International Workshop
User and User-Driven Innovation:
Status, Prospects and Implications
Location: The Open University – Milton Keynes
Dates: March 8th and 9th 2010

Background

User and user-driven innovation are distinct but overlapping categories of innovation. User innovation involves the user in changing a product to improve its utility, or developing the product, if it is not available on the market. Firms that change their process technologies and practices are examples of user innovators. Individuals, as end users or consumers, also engage in user innovation.

User driven innovation involves a response to the needs and desires of specific sets of users in the design and delivery of products but the products do not necessarily involve end users directly. These needs may be communicated through service agreements, requests for upgrades, complaints, or through interaction with sales and marketing staff. This information is a key input to product innovation.

User and user driven innovation are both becoming more prevalent in a range of industrial sectors as a result of the use of platform technologies such as information and communication technologies (ICTs) and biotechnologies. This is true both in industrially developed and developing country contexts, although the need for increased innovation of this type is often expressed differently in low and high income environments.

There are also calls for more user involvement in innovation in areas such as healthcare and health technology. In the US and Europe for example, there is now a widespread feeling that more 'patient focus' might provide the basis for improved quality and more efficiency in healthcare. In global health initiatives it is now common to find schemes organised on the basis of acknowledged need to increase user engagement in innovation so that products are appropriate and sought after. This interest is reflected in the growing interest in 'public sector innovation' and the need to understand the concept of a market for public goods.

In agriculture, there have long been calls for increased farmer participation in the creation of agricultural inputs and equipment and in the establishment of agriculture as a knowledge-based industry taking advantage of platform technologies. This has particularly applied to small farmers in developing countries who are ill served by mainstream technological and innovation trajectories. In transport there has also been an interest in radical new approaches to innovation based on user and user driven innovation.

Proposed workshop

It is in this background that the above workshop is being organised to provide an opportunity for discussion and further thinking about the drivers behind increased interest in user and user driven innovation in various contexts. This workshop will also devote time to **exploring definitions and meanings** of user and user driven innovation and related terms such as user-led and user-centred innovation (among others), and examining the practical implications of these terms. One question that could be

asked is whether there are universal definitions that can apply to all sectors?   Are there definitional differences and typologies which might be developed for different sectors, for example industrial sectors on the one hand and service sectors on the other hand?

We will also aim to address the **relationship between organisational and institutional forms and effective user and user driven innovation in different contexts**. What sort of 'social technologies' are needed to bring about user stimulated technologies and innovation in different contexts? What sort of organisations and institutions are needed to develop and maximise the potential of these types of innovation?

New web-based interaction and new design technologies provide the basis for new interactions between producers and users. What is the nature of some of this new technology? What kinds of interaction does it allow for and provoke?   For example, what role do web 2.0 applications have in user and user driven innovation?

Another area of interest that the workshop will want to address is **measurement or quantification of user and user driven innovation.** To what extent are existing methodologies adequate for data collection about user and user driven innovation? What sort of approaches might be necessary for more accurate reflections on the extent of and nature of these types of innovation? What sort of metrics are useful for policy?

Finally and crucially the workshop will ask **what the implications of increased focus on and prevalence of user driven and user innovation will be for developing countries?**   What are the geographical implications of more user engagement in innovation? Do particular types of value chain and governance styles lend themselves more readily to user and user driven engagement? Is it the case that firms based in the global South will more readily engage in user and user driven innovation than firms based in industrially developed contexts? Might user and user driven innovation herald a new era in key areas of development, intellectual property management and business models? Is there a possibility, for example, that new web-based technologies and ICTs combined with new design technologies might allow for low income producers across a range of sectors to articulate their equipment needs to a far greater extent than has previously been the case?

The event

The workshop, jointly organised by The Open University and the United Nations University – Maastricht Economic and social Research and training centre on Innovation and Technology (UNU-MERIT), will be a 2-day event (March 8th and 9th 2010), and takes place at The Open University, in Milton Keynes, United Kingdom. Each day will have two sessions in the morning and two sessions in the afternoon. The last session on the 2nd day will be a reflection on all contributions and consideration of future activities or publications.

Participants will be drawn from a wide range of innovation analysts, design specialists, development academics, policy practitioners and others with an interest in user and user driven innovation.

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