Innovation and product development and Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus, capital and field.

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Technology Management Stream (innovation and emancipation: the management of technology and the process of work).

Stream conveyor – R. Hull.
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The study of organizational innovation has both a long history and has resulted in a large volume of published research. Much of this now focuses upon elucidating ontical “best practice” models of product development and innovation. This paper is based upon grounded research within small manufacturing organizations and attempts an ontological understanding of being innovative rather than an ontical description of product development processes. We argue that these organizations are aware of but do not utilise the “best practice” models for product development and that these strategies cannot be reduced and simplified down to the rational pursuit of an economic, profit maximising goal. They are better conceived through Bourdieu’s theory of habitus, capital and field.

Our paper presents data from two SMEs within our research sample to demonstrate that an organization’s relational position in various fields leads to and affect their multiple strategies used for product development. We will argue further that:

There cannot be a “best practice” model for product innovation. Such a concept is based upon a static and simplified concept of strategy and process. The concept of “best practice” is a form of symbolic violence enacted by some organizations over others and the continued use of this term by academics should now be questioned.

Introduction

How organizations innovate has been a subject of interest to academics from disciplines such as economics, psychology, sociology, engineering and management for many years. This has naturally lead to a wide and diverse literature on the subject. Despite this vast interest, or perhaps because of it, organizational innovation remains an area of considerable academic debate (Van de Ven and Rogers, 1988; Wolfe, 1994; and Slappendel, 1996) but one that has, according to Wolfe (1994), remarkably little consistency.

Van de Ven (1986) argues that innovation is both a product and process of human interaction. Innovation, and therefore the management of innovation and new product development, is socially and culturally based. Innovation here is seen as a process rather than an event, it has a temporal, unfolding nature, it is not the result of some simple action that happens at a single point in time and space. He argues further that innovation has a transactional nature that suggests it involve issues of discourse, knowledge and power between agents in some form of social system (or institutional order). Finally an innovation may take many forms, one of which is the creation of a new product. New product development (NPD) is one form of organizational innovation.
NPD research during the last decade has concentrated upon speed and time to market. The implicit, and at times explicit, beliefs are that: the rate of technological development is continually increasing; long product development times are not cost effective; markets are changing more rapidly; market competition is increasing (see for instance, Stalk and Hout, 1990; Vesey, 1991; Clark and Fujimoto, 1991). These beliefs lead academics, the general media and management practitioners to exhort organizations to compress their product development times, in effect to adopt time compression new product development process as the “best practice” for product innovation.

This paper is neither a review of the various models suggested as “best practice” nor does it present a further ontical model of a NPD process. It is instead concerned with developing an understanding of the ontology of product innovation. To paraphrase Heidegger, it considers what is the way of being innovative. In so doing it attempts a counter-positional critique of the philosophy of the accepted views of new product development. It will develop a theory of new product development based particularly on the works of Georges Bataille and Pierre Bourdieu.

**A critique of innovation theories**

Thomas (1994) develops a sociological critique of theories of the management of innovation. He argues against a structural determinism that he views as underpinning theories of management of innovation. He suggests that innovation is too often viewed as being technologically or environmentally determined.

Technological determinism here assumes innovation to be driven by an “ineluctable flow”. Technology here constrains and determines how new products may be designed, developed and manufactured. The development of an innovation, or new product, becomes inevitable as society progresses towards some utopian future. To stand in the way would be to oppose this obvious and inevitable progress. These theories of innovation suggest why radical innovation may arise. They do not however focus upon the process that occurs.

Environmental determinism assumes that the structure of an organization’s market determines how it produces new products. Organizational strategy and tactics, and new product development processes are chosen according to the demands of the market. An environmental deterministic position leads to a homogenisation of organizational forms and practices within a market or a market niche (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Freeman and Hannan 1987). The assumption is that organizations will become isomorphic as they mimic the practices of the most successful firm in their particular niche. Thus a successful organization in a turbulent market is one that can respond to change rapidly. This, according to Eisenhardt and Tabrizi (1995), requires them to adopt a new product development process that is equally open to adaptation. This then becomes the accepted practice within a market as the organization’s success is recognised and others start to mimic it.
A post-structural critique of the best practice NPD models.

Technological and environmental deterministic models are based on ontic methodological assumptions. Primary here is a belief in objectification so that a concept may be isolated, studied and measured. Objectification however requires both a reified object and neutrality (Heidegger, 1988). Innovation and the practice of innovation are neither. They are contextual processes that involve the actions of multiple actors. To paraphrase Heidegger, innovation has two forms, it is both a means to an end and a human activity (Heidegger, 1977), innovation therefore has a strategic nature. We will consider this further from Bourdieu’s theory of capital.

An unstated and therefore unquestioned assumption (or “doxa” in Bourdieu’s terminology [Bourdieu, 1977]) of the ontic methods is that firms use “best practice” as a rational mechanism to most efficiently meet the rules of their structurally determined world. In so doing there is little, if any, need to question fundamentally what it means to be innovative. Ontological concerns disappear under the need to provide ontical positivistic research of the processes. The possibility that non-rational and irrational forces, such as creativity, passion, desire, may affect NPD disappears under the weight of rationality. We will argue that the tension created between the rational and the irrational forms the ontological being of innovation.

New product development, desire and the fear of death.

Georges Bataille presents a series of complex dialectical and paradoxical movements to argue that human society is split between the profane, rational world and the sacred. This split occurred as a result of humanity’s Fear of Death and has permitted humanity to effectively retreat in to the rational and profane world of work so as to distance themselves from the violence of the natural world. The profane achieves this end (albeit temporarily) and maintains itself through the imposition of rules and taboos on humans (in particular, Bataille, 1987, 1988, 1990; Guerlac, 1990: 90-105). (Fear of death here becomes the limit experience of human existence. Our originary Fear of Death here is embedded with our discontinuity as human beings because each of us is individual. We are thrown into the world by a violent rupture which leaves us isolated, alone, anguished and in pain [c.f. Heidegger’s notion of exteriority]. We need to extinguish these profound qualities but paradoxically they distinguish us as human.)

Bataille argues further that humans are only truly sovereign when they become self-legitimating, i.e. when they both set and act according to their own self imposed rules. As such our acceptance and following of social rules and taboos means that we are not truly sovereign, we are in effect Hegelian Slaves. (Bataille’s philosophy here is deeply influenced by Kojève’s reading [Kojève, 1969] of Hegel’s Phenomenology [Hegel, 1977]. Bataille’s reading of Hegel here is somewhat idiosyncratic, departing from the more common view of Hegelian theory as transcendental dialectic towards a more Nietzschean dialectic of forever becoming. For Bataille, fascism describes the actions of a being that prevents another being from achieving sovereignty [Bataille, 1985]. According to Bourdieu [1977] such actions may be real [physical or economic] or symbolic acts of violence.) We exist within a paradoxical tension between our desire for sovereignty and our originary fear of death.

For Bataille, transgression is implicitly embedded as the other of a rule. (Rules exist to be
transgressed, without it they would be an inviolable, animalistic urges.) Transgression here is not merely the breaking of a rule however it is the means by which we transcend the profane and our originary fear of death to become sovereign. Transgression thus means that we must leave behind the profane, rational world to become other by a leap into the void. Bataille theorises that this movement is accomplished when we are overcome by the ecstasy of Human Desire. (Human desire is not the longing for something that we lack. Desire as negativity, as a “lack”, is animal desire. Human desire is the desire for recognition by some other being. Furthermore we do not possess human desire but are possessed by it. Bataille here avoids the objectification of Desire common to humanist readings.)

Abernathy and Utterback (1978) suggest that product development is based on a cyclic motion between the extremes of incremental and radical innovation. Incremental product development and innovation seek to build on, compliment and extend existing products, resources and processes. As such it acts so as to develop a system without destroying it. Radical innovation does not build and extend what exists but seeks to overturn it. It is destructive of the skills, practices, product forms and social relationships that already exist within and between organizations (Abernathy and Clark 1985; Henderson and Clark 1990).

From a Bataillean perspective incremental innovation operates in the profane and rational human world so as achieve a technical advance that further separates, and protects, the human world from the violence of the Natural one. It achieves continuity, and allows progression whilst maintaining, and further reifying, existing social systems. Incremental innovators here “step back” from the void, preferring the safer ground of the known world. They do so however at the cost of remaining as slaves in a state of servitude, only radical innovation holds out the possibility of sovereignty.

Radical innovation destructively transgresses existing rules and taboos to establish itself beyond existing human society and culture. Radical innovation here implies by its nature that it involves a high degree of risk for the innovator. There can never be a guarantee that the “cost” of transgression will be paid or indeed that the innovator survives the risk of transgression. Radical innovation carries with it the possibility of complete destruction for the innovator. We can not understand this willingness to risk all within a profane, rational framework. The existence of radical innovation demands a theory of a Bataillean transgressive desire. The fundamental, ontological question here is, “Why do some step back whilst others risk all, including death, to innovate?” We will now attempt to answer this question below.

Innovation and overcoming our fear of death

To produce a radical innovation implies that the limit experience, the human fear of death, is at least temporally, overcome. An appreciation of Bataille’s philosophy suggests that this may be achieved through human desire for recognition. Radical innovation here stems from a desire to be recognised as innovators by those whom we respect. The desire is not just to be innovative but to be seen as innovative, a desire to be recognised as sovereign. The corollary suggests that incremental innovation, and more so the failure to innovate, is followed where this desire is insufficient to overcome our fear of death or where we believe ourselves to already be sovereign.
The desire for sovereignty however may be insufficient by itself if the innovator lacks the capability, or capital, to achieve it. Desire as recognition here however suggests that capital is not just economic capital. (Capital here is understood according to Bourdieu’s sense (Bourdieu, 1977) rather than the restricted economic conception used commonly in management theory. Capital is thus the total volume of capital available to the innovator where the two most important are economic and cultural capital. These together form a chiastic relationship. Capital here helps both determine an actor’s relative position and their ability to act. It affects but does not determine the propensity for action. The propensity for innovative action here still depends on overcoming our limit experience, as a fear of death when we become immersed in Human Desire.) The radical innovator attempts to achieve the desire of an other whom s/he values by becoming what the other values by achieving the social, cultural, educational capital and status that the other respects.

The ability to achieve sovereignty here is suggestive of a power relationship. Power here has to be viewed in the Foucaultian sense because it allows an innovator to transgress even when they are in a dominated position within a social system (Foucault 1980). Seen from this perspective, the attempt by an agent to impose rules and taboos which maintains their dominant position in a society attains the status of symbolic violation and annihilation against the Slave. The concept of a “best practice” form of innovation or product development here becomes particularly pernicious because they appear as facts legitimated by an independent authority. It maintains and reifies practices and positions within an industry, reduces the scope for transgression and change and acts as a barrier for a dominated company to achieve sovereignty.

In order to achieve radical innovation, the innovator needs to be open to immersion in, or possession by, Human Desire. This becomes increasingly more likely as s/he places the limit experience under increasing tension by transgressing the rules and taboos of the profane. It is not however enough just to break or questions rules, a sense of jouissance is also required, a sense of playfulness. Radical innovation requires space for exuberant play in the present beyond the profane world of work, its rules and taboos and its demands for than a rational, planned process.

We will now present empirical evidence drawn from two SMEs to substantiate our Bataillean influenced ontology of innovation. These organizations have similar structural characteristics (size, market type, age, turnover and family owned and managed). Company A has won numerous awards for innovative products whilst Company B has been described by its customers and itself as “non-innovative”. The evidence below is a distillation of over 20 hours of semi-structured and unstructured interviews (100 pages of transcription) with these two companies.

Company A – a radical innovator
Its present managing director (MD) formed this organization after she divorced her first husband some 21 years ago. The company employs the MD’s sons in several senior roles. It operates in the same market and is in direct competition with the MD’s ex husband’s company. Her ex-husband’s company dominates what is described to be a highly competitive market and has established the de-facto product standards for it. The MD believes that market, and economic,
advantage comes not from establishing and maintaining these standards but by achieving logistical advantages. According to the MD, her company has not pursued a strategy focused on logistics, preferring to concentrate on radical product development as a means to challenge the de-facto standards. She does believe that her company should be run for economic maximizing reasons.

Company B – “non-innovative”
This company was set up some twenty years ago. It passed to the present MD on the death of one of the founders, the present MD’s father. The MD wished to pass the company on to his own children in the future. During the interviews the product and market was described as static, a viewpoint that came to be contested because of major changes that occurred in the market. (Changes included increased competition, a smaller market size and new demands by customers for lower prices, increased efficiencies, rapid product developments and multiple rather than single source supply contracts.) The organization believes that it “serves” its customers with whom it has established a relationship and understanding. It believes that these relationships form the basis of its market advantages, advantages that lead to “sufficient” rather than maximal turnover and profit.

Death and continuity

Company A
During the interviews the MD of Company A made clear that she did not intend her sons inherit the company even though she describes the company as a family business (“this is a lifestyle type business, it is a family business. Furthermore, most people out on the shop floor know the family. It’s got a history that tends to reinforce the family aspect”). The family here takes on a role in the present, as a social system rather than as an historic lineage whereby the children inherit capital from the parents. Her concern was with the present, as an arena to contest her ex-husbands company’s market dominance. She believes that radical product innovation acts as a means whereby her company may fundamentally change the de-facto market standards and so becomes the market leader. Her company focuses on this to the exclusion of a more rational, economic pursuit of improving its logistics. The company has only recently achieved a financial breakeven position – 21 years after its formation:

Last year… we broke even. That meant that we made a 27% improvement in our gross margin. That’s absolutely terrific.

What’s wrong with running as a non-profit organization, writing investment off of the bottom line, investing it all in R&D? As long as everyone is happy with the rate that new products come out does it really matter if the return on capital is there? …I’d seriously, seriously like to think that that is feasible.

Here we may see that this company is aware that it may achieve greater profitability through pursuing a strategy similar to its competitors. It however doesn’t follow this course preferring instead to consistently risks financial death in the pursuit of high risk radical innovation even though a more rational option is available and is used by its competitors:
Q: You’ve suggested that in your value chain that the largest proportion of margin is in distribution?
A: Yes.

...This is not a market to be coming into. There aren’t opportunities to cream, it’s [all] standard products. Yes we are producing a product that is going to produce a market edge, whether anyone is going to pay for a market edge I’m not too sure. Having said that DH [her ex-husband’s company] is producing 14% net profit. That’s better than us. ...But bog standard filters have little margin. People who are adding value are making money that tends to be at the distribution level.

The conscious, rational pursuit of economic objectives so often theorised in management literature is not operative here. Instead it is evident that this company is risking itself in the “now” of being by pursuing radical innovation as a means not merely to break some rule but to become sovereign and so establish them and to be recognised as such. The company here is willingly to risk everything to become self-legitimating and believes that it can achieve this only through radical innovation that transgresses and so re-determines the established standards and rules of the industry:

[So why the emphasis on R&D [rather than distribution]? It’s because we have a process which needs to become the industry standard because then no one can compete with us. ...We’ve only just started getting involved in the standards. Up until this year you could guarantee that the people writing the British standards were both DH and “Y”. ...That’s what we need to do.

It is rare in Western modern society for women to have dominant and important roles in industry. Men often hold these because society operates so as to both accord men with economic power and to maintain this situation (Beck and Gernsheim, 1995). The MD here however refutes this doxa. The desire for sovereignty here is fused with the MD’s personal relationships with her ex-partner and her refusal to accept a socially gendered role:

[T]here is nothing worse then not being in control of your own environment. I’ve been there and it’s a terrifying feeling. To be able to alter your environment and to feel that you can alter your environment is an important aspect of working I believe.

...[B]asically my [ex]husband and I moved from separate bank accounts to amalgamating everything. That was fine as long as the trust existed. But then when the trust started to breakdown, what a nightmare! An absolute nightmare! It was the one thing that terrified me, and one of the reasons behind getting the divorce was that I couldn’t actually control, there was nothing that I could call mine. ...Which was terrifying, I had absolutely no control.

It is apparent here that she contests fundamentally the socially gendered roles of women in Western society.

The one thing that does terrify me is power. ...What is it that this power is giving [to people]? If you compared say a matriarchal society where the family is all important. There is a different sort of power in that society than there is in the sort of paternalistic type. ...Even now I go
home, who picks up the iron? [With particular feeling] Me! If I don't pick up the iron then the ironing would never get done. Interestingly enough I brought up four sons so that they were all taught to iron, sew and cook. Three of them are married and to varying degrees they have all reverted to type. ...So on the whole for society I think that it [would be] better if it [was] matriarchal.

The MD of this company does not accept the economic hegemonic “logic” of modern society whereby men assume the role of economic provider (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). Her initial act of forming Company A was to gain economic independence from her ex-partner, to become sovereign in her own right. (It is apposite to note that she has rejected her gendered role in society for many years. She rejected a place at a “ladies finishing school” at the age of 18 in favor of a University education and studied for her B.Sc. in Engineering – very much a male bastion - some 30-40 years ago. So from a relatively early age she followed a path of questioning, breaking, transgressing the taboos and rules of society.)

The “now” of being, coupled with radical innovation as the pursuit of an unknowable other rejects radical product development as held within diachronic, teleological time and history. Process here becomes exuberance and play in the present:

Q: Who would be involved in finding solutions to the problem?
A: At the moment I would suggest that it gets casually talked about. Or some individual says “Eureka”. Sometimes the Eurekas can be an absolute waste of time. It’s a question of how quickly you pick that up [laughs. ...There’s a lot of accident, a lot of fluke. ...[Being innovative -] it’s a game that you... play.

[T]he more flexible and dynamic you can keep it the better. The big thing that worries me about this company is that it’s being throttled by too many constraints coming in to formalize this or formalize that.

[I]f you think about having fun, if you can identify how you can have fun... It’s about having good relationships, having a secure environment and being your self. If you can achieve that for individuals, pull them together as a willing team, I can’t see why you shouldn’t achieve your objectives [in work].

“Time” as some objectified flow (as time’s arrow) here is lost in the simple joy of being. The need for rational planning here loses its force and importance to disappear in the moment. Our fear of death dissolves as time and finitude themselves dissolve in the present.

Company B
Company B was started by its founders who then bequeathed the organization to their own family:

Why did we set up in plastics? Basically the two gentlemen that set up the company had been in plastics all their life. It's all they knew. They felt that they could do as well, if not better, then the people they were working for. That was the drive to set up a company to make similar products.
Furthermore continuity here becomes important. The present MD, a son of one of the founders, inherited the organization. The MD wants his own children to inherit the company. The sense of continuity and history here is particularly strong:

[The MD has] always been with the company. His dad was one of the partners, who founded the business. He has basically come up from the ranks like the lot of us, from apprentice in the tool room, he’s gone through the ranks in various parts of the factory. ...He has come through the business. You know whom you’re working for. It’s a family business.

What is of importance here is that the company becomes an object that is nurtured and passed on between family generations. The present MD here acts as a custodian or steward to protect a future inheritance.

This sense of continuity becomes more profound because it is enmeshed with the company belief that it operates in a stable market, one where long term relationships are important. These allow the organization to know its customers, suppliers and competitors and be known to them:

I feel that we’re held in very high regard by “X” [this company’s biggest customer] and equally we hold them in very high regard. It’s a very amicable arrangement. We like their custom, their work. Not because we’d just like [to have] it, but because its exactly what we are good at. We don’t get the best prices in the world from “X”, to be honest, they’re not the greatest payers, but the work exactly suits this company. So we stick with them. The way we work suits “X”. ...It’s good.

“X” is a good example to use, they tend to know what people’s products are like. We’ve got BS5750, or ISO9002 as it is now, and so have “X”... I know it doesn’t mean a lot really, it’s just a number, a sign on the front of the building, but they know what our quality is like. ...They [“X”] know the quality is there. So again all they need to do is look at the numbers and crunch them and see who they get value from to be honest.

...[In] business, all the companies around here in our game... are competitors but at the end of the day none... are that competitive that we want to see another go out of business. ...It's a way of life really it's a special little industry that gets along with itself and by itself. ...The big boys may think they have to destroy the competition or what ever. We are much more relaxed in what we do. We haven't got the same sort of pressure to undercut [another company] until we've broken their back. In reality you'll just break your own. We just try to get along it's a very different reality.

A stable micro-society is formed here but one where this company consciously is in, and accepts a dominated position. (A useful concept here is Bourdieu’s Niezschian concept of *ressentiment* as a compensatory mechanism for how the dominated within society rationalise bad faith [Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992]) It accepts that it is not sovereign, its customers control and set the agenda:
…Price is very high on the agenda especially for people like “X”, because year on year they’re going for “cost down” that’s what they’re looking for, 2 to 3 percent every year, for every year. We’ve got a couple of products that we make for them, and the prices have been basically held for seven years even by “X”.

…But we’ve now extended out the back because we’ve got warehousing facilities because “X” doesn’t like keeping things on site. So they want us to keep them here so we’ve invested there.

Q: How much control do you have over the design, specification and manufacture of your products?
A: Using “X” again as an example ...as regards input, [all that] we actually have input on is its feasibility. Feasibility basically of the part.

Its product development concentrates on copying those organizations that it admires. This is not a human desire, as desire to be the desired other of the other’s desire. It is the simple objectification of the other followed by an appropriation of their form. The company does not attempt to be different it resincds heterogeneity in favour of camouflaging itself in the homogeneous mass. Incremental innovation acts as a kitsch version of radical innovation:

...[W]e didn’t know anything about the printer. What happened in this case, we went to a little customer [of ours] whom we know fairly well, who knows about printers. ... We knew they pad print, so we approached them. We thought, if anyone could help us it was them. ...We went to them said we want to do this for “X”, what do you think? How do we package that? No problem, so he showed us how to do it.

Being a subcontractor there isn’t a lot of innovation that we can come up with. We can innovate to improve in our service level but not elsewhere. ...There is little innovation that we do on the product, we might add tweaks and whistles but the design is pretty much given to us. ...[S]o we’d better stick with their mentality and not develop a different idea.

Time here is a flattened out horizon of an unchanging future and acts as ressentiment, a rationale for not innovating. The company accepts perpetual servitude here because it can not see the future as holding an alternative. The choice here is the acceptance of servitude and a long drawn out death or the immediate annihilation of radical innovation because they would have to become something new and different or die trying (Baudrillard 1993):

...I don’t think the process has changed a great deal since its infancy. ...The technology that we actually need doesn’t really change. ...There are new machines about... [but] we feel that’s very specialised, its not what we do.

...Price is very high on the agenda especially for people like “X”, because year on year they’re going for “cost down” that’s what they’re looking for, 2 to 3 percent every year, for every year. We’ve got a couple of products that we make for them, and the prices have been basically held by “X” for seven years even.

One year later HP started to express real concern with regard to cost down:
...[E]ven “X” are getting on the cost down bandwagon. ...[If] you think that for some of our products there hasn’t been a rise in the cost for 11 years well they’ve already had a canny cost saving in real terms. They don’t consider that though, they say, “Tough”.

...I’ve got three parts on the side there from “X”. I know for a fact that this part here is a 1998 part [new] for this year... We have got parts on this assembly but we don’t make this [other] part. ...So if “X” are touting [the other part] around, then to me then they must also be touting the bits that I’m making to someone else just to see what sorts of savings that they can get. Now I can understand them doing that, but what I can’t understand... Well it’s madness from an engineering point of view, people have developed with “X” the process to manufacture these parts. From that point of view I think it’s madness. But it seems to be the trend. ...[It’s] purely cost driven and nothing else. It’s a bit of a shame that but I can see that that’s the way that they are going.

When faced with the potential of an indeterminate market that suddenly demands change (and holds the potential of death) it expresses a marked degree of consternation; it does not understand why its customers are undermining the stable master-slave relationship:

So from a sales point of view that seems to be the state of the market. We are still winning business from “X”. ...But I did get a bit of a shock this week when they offered us this part [the other part above], it’s like a Summer 1998 part. We are only two or three months into the season, and already they are looking to re-source it from someone else! That’s heavy, it’s a shock if that’s their mentality now. It hasn’t even gone into the catalogue yet - it’s for Christmas. It’s their latest thing, its only just gone into production a month ago and already they are looking to source it elsewhere. To see what else is out there price wise. (The interviewee sounded and looked perplexed during this long interview passage.)

Capital, field and multiple strategies

It is clear that Company A is willing to risk the limit experience in order to be sovereign whilst Company B attempts to defray death even though the cost is its own slavery. In order to be successful however, Company A requires sufficient total capital to become the object of the other’s desire. In order to achieve this the act of innovating is not sufficient – the organization must become the object of the other’s desire; it must achieve sufficient status in fields associated with “being innovative”.

Table 1 situates these two companies within various fields that they view as important to both their industry and innovation. (The economic capital of both these companies is similar, in Bourdieuean terms both occupy dominated positions within the economic field. Table 1 excludes the economic capital of these two companies both because of their overall similarity and so as to reduce the complexity of the diagram. It considers only the forms of capital that might be thought of symbolically as cultural capital.) These fields are the characteristics that these companies associate with being an innovative company.
Table 1 - Innovation, capital and field

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Dominant</th>
<th>Dominated</th>
<th>Dominated</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education (General educational standard of senior staff.)</td>
<td>Company A (Degree or higher.)</td>
<td>Company B (HNC/ONC.)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Technical knowledge for industry</td>
<td>Company A (Good knowledge of technology outside own area.)</td>
<td>Company B (Good knowledge only of own specialist area.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Status as innovator</td>
<td>Company A (Wins awards for innovation.)</td>
<td>Company B.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status in industry</td>
<td>Company A (Independent SME.)</td>
<td>Company B (Low tier supply chain SME.)</td>
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It is important to remember that human desire is the desire for recognition – a human desire for innovation is the desire to be recognised as innovative. Being innovative should not be conflated with the possession of a sufficient volume of capital, capital acts as a resource to enable action it does not determine here the propensity for action. (It is apposite to note that there are many
conflicting accounts in the academic literature regarding whether or not an organization’s access to finance leads to increased levels of radical innovation. Such arguments confuse a resource with a propensity to act.) The propensity for radical innovation is held within the organization’s transgression of its fear of death as it becomes consumed by Human Desire.

An innovative company here has skilled, educated staff knowledgeable about technology within their own and other industries. It will have gained external recognition for innovation in the form of prizes or awards. It will finally be able to develop its own designs and therefore has some degree of independent status in its industrial market.

Bourdieu suggests that action is directed towards improving our relative positions within multiple fields. Actors do not attempt to gain positional advantage in a single area but try to improve or maintain their positions in many related areas by accumulating appropriate capital. (The form or type of a capital is dependent on its associated field. Educational capital is the actor’s educational qualifications. Capital can however be transferred between fields because they are all related to a dominant form of capital – economic capital. [Bourdieu, 1984]) However, our propensity to invest in a field is linked to our existing capital as this determines both the required future investment and our likelihood of success. Success is more likely if one occupies a position within the dominant domain. (Bourdieu [1984] argues that it is easier to move from a dominated sub-position within the dominated sector than to move from the dominated to dominant sector.)

It is clear from this simple comparison that Company A possesses more capital, in Bourdieu’s sense, than Company B. Company A is better able to contest and improve its relative standings in these fields than Company B; it is quite simply more able to achieve a dominant position in these various fields. Company A can therefore achieve sovereignty through radical innovation by pursuing a complex, multiple strategy of investing in the diverse fields associated with innovating. It has both the resources to achieve this and, as we have shown above, the propensity for radical innovation because it wishes to gain sovereignty.

Conclusion
Innovation is often theorised according to an ontical methodology whereby innovation is reduced to a reified object. Ontical methodology here often results in concepts of “best practice” innovation processes. “Best practice” here is however both context dependant and non-neutral in nature. The consequence of this non-neutrality is however often ignored by researchers. A non-neutral method here can therefore result in symbolic violence because it acts as a means by which a dominant party gains, or maintains its political advantage over others. Social positions become reified, and the economic hegemony becomes doxic; an act that negates the potential for the dominated to oppose the hegemony. “Best practice” theories here reduce innovation to some form of economic utility supportive of the economic hegemony. The potential that actors may be acting according to non-economic rationales is lost.

Ontical methodology furthermore is not appropriate for considering innovation as ontological. An ontological theory of innovation suggests that the being of innovation is associated with the
limit experience and sovereignty. Radical innovation here is a Bataillean Desire for sovereignty. In order to achieve sovereignty however requires both the desire to transgress and the means to achieve it. Desire here is the desire for recognition and therefore requires the transgressive innovator in a move to become the object of the other’s desire; the innovator must not only be innovative but recognised as innovative. The innovator is placed in a complex and multiple series of strategic moves whereby they attempt to acquire sufficient capital in the fields associated with innovation. Radical innovation is thus dependent on multiple strategic actions rather than a simple economic one.
References


\(^1\) Following Heidegger this attempt can never be achieved as it involves bridging the gap between beings that is externality. This could only be resolved by becoming the other (whilst I can empathise with the other I can never truly know who and what they are without being them.) This stands in contradiction to Kierkegaard’s believe that the interiority of a subject may be bridged through communion and indeed Habermas’ theory of communicative action.

\(^2\) Symbolic violation is Bourdieu’s concept where a dominant party uses non-physical means to violate the other party’s freedom of action (Bourdieu, 1977). Symbolic annihilation goes somewhat further in suggesting that the dominated party is symbolically negated to a point where they become part of the animal mass and less than human (Tuckman, 1979). The slave does not however symbolically annihilate or violate the Master because they are the act of being that views itself to be already autonomous preventing a threat to this autonomy arising from another beings struggle to become autonomous.