

# Aligning expectations and marketing communications for multi-stakeholder innovation networks

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**Short description:** PhD defence Bram Roosens - Faculty of Business and Economics

## **Abstract**

Innovation is a key driver for growth and competitive advantage. Where companies have long strictly relied on their internal resources to steer the innovation process, the development of multi-stakeholder networks for innovation is securely growing in many industries and is considered as an important strategic asset for organizations. This dissertation zooms in on the role of communications within the context of multi-stakeholder innovation networks. Specifically, we focus on two communication perspectives throughout the collaborative innovation journey: (1) the internal communication process between different stakeholders within the innovation network and (2) the decisions that partners should make when developing external communications about their co-created innovation towards consumers.

In light of the internal communications process, this dissertation focusses on the role of expectations. It starts with developing a holistic framework of stakeholder expectations within innovation networks, where stakeholders' collaboration and behavior are studied through the interplays between four types of expectations (outcome, process, relational & context). Furthermore, we argue that roles in such networks can be distinguished based on sets of expectations, distinguishing five types of stakeholders: collaborators, supporters, drivers, opportunists, and orchestrators. Next, we study the role of expectations throughout the innovation process, linking them to inter-organizational collaboration dynamics and network outcomes. Our findings imply that different network compositions in terms of expectations need different management and orchestration approaches. This dissertation underlines the crucial task of an orchestrator to try to understand and manage the expectations of the different stakeholders. Finally, we disentangle the potential positive and negative impact of conflicting expectations on successful collaboration in an innovation network.

In the second part of this dissertation, two experimental studies investigate how innovation partners should communicate about their joint innovation efforts. Our findings show that there is great potential for firms to positively impact consumers' perceptions about their organization and products/services if they communicate explicitly about their alliance partners, and that they should engage their partner organizations to do the same. In doing so, organizations should also strongly emphasize their close collaboration during innovation processes when communicating about alliances. Nevertheless, they should make sure they are still perceived as independent partners. Firms and their partners can do this by sending out their own message, complementing the messages of other partners, and not just copy the same message content for all partners.