Jams as emerging practice of innovation communities: The case of the Global Service Jam 2011

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Abstract: Jams, initially coined in the domain of Jazz music, are nowadays applied by various institutions as practice of innovation communities. Jams help to gather and strengthen the community and allow for seamless knowledge transfer to develop innovative concepts. Yet, the body of academic literature on jams is rudimentarily established and lacks a comprehensive understanding for this specific innovation practice. To close this gap, we investigate the *Global Service Jam 2011* (GSJ11) as an emerging practice of innovation communities, which ran 48 hours from 11 to 13 March. Within this short time frame 1263 voluntary jammers, globally dispersed in 59 locations, created 203 innovative service concepts. This paper investigates and reports on an ongoing in-depth case study of the GSJ11: first, by presenting background information on jams, especially from the more well-known area as corporate practice, second, by depicting the special set-up of the GSJ11, and third, by discussion the uniqueness of this jam event, its results as well as prospects for subsequent analysis.

1 Introduction

Initially known from the Jazz community in New York and Chicago, jams or jam sessions have a long-standing tradition in music. In these sessions musicians physically gathered in one place to improvise songs or melodies without any elaborate preparation in advance. This form of collaboration has been used for various reasons. Jams helped to gather and strengthen the community, offered time and space for boundless practice and allowed for easy knowledge transfer. In addition they provided a platform to compete and, most relevant, generated new and thus innovative material by deeply exploring ideas [Be94]. Nowadays organizations recognize that jams not only apply for the specific context of music. Over the last ten years jamming has evolved as a promising practice for initiating and managing innovation. In analogy to the music scene, jams are utilized to connect people, to form a community based on a platform for collaboration, and consequently to generate new ideas in the respective area of interest [Wi08].

However, when comparing the music jam sessions from the past with recently conducted business examples from huge corporations like IBM or Dell, major differences in the basic set-up and the topics can be identified. First, concerning the setting, online communication via internet plays a key role as it allows for scaling up the number of participants tremendously. Second, topics and content of jams tend to be very heterogeneous. Jams might call for ideas on products or alternatively for concepts on service innovations. One example is the latest jam by IBM in 2010, which purely focused on services and likewise has been named "IBM Service Jam" [Ib10]. These major differences create new demands for the appropriate design and execution of jams.

Both music and corporate jams have in common, as to what von Hippel [Hi05] dedicated his book "Democratizing Innovation" to: people innovate, particularly in innovation communities. Democratized innovation is driven by the advances in information and communication technologies, which allow for collaboration via online media despite geographical dispersal. Jams as global innovation community practice only started to emerge in recent years without being subject to extensive research. Moreover the global scope of jams via utilized online media – in contrast to local music jams – has not been researched so far. Thus the puzzle in innovation research concerning jams is not yet fully solved and hence leads us to ask the following question: How do jams as an emerging practice drive innovation communities? With regard to this research question, we decided to deeply investigate the case of the *Global Service Jam*, which targeted the creation of service concepts. The latter was conducted in March 2011 applying a mixed online and offline setting. It lasted 48 hours and took place in 59 locations around the world. 1263 people voluntarily joined the jam and created 203 new service concepts [Gs11]. Our research approach employs an ex-post, in-depth case study of the Global Service Jam.

2 Research background

Over the past two decades research on the innovative strength of communities has increased significantly [Fi09]. At the same time many different terms evolved in research concerning communities, which target innovation in various dimensions and fields. To these community-related terms count inter alia communities of practice, online communities, user communities, and innovation communities, of which the latter ones are subject to this analysis. Though these different terms are recognized, a clear understanding has not yet evolved, which requires a clear cut definition for the research conducted [WL08].

Innovation communities are "*nodes consisting of individuals or firms interconnected by information transfer links which may involve face-to-face, electronic, or other communication. These can, but need not, exist within the boundaries of a membership group*" [Hi05]. This understanding of community does not necessarily entail qualities of interpersonal social ties, which provide a sense of belonging and sociability. Moreover, innovation communities are often specialized to certain categories of innovation, for example product or service innovation [CC10].

Lastly, the definition implicitly conveys that innovation communities can be geographically and timely dispersed. The basic idea of jams in innovation is simple corresponds with the music jam: jams aim at bringing people together to communicate and to brainstorm ideas [BW08].

So far, several organizations such as Dell, Starbucks, or IBM have employed jams in their innovation activities. Especially IBM fostered the development of this innovation practice, which is why research on jams is usually linked to IBM's history of jamming [DB10]. According to IBM, a jam is a massive, world-wide online event, limited to 48 to 72 hours, which brings ten thousands of experts and interested people together in order to openly work on predefined challenges, problems, or topics. The event takes place on an online collaboration platform especially developed for jams, where ideas can be exchanged and developed. The discussions are guided by moderators, which are experts in the fields discussed and additionally tracked by extensive live-analytics [BW08; BK09; Wi08]. As this previous information from IBM indicates, jams for the purpose of product or service innovation have been predominantly investigated and deployed in a corporate setting. However from our perspective, jams as innovation practice need to be distinguished according to their organizational context, i.e. whether they are conducted in a corporate or non-corporate setting. The non-corporate setting, which is so far underrepresented in literature, can be understood as emerging innovation practice.

Corporate vs. emerging practice

Jams in the corporate world are fitting into the paradigm of open innovation as proposed by Chesbrough [Ch06]. It directs firms to use internal and external ideas for research and internal and external routes to market. By opening up the innovation process additional value can be created. The corporate view of Chesbrough requires firms not only to create, but especially also to capture value via outside sources [CC10]. Contrary, von Hippel [Hi05] argues that innovation practices may just informally emerge without being driven by corporates, but by individuals only, as outlined above. This understanding of innovation communities fits to the Global Service Jam 2011, where no corporate organization steered the event, but individuals. Moreover people participated voluntarily and without being connected through organizational duties. In addition this understanding fits to the original understanding of jams from music as well. In turn these emerging jams are contrary on first glance in their initial set-up, e.g. when thinking of the initiators and organizational resources available. This leads to the more specific question, how jams as an emerging practice drive innovation communities.

3 Method

For answering the research question we decided to follow an intrinsic case study approach. We employed a post-positivistic view, which builds on existing theory and rigorous data sampling, if possible [Cr07]. Here the case study approach focuses on the Global Service Jam 2011 (GSJ), which was a first of a kind as emerging practice.

The case is framed by the GSJ, which took place from March 11 to March 13, 2011 within 48 hours. However, organizers and participants also got involved in pre- and post-jam activities, which are taken into account as well. Within this case study approach we decided to deploy mixed methods for investigating the Global Service Jam 2011 to build upon different sources of data in parallel.

The case study data collection phase began on March 7, 2011 and ended on May 17, 2011. The late ending was chosen to be able to analyze developments in the post-jam phase. Different sources were consulted for data collection, e.g. participants, communication tools, and the designed services. For the analysis the different data were handled by different methods, e.g. descriptive statistics or document analysis. As a first step desk research was conducted via the website of the GSJ to outline design parameters of the jam. In addition a more precise research framework was developed to structure the process of data gathering and analyses (see figure 1). In a second step, personal narrative interviews, face-to-face and via phone, were conducted with the two jam organizers (code: IG) and participants, who took the roles of Hosts (code: IH1; IH2) and Jammers (code: IJ1; IJ2; IJ3) during the jam. The six interviews were guided by questions and structured into three parts: pre, during, and post jam. The interviews allowed interviewees to provide historical information via narration.
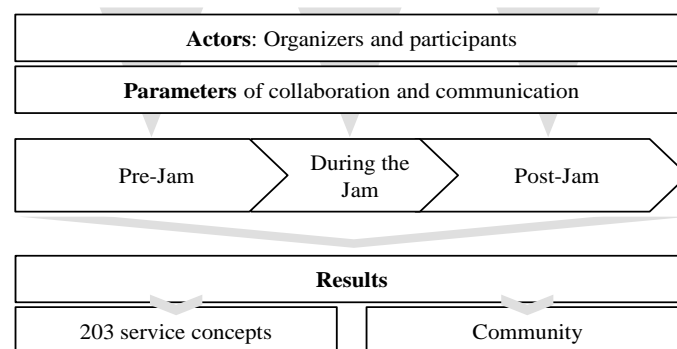

Figure 1: Research framework

For analysis of interviews we followed an inductive approach according to Mayring [Ma07]. This entails defining and refining codes and categories based on 10 to 50 % of the material and finally reviewing and analyzing the entire interview material. The matters of interest were threefold: communication and collaboration with a focus on online and offline media usage; the service concepts; factors and challenges of conducting jams. Moreover the interviews enabled to revise or to confirm analyses based on desk research.

For quantitative analysis a full sample of service concepts and corresponding descriptions was collected as all results were publically available. Primary data collection thus followed a non-interactive approach based on human observation of audio-visual material, on the one hand [Cr07; LL08]. This included the location, number of team members, and media used by teams to present the service concept.

On the other hand, the researcher enhanced the data whenever possible with values of two categories to the service concepts: challenges tackled and service industry. These categories were chosen as they describe the service concepts broadly on an aggregated level. The values of the first category, challenges tackled, were defined through an explorative approach. After twenty concepts were investigated, a sufficient degree of saturation was reached as reviewing additional ones did not suggest extending the defined values anymore. The values of the second category, service industries, refer to the classification of the European commission. In total 196 data sets were collected. After data cleaning, which excluded service concept dummies and non-complete concepts, 174 data sets were left.

4 Empirical analysis: The Global Service Jam 2011

4.1 The Jam Set-Up

The initiators of the GSJ are service designers. A broader network of passionate international practitioners supported the initiative. Overall the motivation was to promote and to spread the discipline of service design with its tools and methods. All work which was done for the GSJ was voluntary work. Moreover the GSJ orientation was twofold: Non-profit and open to the world. The idea was to bring people with a joint interest physically together – regardless of whether they were professionals or non-professionals – and to enable them to create new services in small design teams. Additionally, networking was another intent followed by the initiators. To conclude, the Global Service Jam's self-understanding is a "Non-Profit activity organized by an international network of service design aficionados" [Gs11]. Several means guided the creation of new service concepts at the GSJ: a clear focus, role definitions, rules and defined communication media were essential design parameters from a managerial perspective. These are reflected in the high-level set-up, illustrated in figure 2, and are explored in more depth subsequently. The focus was primarily given by a theme, which was '(Super) Heroes'. All developed service concepts had to reflect this theme. It was kept as a secret until the Jam started out – when the topic was presented during the opening video – in order to provide a level playing field. The term 'Super' was consciously put into brackets to point out its secondary meaning in comparison to the main topic 'Heroes' (Global Service Jam 2011). In addition, like the whole set-up, the service concepts should be non-profit concepts. There were two different actors involved in the GSJ: organizers and participants. While all were individuals, they joined either for getting involved in preparing and conducting the jam or for actually developing new service concepts.

However, these actors were assigned different roles with certain tasks. First, there were 'Jammers' who were individuals participating in the GSJ and who were actually developing service concepts. Jammers came together in 59 locations worldwide to collaborate in 'Teams' which were supposed to be a group of approximately five Jammers working on one common service concept.
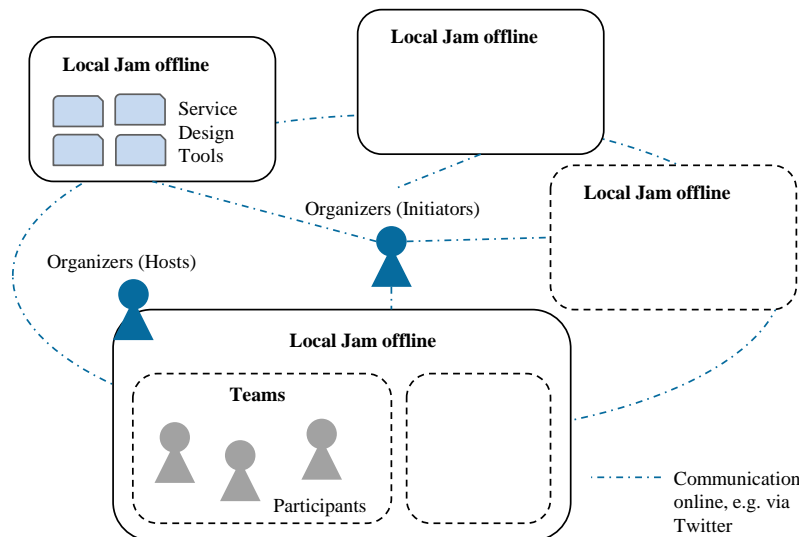
Figure 2: High-level set-up overview Global Service Jam 2011

These teams were invited and guided by a local organizer, the 'Host'. The Hosts also owned the tasks of setting up the location and corresponding tools. A 'Jam' comprised all teams at one physical location, while the Global Service Jam was the aggregation of all local Jams. In order to organize core activities a 'Global Council' was additionally established, a secret group of Hosts and Jammers. 'Global', the two initiators, took coordinating activities from Nuremberg, Germany. The organizers established various rules and communication channels for their organizational efforts.

Before the event started, rules as well as some tips to follow while creating new service concepts were published to the participants. There was an agreement signed by participants, which also stated that breaking the rules equaled the exclusion from the event. The jam took place on the weekend from March 11 to March 13, 2011 in different time zones. In each time zone, the starting time was 5 p.m. on March 11. In the following 48 hours the Teams had to design their service concepts and submit them in time until 3 p.m., March 13. During the opening video, which was shown by the Hosts to the Jammers at 5 p.m., additional tips were provided besides the overall theme. Among those tips were: to adjust expectations, to focus on one new aspect, to share tools and to be open to new tools or to focus on doing, not talking. Moreover, for submitting service concepts read-me files were guiding participants. For global communication predominantly online media were employed and defined through the phases prior to the Jam, during the Jam, and after the Jam. Prior to the jam, information were in first line provided via the website (http://www.globalservicejam.org), where users could also sign up for a separate mailing list. Moreover, a Twitter profile ('GSJam') and a Facebook fan page ('Global Service Jam') were established. Each local Jam also set up an own website, which included a registration form.

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Many local Jams additionally communicated via own Twitter accounts or Facebook pages. Globally Twitter was preferred as the main communication tool for which the hash tag '#gsj11' was recommended as identifier. Moreover a YouTube channel ('Global Service Jam') was launched, which includes the opening video. All submissions were coordinated via a Dropbox for which submission guidelines were provided to the Teams. Then the results in the publically available Dropbox folder were linked by Teams to the website (http://planet.globalservicejam.org) and thereby published prominently to the public. The latter website requires registration for all participants and contains community functions such as commenting and rating on service concepts, which is part of the communication after the Jam. After the Jam, the Twitter account, the Facebook page, and the global and local websites remained active as of May 2011.

During the Jam the Teams primarily communicated offline and face-to-face, while they brainstormed and designed new service concepts. The locations' equipment offered for collaboration was organized by local Hosts and Jammers themselves. Among the equipment tools were post-its, pens and boards, business model canvas, customer journey maps or putty. However, the decision for the appropriate tools was left open. Delivering results in time mattered. 1263 Jammers were registered and came together in 59 locations. The results are twofold: First, there are the service concepts developed, and second, there is a community of Jammers, which evolved from the jam (Global Service Jam 2011).

The Jammers created 203 service concepts in their Teams (Global Service Jam 2011). Each Team developed one service concept. Thus on average there were three to four Teams of approximately six jammers working in each location. The jammers presented their service concepts in various formats: videos, photos, text descriptions, presentations, plays, websites or other means. Very often, these formats were combined. One example of the results, which presented the service concept via a video as well as a web site, is the concept of 'Start-up Superheroes' by a team from Toronto, Canada. They described the concept as follows: "Start-up Superheroes is not your average online job board. It's a platform that connects resource-strapped entrepreneurs looking for help on their start-ups with skilled but overlooked job seekers (aka Superheroes). They get recognized work experience and professional recommendations for permanent employment and entrepreneurs get qualified help without committing to employee overhead."

From the community perspective the jam yielded astonishing results. More than 1000 geographically dispersed people came together, mostly without knowing each other in advance in order to collaborate. The teams were jamming all over the world. However, the largest proportion (68 %) of jammers in total was from Europe; actually no African team participated. The number of team members varied across regions from 4.79 to 8.23 members per Team, on average. When turning to gender diversity, jammers were homogeneous divided into male (53.2 %) and female (47.8 %) across geographies. In sum, a global diverse innovation community was created before and within the 48 hour-jam-event, but potentially also beyond the jam. Thereby this community is another important result besides the service concepts of the GSJ.

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4.2 Communication and Collaboration

Before turning to the perceptions of different actors regarding communication and collaboration, the initial motivation of Jammers to participate is shortly examined for a more comprehensive understanding. Jammers were motivated to join for both, private and professional reasons. Among those were to learn, to network, to work creatively and to have fun. Also, some were simply curious what might happen at a jam event (Interviews: IJ1; IJ2; IJ3.).

In the early preparation stage, the touch points of Global with Hosts and Jammers were in an offline setting (Interviews: IJ1; IJ2; IH2.). The initiators presented the concept at service design conferences in 2010 in Berlin, Germany and Linköping, Sweden, which helped to win important international stakeholders for hosting local Jams for instance (Interview: IG.). Another Host was convinced by an extensive, but very comfortable two hours phone call (Interview: IH1.).

Yet, Hosts tried to get in touch with potential Jammers locally and via extensive use of online media (Interviews: IH1; IH2.). After Hosts had been convinced to take part, organizational issues were discussed and ideas were exchanged among them, e.g. about how to make a local Jam happen best or how to promote it (Interviews: IH1; IH2.). Extensive collaboration and communication was already going on between the members of the Global Council. Very proactively they determined the topic of the GSJ and created the opening video (Interview: IG.). Among Jammers, there was more or less no communication prior to the Jam, except for organizational issues, e.g. what to bring to the Jam or how to get there. To that extent, Jammers rather not prepared themselves for the Jam, but simply brought the skills they had to the table plus some tools such as photo cameras or putty, if available (Interviews: IJ1; IJ2; IJ3.). Finally, the local Jams started out with the opening videos. From Jammers perspective (Interviews: IJ1; IJ2; IJ3.) there was a starting phase, while everyone settled, got to know each other, and also got familiar with the topic. Jammers were positively surprised by the openness and trust of others. Then brainstorming phases on the Jam's topic started during which ideas were exchanged. This phase was very creative and inspiring due to the open atmosphere. Subsequently a decision phase, based on the previous brainstorming, emerged, which resulted in the definition of service concepts to work on. This was perceived as being a troubled phase as some were disappointed or felt offended about decisions made. In addition many discussions without outcomes were held. The decision phase was followed by the 'doing-phase', where Teams settled and started designing a final service concept. Here the diversity of Teams in terms of different backgrounds had two consequences: on the one hand, many talents and ideas came together making the final outcome more valuable. On the other hand, there was a lack of understanding of terms and a lack of skills in service design. The final submission deadline created pressure to move forward especially in times of disagreement. Above all, the positive atmosphere in terms of openness and cooperativeness added substantial value to making progress. For instance, when somebody was done with his job, he asked around if others would need a helping hand. However, Jammers usually were focused on their own Team. One exception is truly the collaboration between Utrecht, Netherlands, and Montreal, Canada. Both Jams collaborated to design a service.

Nonetheless, Teams were mostly neither collaborating locally nor globally, rather they were simply communicating what they were doing or what was happening via Twitter every once in a while. This was due to time pressure and focus on the own work. Global collaboration was not established among Jammers during this time. However, the ongoing communication via Twitter created belongingness and feeling of being part of a global event. Finally, the Jammers prepared a short presentation on their submission for all local participants. After that, networking started. e.g. by exchanging contact details. Among the feelings experienced were great satisfaction and relieve.
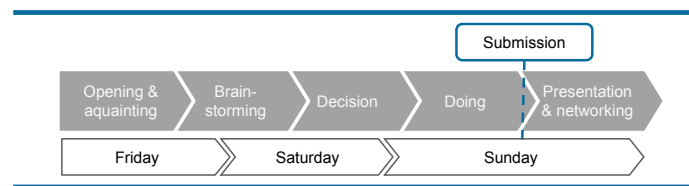
Figure 3: Phases of a local Jam from Jammer's view

The Hosts (Interviews: IH1; IH2.) were communicating in various ways during the GSJ. On the one hand they were reporting to the world what was happening locally via online media or solving organizational issues with other Hosts and Global. On the other hand, they were communicating locally to create and to maintain a fun and collaborative atmosphere, particularly when there were crises among teams. Finally, they were trying to engage Jammers in global communications to create a global feeling. They evaluated the collaboration between local Teams as being cooperative. However, there was competition among them to the extent that Teams wanted to finish in time and first.

For the initiators (Interview: IG.), or Global, the jamming time was intense in communication, which led to a high physical stress load. They had to answer various requests from Hosts, which were arriving via different channels. Especially while Jammers were submitting their service concepts they were involved in trouble shooting. Also they had to give instructions. For example, it was a challenge to keep the topic as a secret for a level playing field due to the different time zones. Many Jammers were already jamming while others had not even started. However, they observed with great satisfaction that generally there was a very good fun-atmosphere for collaboration globally. Two examples made them particularly happy: first, Jammers from New Zealand were offering help to other Jammers in the world after they finished, and there were two Jams, Utrecht, Netherlands, and Montreal, Canada, working together on one service concept.

Altogether, every interviewee agreed that the GSJ was a true success. The reasons for this were the fun atmosphere, the openness towards people as well as ideas, networking possibilities, the amount of service concepts developed and the global scope. This leads to the question, which communication media were employed by the participants for innovating, and which of those turned out to be very helpful.

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4.3 In-depth review of jam results

The interaction between the actors and the media use was already portrayed. A variety of media was used during the design process of new services concepts. When looking at the actual submitted service concepts, this broad variety is reflected as well. Jammers used videos and presentation decks most with 87 out of 174 times. Exotic media were spread sheets, booklets, or plays. Moreover the media usage is homogeneous across regions, i.e. Jammers preferences regarding media were quite similar, although the range of media itself is quite high. Many times, there was not only one medium used for conveying the service idea, but a combination of media. Furthermore online and offline media were combined and internet services used, e.g. YouTube or VIMEO for videos and Prezi or Slideshare for presentations, respectively. Finally, 97.8 % of the teams provided a short description for their service, which was part of the submission page and which reflects a very good discipline of the Teams.

Looking at the service concepts from an industry perspective, one observes that the submitted service concepts are – similar to the media usage – homogenous across regions. The dominant targeted industry is 'arts, entertainment and recreation' with nearly one quarter of all concepts developed. Teams often took a playful approach, e.g. via web or mobile services, when designing their service and imagining potential customers. One example is 'Super deeds', a service concept developed in Oslo, Norway, and described as follows: "A superhero experience for children. Children (age 6-12) do good ecological deeds and have fun while doing so. The experience is based on a social network framework of collecting badges and virtual superhero outfit items for every good deed completed. The children can give each other kudos for completed deeds, and exchange items with each other."

5 Discussion

Jams have a long-standing tradition in Jazz music. Nowadays, jams are increasingly employed as practice for generating ideas and initiating innovation communities. Today's information and communication technologies allow for hosting global jams via online media and thus for scaling up the number of participants beyond time and space. Jams were initially driven by corporates such as IBM, which backed the jams with heavy resources for organization and analytics. The Global Service Jam 2011 was a unique jam event and resulted in 203 service concepts, which were developed by people physically working together around the world in 59 locations on a voluntary basis for 48 hours. The uniqueness is derived from following characteristics in major design parameters:

This jam *emerged* from individuals as organizers, who were motivated by spreading the service design discipline and who set up very *lean organizational structures*. Main parts of the organization were conducted by local organizers and globally the initiators limited their activities to coordination tasks such as giving instructions to participants and sharing knowledge among local organizers.

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Organizers employed *online and offline media* for communication and collaboration. While offline media created an atmosphere of openness and trust among Jammers, online media were mostly used by organizers for coordination. Participants used Twitter, the predefined communication channel, rather for informative purposes and for getting a global feeling, but not for collaboration with others world-wide. The interplay of online and offline media allowed for combining strength of both media: in essence, offline collaboration created effectiveness for innovating in diverse teams, while online coordination guided participants and organizers and made the jam a global jam via the online information flows.

The jam resulted in 203 new service concepts and was the one of the first jams purely targeted at services. For presenting their results *various media* were employed and the results were stored online, i.e. *freely accessible for the public*. Organizers and participants were satisfied with the developed concepts in general, while they see potential to improve them, e.g. by providing more structure to the innovation process by defining more deadlines or role concepts. Moreover the jam resulted in an innovation community which keeps being active, especially in offline settings. Thereby it is the first innovation community dedicated to services to the best of the authors' knowledge.

This unique configuration of the Global Service Jam 2011 is an alternative configuration to the known corporate jams. For moving towards a theory of jams, hypotheses based on design parameters, such as the use of online and offline media, should be developed and tested regarding their effectiveness for creating good results in the future. Likewise the innovation community developed by this jam should be followed by research in order to investigate its strength. It would be of special interest to what extent this community is sustainable, implementing the service concepts developed, and contributing to innovation in services, e.g. via developing additional tools for service design.

Acknowledgement

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