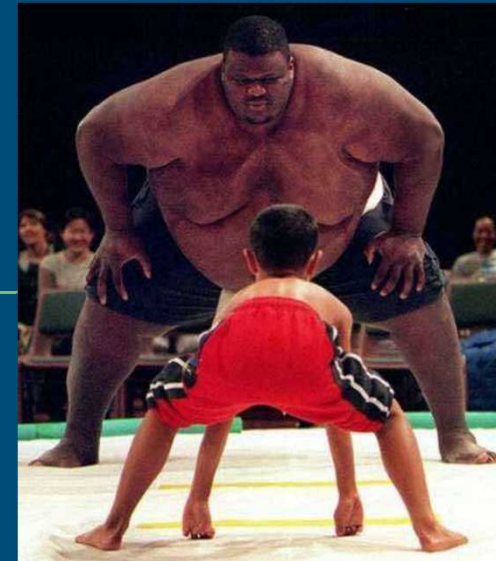


# The interaction of multiple champions in innovation networks: conflicts and complementarities

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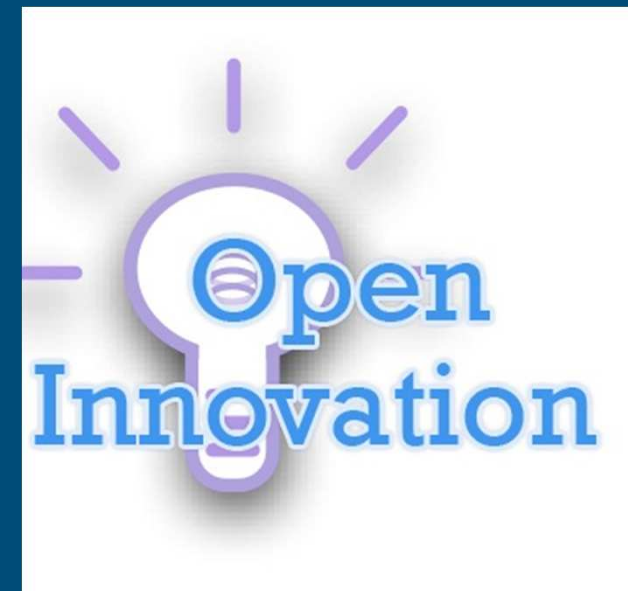
<sup>1</sup> Communication and Innovation Studies, <sup>2</sup> Communication Strategies



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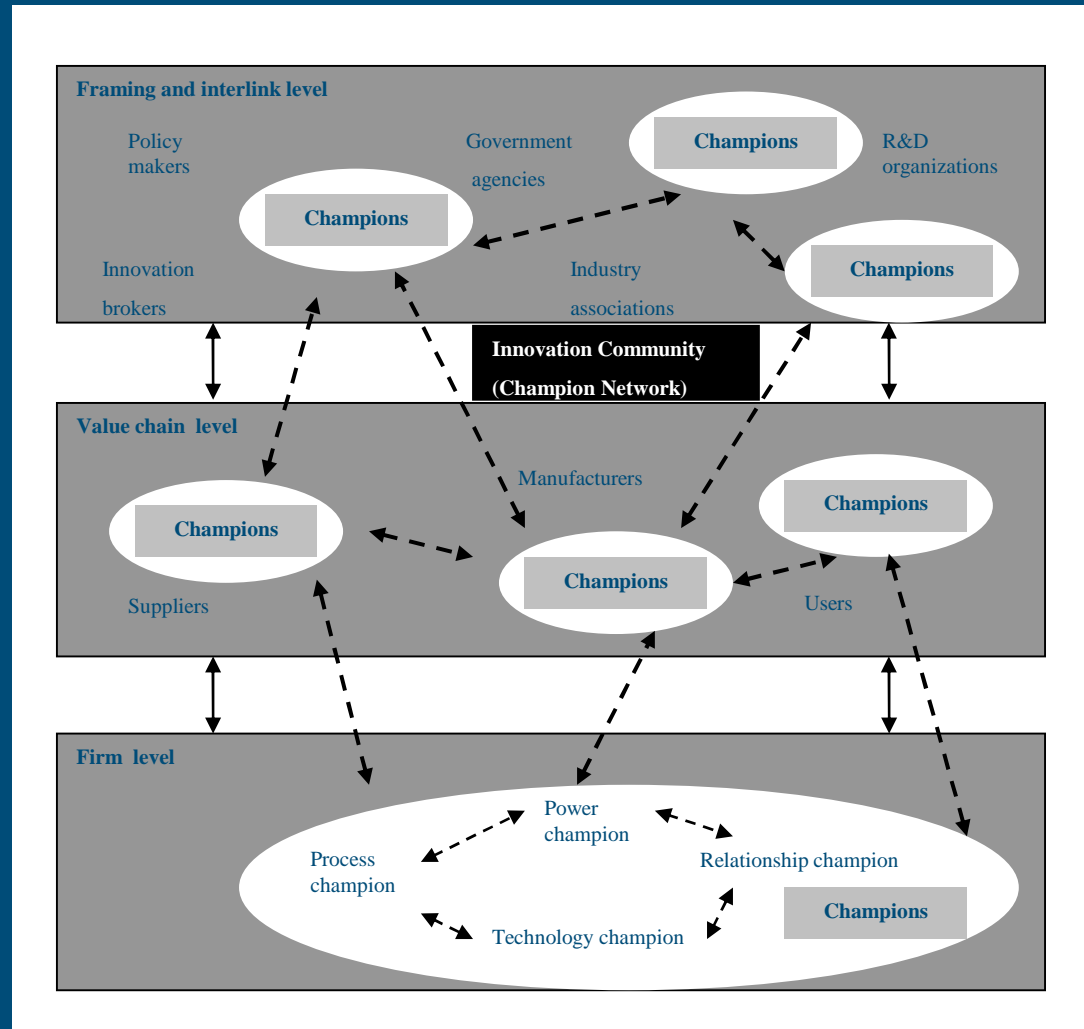
# Broadening the perspective on championing

- Innovation champion: “individuals who informally emerge in an organization and make a decisive contribution to the innovation by actively and enthusiastically promoting its progress through the critical stages”
- From inter-firm focus to distributed network focus



# Construct of innovation community (Fichter, 2009)

- Cooperating team of champions at different levels
- 4 kinds of champions:
  - Technology
  - Power
  - Process
  - Network /relationship
- Both 'producing' stakeholders, and facilitating intermediaries
- Especially network/relationship champions 'orchestrate' the network



# Factors for a functioning innovation community

- IC enables better resource access and joint action helps overcoming barriers easier
- Common belief, vision, goal, team spirit, and mutual support and informal between individual champions, is key for a well-functioning IC
- But: **is this easily achieved?** This is an unanswered question.
- So: process focus on complementarities and conflicts between different innovation champions



# Research methods

- Case study approach
- ‘Innovation journey’ analysis of three projects in agri-food (Rondeel, Sjalon, Greenport Shanghai)
- Analytical focus on conflicts and complementarities in three main network orchestration activities:
  - Demand/vision articulation
  - Network composition
  - Innovation process management



# Results: demand articulation

## ■ Complementarities:

- Through interaction of different champions visions/designs become more realistic and feasible
- Especially external facilitating champions (innovation brokers) enhance this process

## ■ Conflicts:

- Position changes of champions due to network composition change induces friction
- Champions may increasingly diverge in vision: this erodes the IC or prevents one building up



# Results: network formation

## ■ Complementarities:

- Catalyzing and emergent effect: chains of championing
- Innovation brokers can provide fresh look, and make connections 'producing' champions cannot make

## ■ Conflicts:

- Role coordination problems: who does what, who is spokesperson?
- Double identities cause role problems
- Adverse informality



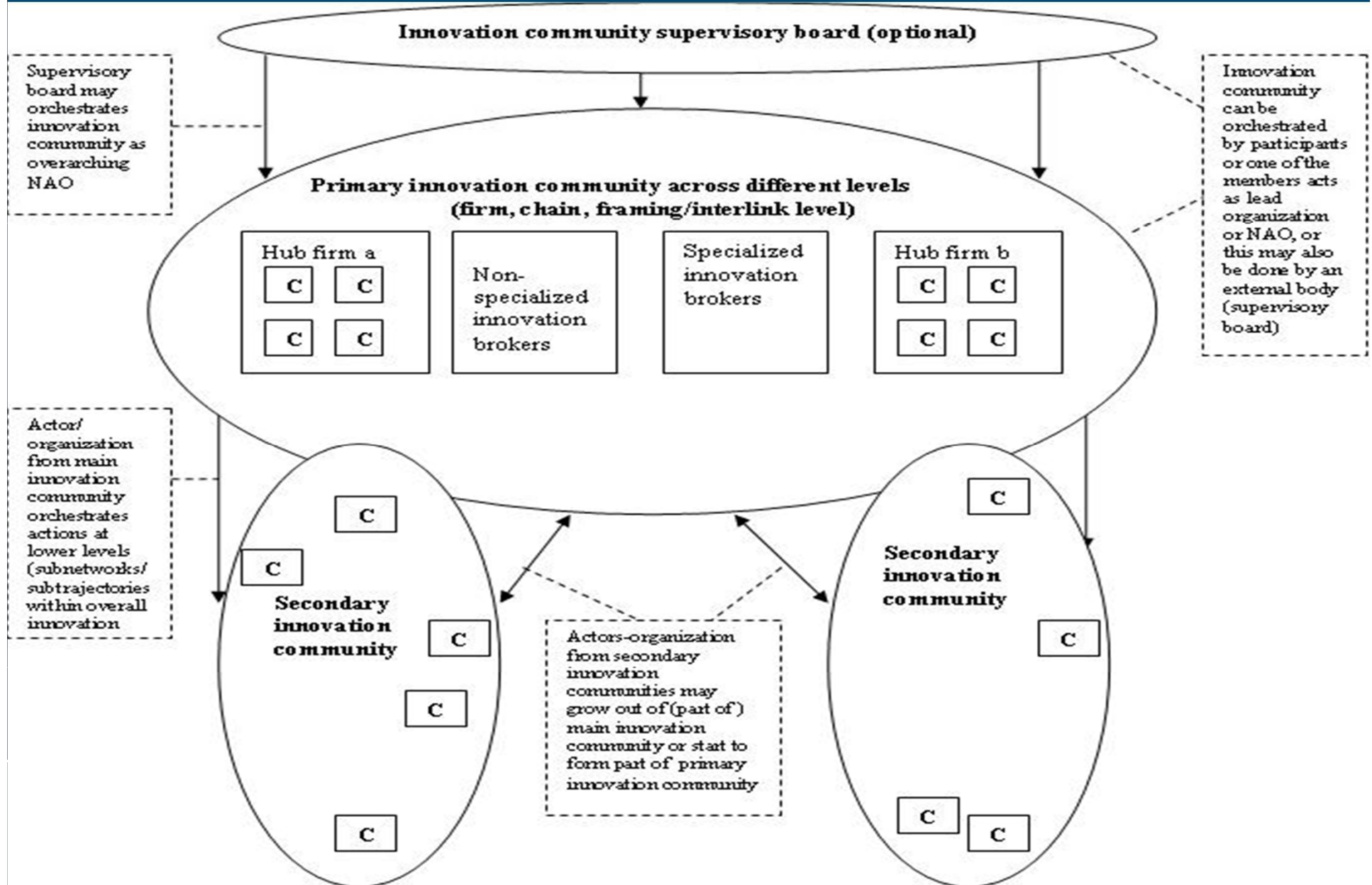
# Results: innovation process management

- Complementarities:
  - External innovation brokers help avoid lock-in
  - External innovation brokers can buffer and mediate because of more impartial position
- Conflicts:
  - External brokers may become too involved (e.g. becoming a technology champion) and thus lose impartiality and ability to act as network/process champion





# Discussion: IC is complex and dynamic constellation



# Discussion

- Common vision, team spirit, and mutual support in innovation communities are relative and dynamic: networks of champions are constantly redefined
- Orchestration by different kinds of champions is both complementary and counterproductive: IC needs some orchestration itself
- Innovation brokers are complementary but have to explicitly legitimize their position



# Conclusion

- Innovation communities of distributed champions are not stable but dynamic entities
- Although essential to the innovation process, they are not automatically beneficial and can even deter it
- In line with network management paradox that IC need a form of management, but at the same time should allow for informality and flexibility



# Thank you for your attention!

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