

**Keywords** Open innovation, Practices, Tools, Actors

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

The open innovation (OI) paradigm has received an extensive number of contributions from different research streams (Gassmann, 2006), taking into account a variety of dimensions such as strategy, leadership and organisational structure (Giannopoulou *et al.*, 2011). The exponential growth of this research field has also led to the publication of numerous reviews, addressing major research streams on different topics. In particular, previous studies have focussed on notions of OI, OI forms (in terms of inbound/outbound/coupled processes, number, type and variety of partners, mechanisms, opened phases of the innovation process, types of innovation, focus), effectiveness (in terms of the firm's general or innovation performance), contextual factors (size of the company, industry/technology intensity) and strategic orientation (leader/follower, leadership and internal culture, business models, impact of appropriability) (see e.g. literature reviews by Elmquist *et al.*, 2009; Huizingh, 2011; Kovacs *et al.*, 2015; West *et al.*, 2014).

Beyond theoretical issues, little research has been conducted to thoroughly investigate effective OI implementation in companies, i.e. practices or modes (Giannopoulou *et al.*, 2011; Spithoven *et al.*, 2013; West and Bogers, 2014). While OI practices adoption has been widely proved in different companies and in different contexts (Huizingh, 2011), scholars (Chesbrough and Brunswicker, 2014; Docherty, 2006; Gassmann, 2006; Giannopoulou *et al.*, 2011) agree that companies are still facing difficulties in implementing them, particularly in terms of organisational and cultural barriers. Moreover, companies interact with various combinations of actors, with different roles and strength of ties (Lee *et al.*, 2010) and adopt diverse sets of instruments (Rass *et al.*, 2013) in their OI activities.

