

Elements and trends of service innovation context: an action research to investigate the role of technologies within B2B market

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Purpose - The work proposes an explorative-experimental validation of the theorization on service innovation context originally proposed by Edvardsson et al. (2018), offering an empirical evidence of the role played by technologies in the Business-to-Business market. Specifically, the paper pursues a twofold objective: on the one hand, providing a practical feedback on the main elements (space, resources, institutional arrangements) and trends (speed, granularity, liquification) characterizing the context in which service innovation is carried out; on the other, verifying the existence of further elements and trends capable of guiding the innovative processes of B2B high-tech companies.

Design/Methodology/approach - Given the high complexity of the market investigated (B2B) (Hohenschwert and Geiger, 2015; Barile and Polese, 2010; Gummesson and Polese, 2009), the study follows the multimethod research approach, based on the synergic integration of two methodologies, the multiple case study (Sigala, 2018; Åkesson et al., 2016; Högstöm et al., 2015) and action research (Reason, & Bradbury, 2001). The information used is collected and analyzed over a one-year period from four high-tech companies, involved in ambitious service innovation processes within different sectors of the B2B market: automotive; mechatronics; IT; and manufacturing.

Findings - The analysis supports the conceptual theorization proposed by Edvardsson et al. (2018), highlighting the constant presence of elements and trends typical of the context in which service innovation is realized. This highlights the importance that space, resources, institutional arrangements, speed, granularity and liquification take on for the effective achievement of the objectives pursued by high-tech companies operating in the B2B market. In addition, the empirical results suggest the opportunity to enrich the theoretical model by considering two further aspects characterizing the service innovation context: the “actors” (as an element) and the “sustainability” (as a trend).

Research limitations - The main limitation of the work is represented by the low sample size (only four companies involved), which could raise doubts about the possibility of generalizing the results obtained.

Practical implications - The use of an experimental analysis for the identification of the main elements and trends characterizing the service innovation context provides a possible answer to the scholars and practitioners’ need to know the most important aspects to be appropriately considered in order to facilitate the start up and development of innovative processes or new ways of co-create value in high-tech companies operating in B2B markets.

Originality/value - The originality of the paper is closely linked to the experimental approach followed to verify the effective adherence of a theoretical framework focused on service innovation in a context (B2B market) characterized by high complexity of observation, study, analysis and interpretation.

Key words - Service innovation; Business-to-Business; Technologies; Action research; multiple case study.

Paper type - Research paper

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