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## Changing Views of Innovation and Design — New Roles for Extension in Trans-Disciplinary Encounters

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### Abstract

Since the work of Everett Rogers, theories about the adoption and diffusion of innovations have continued to inform scholars and professionals in the field of 'extension'. In recent years we have witnessed the emergence of new theories and modes of thinking about innovation and innovation processes. Innovation is increasingly seen as a co-evolutionary process that involves simultaneously different human and agro-ecological aggregation levels. Network building, social struggle and social learning appear to be key ingredients of innovation trajectories. This presentation introduces these conceptual shifts and discusses their implications for the role of both scientists and communication professionals in socio-technical design trajectories. Subsequently, the presentation draws attention to incompatibilities between, on the one hand, increasingly privatised arrangements for the funding of research and extension, and, on the other, the novel roles as derived from recent innovation theories. It is argued that, in practice, the discourse of 'demand driven service delivery' can easily lead to interaction patterns that hinder the flexible cooperation, learning ability, pro-activeness and creativity that is necessary in order to enhance innovation. Institutional change and a rethinking of the notion of 'demand articulation' are needed to move ahead. Examples from the Netherlands and Ghana are used to underpin and illustrate the arguments made.

**Keywords:** Innovation theories