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EVIDENCE BRIEF
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EVIDENCE BRIEF · INNOVATION AND NETWORKS

Openness Pays Up to a Point

Does openness pay?

Firms open up to find ideas through partners, challenges, crowdsourcing contests and events, but every disclosure risks losing control of knowledge. Studies of 2,931 UK manufacturers, R&D collaborations, a crowdsourcing platform, open innovation managers and a Jaguar development project show when openness pays and what it costs.

By Eventamin · How we work 12 November 2026

United Kingdom, Netherlands, Sweden, Europe, Worldwide

●●●●● 5 studies

open innovation | paradox of openness | intellectual property | knowledge sharing | crowdsourcing contests | selective revealing | R&D collaboration | appropriability | innovation challenges | patents

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KEY FINDING

Openness pays up to a point: UK manufacturers collaborate most broadly at moderate levels of IP protection, and fewer partners join when protection becomes very strong. Successful firms and individuals reveal selectively and time their openness, closed while ideas are unprotected and open once patents are filed, but openness carries hidden costs in stress and lost control.

Five studies, 2011–2022

Key findings

- **Openness peaks at moderate protection.** Among 2,931 UK manufacturers, the breadth of formal innovation partnerships rose with IP protection up to about 13 on an 18-point scale and then declined [1].
- **Firms search widely but partner narrowly.** On average, they drew on about 39 percent of the possible types of external knowledge sources but partnered formally with only 14 percent of the possible types of partners [1].
- **Selective revealing is the norm.** 91 percent of interviewed crowdsourcing solvers revealed only part of their solution, 67 percent agreed on non-disclosure and 23 percent bypassed the platform to deal with the client directly [2].
- **Openness has a dark side.** Open innovation professionals mostly responded to sharing-protecting tensions with anxiety, defensiveness and frustration rather than constructive coping [3].
- **Timing decides.** Jaguar kept its rotary gear selector project closed until it filed a patent, then opened it to universities and an engineering firm to gain speed [4].

FOR THE MARKET

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Market outcomes

What the studies mean for each part of the industry.

Organisers & associations	Hackathons, challenges and crowdsourcing contests attract stronger contributions when rules let participants reveal selectively, through non-disclosure terms and staged disclosure; 23 percent of solvers sidestepped the intermediary to reach the client directly.
Exhibitors & sponsors	Firms that show at fairs, pitch at events or enter challenges protect first and reveal in modules: file patents before engaging partners, share complete knowledge only with a core group and keep outer partners at a distance.
Investors & advisers	Very strong IP protection goes with narrower collaboration, and very weak protection with exposure; portfolios gain from firms that balance the two and that manage the stress openness places on staff.

The paradox of openness

Firms open their innovation processes through partners, crowdsourcing contests, hackathons and the trade fairs and conferences where they show new products. Each channel brings in knowledge but exposes the firm's own. In the UK Innovation Survey, manufacturing firms drew on about 39 percent of the possible types of external knowledge sources on average, but partnered formally with only 14 percent of the possible types of partners [1].

Studies at the level of firms, collaborations and individuals show when openness pays.

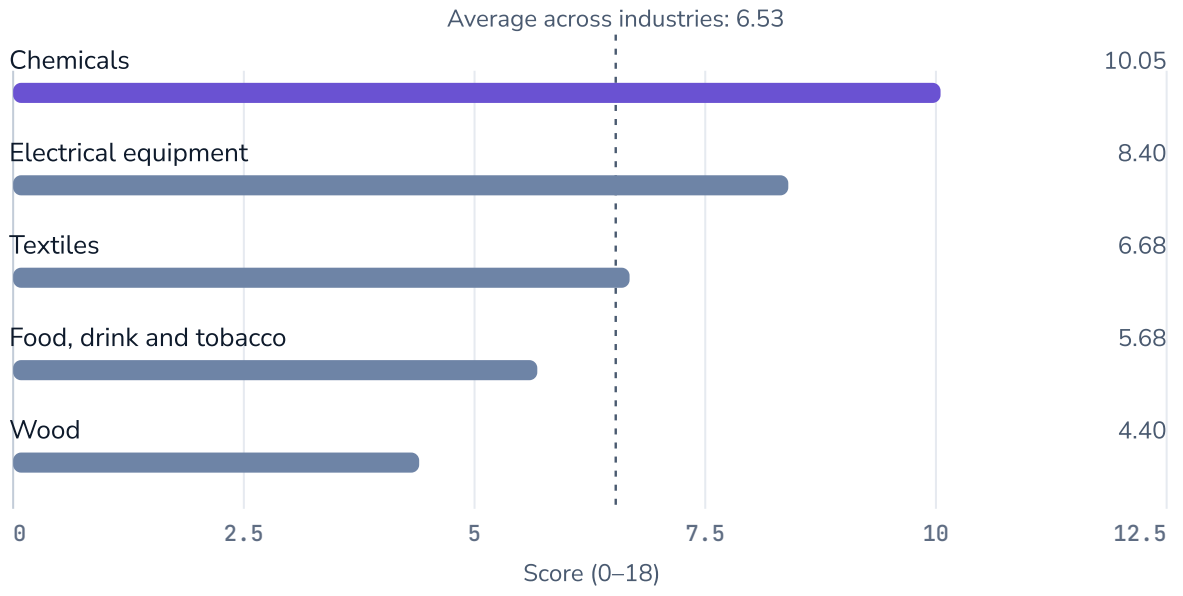
Protection and openness at the firm level

Protection and openness go together, up to a point. Among 2,931 UK manufacturing firms, those with stronger strategies to protect their innovations, through patents, secrecy, lead time or complexity, searched more widely for outside knowledge and collaborated with more types of partners[1]. For formal collaboration, the relationship formed an inverted U: breadth peaked at about 13 on an 18-point scale of protection and declined among the most protective firms[1].

Protection strategies vary by industry. Chemicals firms scored highest, followed by electrical equipment; textiles, food, drink and tobacco, and wood scored lowest[1].

Strength of IP protection strategies among UK manufacturing firms in selected industries

Average score on a scale from 0 to 18.



Source: Laursen & Salter, based on the UK Innovation Survey · Release date: 2014 · Region: United Kingdom · Survey period: 2002 to 2004 · Number of firms: 2,931

Sharing and protecting in collaborations

R&D collaborations manage the tension through the type of knowledge they share. In eight collaborations in the Netherlands and Sweden, the complexity, tacitness and novelty of knowledge decided what could be shared, and trust and distance between partners shaped how[5]. Firms followed one of two strategies: open exchange among all partners, or a layered scheme in which a core group shares openly and outer members receive less; the larger the number of partners, the more likely a layered scheme[5]. Licensing put the chosen strategy into practice[5].

Crowdsourcing solvers reveal selectively

Individuals face the same paradox. On a crowdsourcing platform used by 8,604 solvers between 2009 and 2013, mostly experienced researchers, solvers balanced sharing their solutions with protecting their ideas; 62.6 percent of the 1,149 surveyed held a doctorate[2]. Among 43 interviewed solvers, 91 percent revealed only part of their solution, typically when the knowledge was complex and modular, and 67 percent agreed on non-disclosure[2].

Around one in four, 23 percent, bypassed the intermediary to build trust with the client directly, a share the authors found surprising given the platform's promise to broker trust[2]. Among survey respondents, 16.9 percent had reached an agreement with the client for their submitted solution[2].

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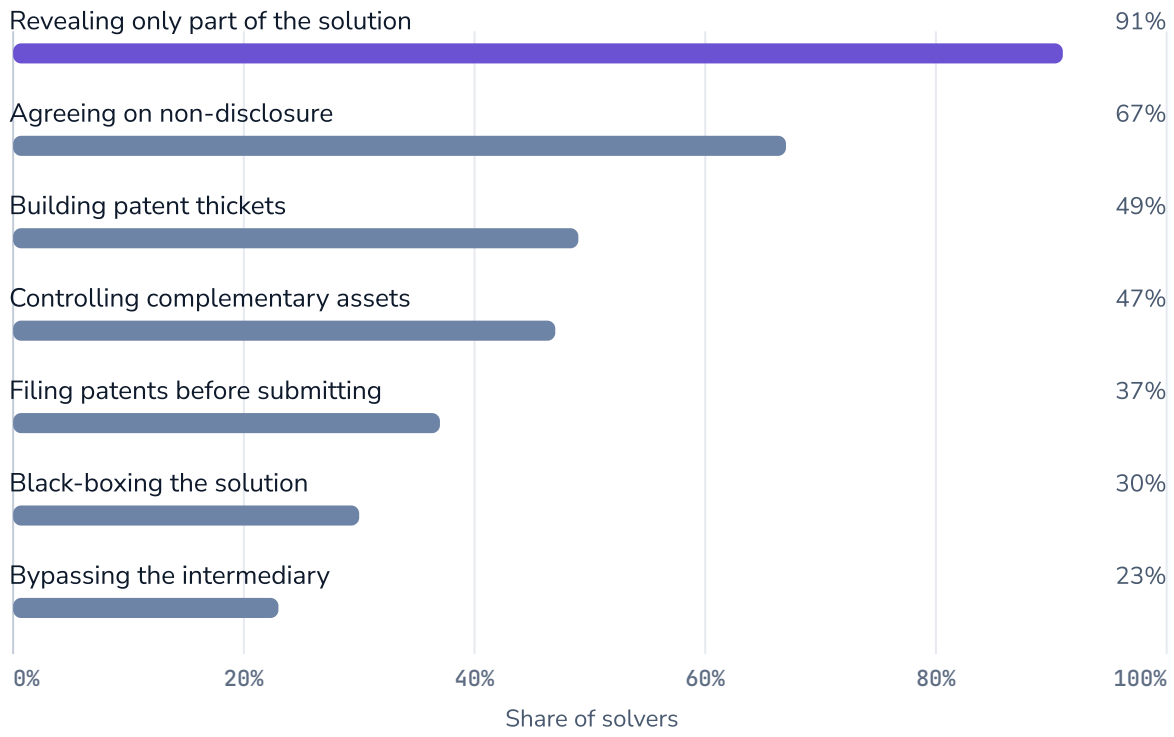
Practices used by crowdsourcing solvers to protect the value of their solutions

Share of interviewed solvers.



Source: Foege et al. · Release date: 2019 · Region: Worldwide · Number of respondents: 43 · Interview period: 2015 to 2016

The hidden costs of openness

Openness takes a toll on the people who manage it. Interviews with 14 professionals at six firms in energy, oil and gas, transport, mining and paper and at expert organizations showed that most responses to sharing-protecting tensions were destructive, revealing anxiety and defense mechanisms[3]. Once tensions escalated into outcomes, such as failing to capture value, only destructive responses were observed; few professionals balanced or separated the tensions constructively[3].

Timing: closed first, open later

The timing of openness can resolve the paradox. Jaguar developed the rotary gear selector for the Jaguar XF, a first to market protected by four granted patents, between 2001 and 2006[4]. The project stayed closed for around a year while the patent position was weak and the concept immature; filing the patent marked the switch to openness, before any partner was engaged[4].

Universities then ran user trials and market research, and an engineering services firm built the prototype faster than an in-house team could; experiments with 30 participants restored senior managers' confidence after an internal crisis[4]. Tasks were split into modules so that no partner saw the whole, and a supplier's independent patent on one component was a small loss against the speed gained[4].

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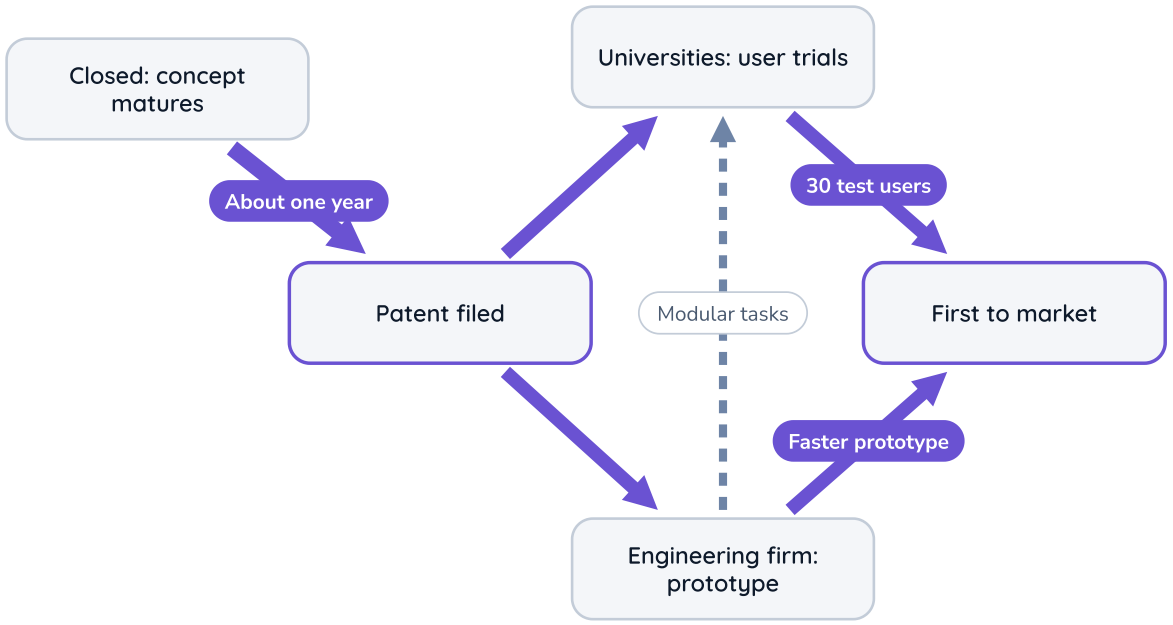
Timing of openness in the Jaguar XF rotary gear selector project, 2001 to 2006

Main sequence; line width shows the main route, not a measured value.

Main route Other links

Arrow width marks the main route, not a measured value · dashed: weak or no link



Source: Bahemia et al. · Release date: 2018 · Region: United Kingdom · Interviews: 44 · Classification: Eventamin

Notes on the data

The figures are based on five studies published between 2011 and 2022: an analysis of the UK Innovation Survey covering 2,931 manufacturing firms in 2002 to 2004, a case study of eight R&D collaborations, 1,149 survey responses and 43 interviews with crowdsourcing solvers, 14 interviews across six firms and expert organizations, and 44 interviews on one car development project[1–5]. The firm-level survey is cross-sectional and does not show cause. The share of breadth is the average share of the possible types of sources and partners listed in the

survey. The sequence of the Jaguar project is Eventamin's coding of the study's findings.

Sources

● Study ○ Industry source

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4 Bahemia, H., Sillince, J., & Vanhaverbeke, W. (2018). The timing of openness in a radical innovation project, a temporal and loose coupling perspective [Journal article]. *Research Policy, 47(10), 2066–2076*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2018.07.015 First-hand

5 Bogers, M. (2011). The open innovation paradox: knowledge sharing and protection in R&D collaborations [Journal article]. *European Journal of Innovation Management, 14(1), 93–117*. https://doi.org/10.1108/14601061111104715 First-hand

The evidence

5 studies

SAMPLE

Five studies: survey data on 2,931 UK manufacturing firms, eight R&D collaborations, 1,149 survey responses and 43 interviews with crowdsourcing solvers, 14 open innovation professionals and 44 interviews on one car development project

YEARS

2011–2022

METHOD

A national innovation survey analysis and qualitative case studies

About Eventamin

Eventamin reads the peer-reviewed research on events, exhibitions and hospitality, sets it against industry data and states what it means for the market. Every brief is published by Eventamin as an organisation: its sources, method and corrections are open.

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