Chapter 3
Social Media as Elements of Shared Workspaces:
The Multifactory Case Study

Giulio Focardi
Osun Solutions, Italy

Lorenza Victoria Salati
Bigmagma, Italy

ABSTRACT

Shared workplaces are becoming very common within Europe. Multifactories are shared working envi-ronment that combine traits of a Coworking Space, a Fab Lab and a Makerspace. One of the traits that characterize a Multifactory is how knowledge exchange brings to innovation. This chapter has its focus on a case study that shows how a traditional SME and a multifactory can work together in order to develop an innovative idea and how Social Media can be parts of an overall strategy set to product innovation.

INTRODUCTION

Many people say do it yourself, we say do it together, make things together and share knowledge. Parade, M. (2013, July 15). Personal interview.

The shrinkage of product life cycles is a very well known issue and is a problem that companies have to face since a long time. Traditionally, companies used to change or renew products quite often and to have in their R&D departments several new products at different development stages. Product innovation is also traditionally linked to the idea that when someone in a company has a good idea, this has to be protected, kept as secret as possible, internally developed within the company or with a help from very reliable partners and brought to the market only when transformed into an exclusive product/service, ready to face the market. Nowadays, the life cycle of ideas, products, and services is so fast that it's less important to protect them. It's much more important to develop them as fast as possible, in a very reli-able, cheap, and flexible way, to release the product on the market as soon as possible.

This chapter focuses on Multifactories, which are shared workspaces dedicated both to the development of services and to the production of material goods.

Multifactories are a type of collaborative environment where innovation comes from free access to common resources, contamination, mutual support and free exchange of knowledge.

Multifactories are multi-competency environments, where the concepts at the base of Sharing Economy apply to physical places and allow for a creative reuse of competencies that leads to product innovation.

A Multifactory is a system that generates more value than the sum of its node's individual values, also due to the social use of Social Media as constitutive elements of an overall strategy.

But a Multifactory is also an economic agent that interacts with other agents, like traditional companies are. When this happens, from the interaction and contamination of these different agents can come out a completely new way to product innovation, where Social Media take an important part.

THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Bigmagma, the multifactory that worked with Nuova Ferrari & Zagni in order to develop Grinding Project, is the result of the experimental stage of a research project carried out by Focardi and Salati from 2012 to 2015. The research started with the aim to visit and study workplaces with three characteristics: to have a great heterogeneity within people working in them, to include a part of production of goods, and to have a bottom-up governance system, at least partially. The research was as an on-field research that took place in five European Countries (Italy, Spain, Portugal, United Kingdom, and Germany), making use of a visual anthropology method and assuming an ethnographic point of view.

The first step of the research took place in North Italy and was to analyze the Made in MAGE of Sesto San Giovanni (Milan). Made in MAGE is a project hosted in a former steel factory, born in 2011 as a temporary reuse project and evolved as a community project. The Made in MAGE experience is interesting for what concerns the interaction of the project with the territorial stakeholders and how companies manage their relationship.

The second step of the research took place in South Italy and was to analyze the Progetto Microfiliera in the Pollino Natural Park. The Progetto Microfiliera is a project promoted by the regional agency for the agricultural development, born in 2011 to help local farmers to create a network and to establish a long term relationship with EVRA, a local factory that produces vegetable extracts. The Progetto Microfiliera experience is interesting for what concerns how a value chain management can result in a cross-skills exchange.

Table 1. Crowdworkers' voice on EXPECTATIONS

"In a way, MOB is a channel for me to get closer to people related to innovation and open collaborative systems, and that's why it makes sense for me being into MOB.I didn't have any expectations, at the beginning. I was working at home, but I realized it was too hard to spend so much time at home, alone, I was completely isolated and I was completely out of the world. I was spending 14 hours a day in my living room. It was unhealthy. At first, I started looking for an office, then I found MOB, and I felt it was different. My expectations were like a coworking space, with many people going around, but then, I think, MOB has exceeded my expectations in many ways. Especially for the workshops, and then I started getting familiar with these Makers, a movement I was completely ignorant about. Like in a way you're working, but while working you keep yourself updated and connected to the world, so that's the part that's exceeding my expectations." Rius, C. (2013, September 10). Personal interview.

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