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The importance of finding a clear definition of innovation

Introduction

Innovation is a common word we see on daily basis in different circumstances. The term innovation has no clear and stated definition according to Zairi (1994) and it's hard to measure innovation and compare, as Zairi gives examples on businesses, that it's difficult to say which business is the most innovative one. The term has been defined in a broad variety and the intention in every case has been to satisfy customers.

Innovations is also being described to be that essential for businesses, like blood in the human body, to keep them alive and growing (Zahra & Covin, 1994).

Innovation need to be studied in today's situation of increased competitions world round, technological alteration and the fast changing market condition. It is seen as a foundation of competitive advantage and financial growth. (Damanpour & Schneider, 2006)

The purpose of this study is to answer two questions; can students at Halmstad University define innovation? Do they think it's a hype? This to get an insight if the word innovation is being used in many contexts, and maybe even in too many, and if student now what the concept really means.

This paper will follow by the chapter of method with the details of how this research was constructed. The next chapter is theoretical framework where there is secondary data and later results with the primary data from the research. The last part of this research paper is analysis, conclusion and proposals to future studies.

Key words: innovation – innovation science – organizational innovation

Method

This paper is based on primary data which is collected from a survey on the internet which has been linked on facebook and

email. By using a standardized survey, it'll result in standardized data which later can be analysed on the computer (Jacobsen, 2002).

The purpose of this research is to describe the situation today about the term innovation. The first step of the research was to find already existing information about innovation. How others have defined it and problems that are stated with the term. To gather this secondary data, I searched for relevant scientific articles on databases at Halmstad University website. Databases I've used are Scopus, Summon and Web of science. Next step was to determine which approach to use to gather the primary data, and for this research I chose quantitative because I want to get a broader picture about the problem with not too many shades of it. Following was to develop accurate questions and design the survey.

The population sample are 200 students at Halmstad University. The representative will be able to answer the survey on the internet. This results in a minimal interference because the survey in anonymous. The sample size should be 10 % of the whole population to be a valid result (Jacobsen, 2002). Since there was 5011 students at Halmstad University the year 2015, that belongs to a program and not only taking classes, makes my 200 respondents a to small sample size to be representative for the whole student culture (University of Halmstad, 2016).

Uncertainties in this research is then that the sample size does not represent the whole student culture at Halmstad University. The survey is answered from the respondents own computers, which allows them to be in there natural environment which makes respondents answer more correct and honest with no affect from interviewer or environment.

Theoretical framework

Innovation is an important process in business, and it is not something they have to accomplish once, but to remain over time to maintain the competitive advantages. A manager's job is to get the organization to evolve and stablish innovation by providing the artistry it needs (Cooper, 1998).

The great complexity of the innovation phenomenon is that there is no accepted definition, what is meant by the term and no appropriate innovation model (Van de Ven, 1986).

The importance of finding a clear definition of innovation

West and Anderson (1996) imply that innovation is the start of a new process or product with the purpose to give an advantage in a group such as organization. The definition is not restricted to be a value only for an organization, but to the wider society. They say that, ''innovation can be defined as the effective application of processes and products new to the organization and designed to benefit it and its stakeholders'' (p. 689). Zahra and Covin (1994) even compare innovation to be that essential for the business, like the blood that is running through our veins in the human body. Innovation is what makes the business to keep going and growing.

Others have described the term as:

> ''Innovation can broadly be described as the implementation of discoveries and interventions and the process by which new outcomes, whether products, systems or processes, come into being'' (Gloet and Terziovski, 2004).

Herkema (2003) stated that innovation was a process that was aiming to generate new information to contribute to the development of marketing. A different definition was funded by Thompson (1965) who said that innovation was the ground for new concepts, methods or services with the three steps: generation, recognition and application.

The management in an organization is the one that affect the innovation the most, both when the organization will implement and avert it. The management control this by constructing strategies and by establish efficiencies in the business (Hambrick & Mason, 1984).

According to Cooper (1998) the term is often illustrated as one-dimensional and it indicates to a new idea and a progress that's providing innovation as either a product or a process. A problem that occur when innovation is being studied is that it is hard to compare conclusions from different studies on the area.

The problematics about the blurred definition and the lack of a model doesn't require complicated calculations or a lot's of resources. Cooper (1998) means that the things that are needed are an accepted reference point and a structure that conception the whole complexity of the word innovation.

Plessis (2007) means that innovation is the creativity to generate new knowledge and be inspirational for new outcomes in an organization. This new knowledge should improve structures and processes in the business.

Knowledge management system is crucial in businesses. It's creating a culture that is encouraging innovation and creativity and the value of knowledge is recognized and transferred in this culture (Plessis 2007). Scarbrough (2003) also mention the culture of knowledge management as an influence to innovation. He means that the innovation is strongly attached to problems like competence building that exists in human resources management. Skills of the employee is important in the innovation process. To provide the employee the skills innovation require, the knowledge creation and sharing is the main activity. An employee with the most suitable skills get to assist in the process of innovation.

Results

There was at total 203 respondents to the survey. Three of them didn't answer all of the questions, therefore I excluded them in the presentation of the results to get a more accurate and consistent result.
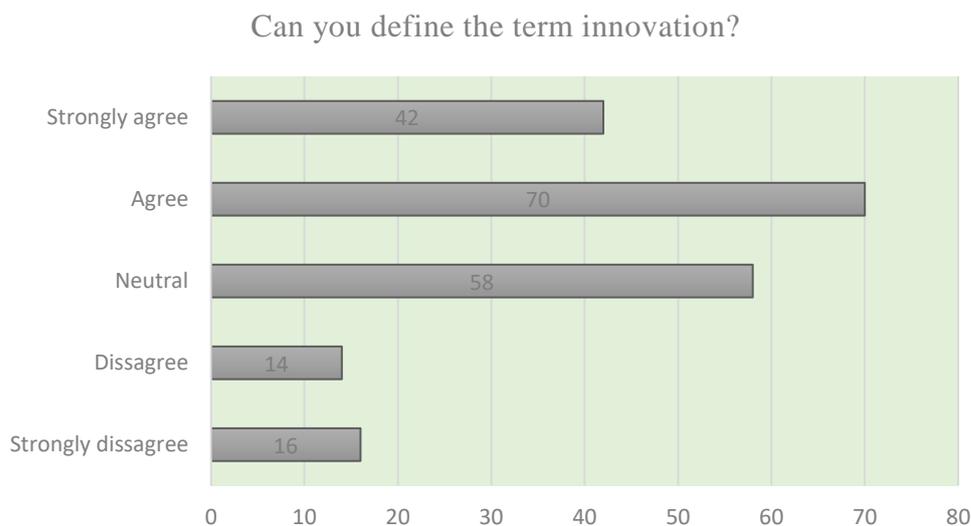
Can you define the term innovation?

Figure 2. Can you define the term innovation?

Figure number two shows that 42 of the respondents strongly agreed that they were able to define the word innovation. 70 answered that they agreed on the Likert scale that they knew the definition. 58 of the participants were neutral whether they knew the definition or not and the amount of the respondents who didn't know the definition at all were 30.
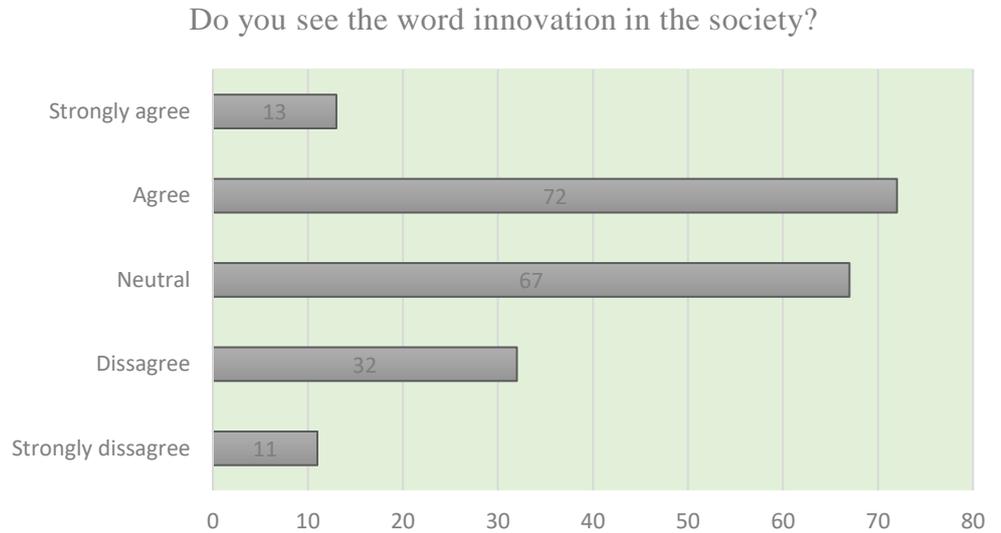
Do you see the word innovation in the society?

Figure 3. Do you see the word innovation in the society?

These answers shows that 85 of the respondents see the word innovation in the society and 13 of them strongly agreed to the statement. 67 were neutral whether they see innovation in the society or not. 32 disagreed with the statement and eleven strongly disagreed.

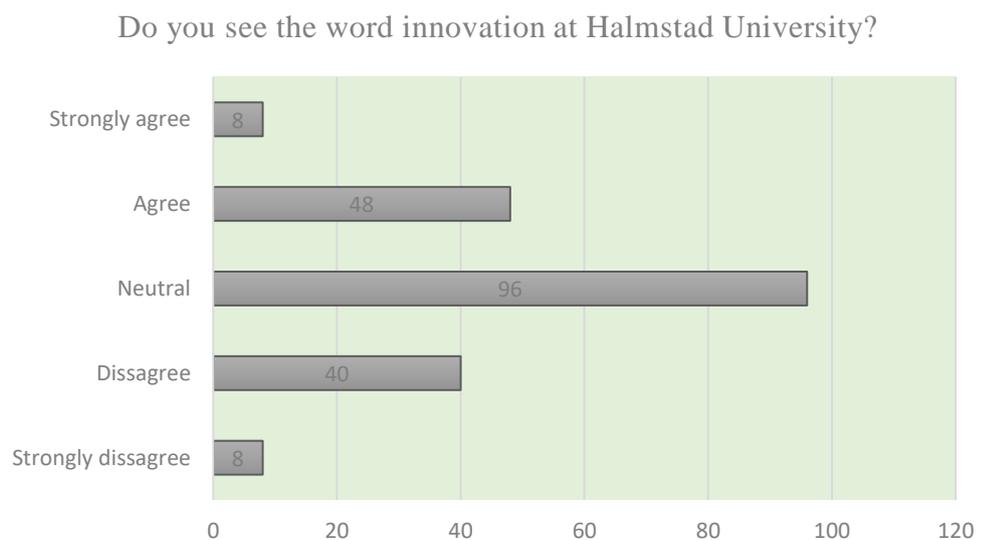Do you see the word innovation at Halmstad University?

Figure 4 .Do you see the word innovation at Halmstad University?

Figure 4 shows that 48 of the respondents see the word innovation at Halmstad University and eight strongly agree that they see the word at the University. 96 were neutral in the question, 40 disagreed with it and eight strongly disagreed that they see the word innovation at the University of Halmstad.

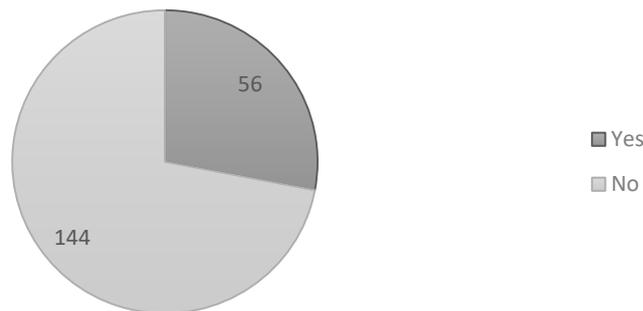Is the term innovation used in too many contexts?

Figure 5. Is the term innovation used in too many contexts?

On this question, 144 out of the 200 (72 %) don't think that the word innovation is used too much and 56 of the sample population think it is.

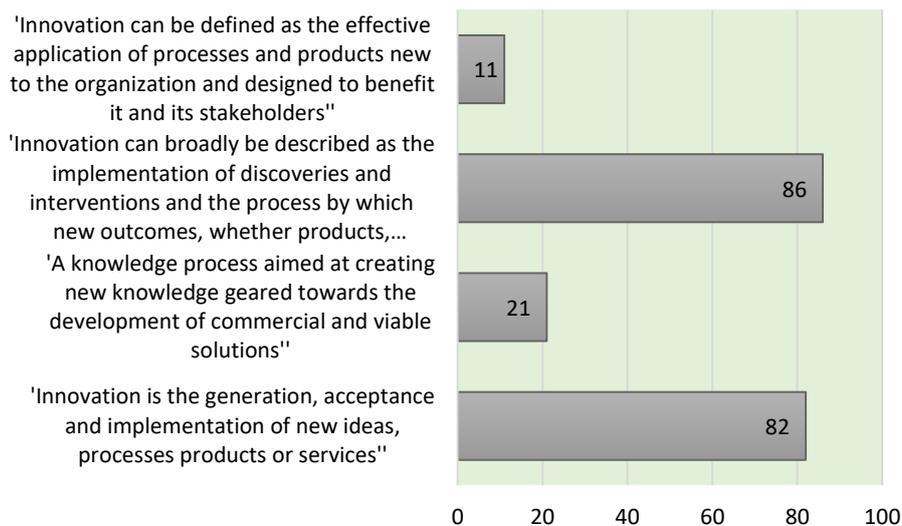Which of the following definitions best matches your opinion?

Figure 6. Which of the following definitions best matches your opinion?

On this last question the respondents got to choose one of multiple definitions, stated by various researcher, which best matched their own opinion on the term. The first definition of innovation by West & Andersson (1996) best matched eleven of the respondents. The second definition was stated by Gloet & Terziovski (2004), and this matched 86 of the respondents' opinion. The third definition by Herkema (2003) was in line with 21 of the respondents. The last and fourth definition declared by Thompson (1965) matched the opinion of 82 of the sample size.

Analysis

In the literature do many of the researcher, like Van de Ven (1986) and Cooper (1998), agree on that there is missing an established definition on innovation. This because the complexity of the term and therefore can be used in many different cases. As we can see from the primary data from this research, 58 of the 200 respondents, that is 29 % of the sample size, were neutral in the question if they knew the definition on innovation or not. This could strengthen the statement that there is a blurred and undefined definition of innovation. As well as it can be an explanation on why that many of the sample size didn't know or didn't want to make a statement about the question.

Innovation is significant in businesses. The importance of innovation is not to accomplish it, but to remain it. It's the manager's job to equipment the staff with the knowledge that it needs to be able to obtain innovation and to develop it (Cooper, 1998). To this, Zahra and Covin (1994) agrees on and makes similes on the human body and how it needs blood to function and business that require innovation for its survival.

The results of the research shows that many of the students see the word innovation in the society (85 all together by 200). If the students of the sample size see the word in the University at Halmstad, 56 of 200 agreed. Of the 200 respondents, 144 said that innovation isn't used in too many context. This could mean that the University of Halmstad is using innovation in a too small extent and could probably use it in a wider context. This because of the importance that Zahra and Covin (1994) points out, and that

in fact that 144 of the 200, which is 72 %, actually said that it is not a hype and is not being used too much.

The definitions by Gloet and Terziavski (2004) matched 86 of the respondents and the definition stated by Thompson (1965) matched 82 of them. Gloet and Terziavski's definition was about implementation of new discoveries and interventions to generate new outcomes. Thompson said that innovation is generation and implementation of new ideas, processes, products and services. The both definitions contain the word implementation, and that there is something new to attribute. This is in line with what Plessis (2007) means that innovation is. That it's something creative to come up with new knowledge that should improve structures and processes and be stimulating for new outcomes.

West and Anderson (1996) on the other hand defines innovation as a submission of new products and processes which is intended to bring a value to the organization and its stakeholders. Herkema (2003) defines innovation from a different perspective, where innovations is to bring new information to the table to improve marketing.

The survey showed that students at Halmstad University was unsure about the definition of innovation. 29 % were neutral, which is a rather big portion of the sample size, that couldn't state if they knew the meaning of the term or not. 30 of 200 could say that they didn't know what innovation means, which is 15 %. If the sample size would represent the whole student culture at Halmstad University, it would mean that 752 students would not understand the concept of innovation. 28 % of the sample size said that they see the word innovation at the University of Halmstad. That means that of the 752 students, which are 15 % of the whole student culture, 211 of them see the word at the University but does not understand it (28 % of the 752). The word innovation was seen a little more in the society in general than on the University. In the society in general, 85 of 200 see the term which is 42, 5 %. If 15 % of the whole student culture see

innovation in the society but don't know what the definition of innovation are, that means that 320 student from Halmstad University see the word in different situations in the society but don't understand what it means and its concept.

85 of the respondents see the word innovation in the society. 56 of the sample size think that the term is being used in too many context and situations, which is 28 %. Of the 85 that see the word, 28 % of them think that innovations is being used too much. On the whole student culture, that would mean that 596 of the student who see the word in the society, also thinks that it is being used too much, and therefore can think that the term innovation is a hype in today's society (28 % of 2130).

If the students see the innovation in the society, 67 of them were neutral, that they either see it or not. If the students see the word innovation at the University of Halmstad, there were 96 that were neutral in the question. It's interesting why these two questions differ. Are the student more occupied in the mind when they are at the University or is it another variable that makes these two questions differ.

The number of the respondents that see the word innovation at Halmstad University was 56, which is the same number that answered that innovation is being used in too many contexts. It would be interesting here to see how many answered that they both saw the term innovation and thought it is beings used too much. If there is any type of correlation between the two of them.

Scarbough (2003) said that the skills of the employees is the main importance in the innovation process and brings a lot of business value. This would encourage Universities in general to educate and prepare student for this task. As the research showed, 30 of the sample size didn't know how to define innovation. Of the whole student culture at Halmstad University, that would mean, like mentioned before, that 802 student on the University don't know what innovation means and could therefore not apply it in working practice. This means that 802 students in Halmstad are unprepared for that important task in the working life.

It is also an importance for Halmstad University as an organisation, to represent the innovative mind-set in today's

society. As stated by Cooper (1998) innovation is an important process that has to stretch over time and make it able for organisations to keep their competitive advantage. If Halmstad University represent the "old fashioned way" instead of innovation, they wouldn't attract students and the organisation would eventually fall apart. Even though organization don't necessarily have to represent innovation, they need to be careful for representing the opposite and that demands them to apply innovation in their organisation. Halmstad University wouldn't like the number of 802 students, who can't define innovation to increase, because that would be a step in the wrong direction.

According to West and Anderson (1996) the innovation process may not only be a value for an organization, but for the wider society. The importance of innovation is therefore not only valuable for Halmstad University, but based on the fact that Halmstad University is an educating organization and they also have a responsibility to the wider society. The future workforce is sent out by Halmstad University and it is of great importance that they are familiar with the phenomenon innovation.

The tricky thing though is to not go overboard and turn innovation into a hype. If the word is used in too many context people might questioning the importance of it. Van de Ven (1986) means that innovation is very complex and there is a lack of a clear definition and appropriate model. Cooper (1998) emphasize the need for a reference point and a structure that summarizes the word innovation. Would there be an appropriate model and a reference point for the innovation process, it would be easier for organizations to implement and maintain it. To add to this, Hambrick and Mason (1984) mean that whether the innovation process is successful or not, depends on the management in the organizations because they are the ones who construct strategies and decides whether they will implement it or avert it. If there was a model and reference point for

innovation, it would be easier for the organizations to control it and make sure it doesn't turn into a hype.

Conclusion

Like the literature agrees on, there is no accepted definition on innovation, and therefore it's not odd that students, or people in general, doesn't know the definition of innovation. The results of the research showed that 29 % of the respondents whether did or didn't know the concept of innovation and 15 % answered that they didn't know the definition of innovation. Because of the broad use of the term, it could be confusing what it really stands for. Therefore, people in general might know what they associate innovation with, like implementation of new ideas, discoveries, processes and such thing, but no really definition on what it is exactly and if the term has some limits. The problem that it is brought on, is the importance of innovation in the business and organization world. It's crucial for the organization to maintain its purpose and survive. The innovation process is managed by the employee and their skills. If Halmstad University sends out new educated students that don't know the concept of innovation and what it means, the employee are not prepared for that important task that the business word holds. The University must educate the student on innovation to make them qualified for that coming task.

This research showed that innovation exists in the society and different organizations like the University at Halmstad. The University is like any other business in that matter, that they also need to attract customers, in their case students. The research also shows that 144 (72 %) of the respondents don't think that the word innovation is used too much, therefore it's not a hype. This could mean that the University of Halmstad is using innovation in a too small extent and should increase it to improve their competitive advantage and to attract new students to the University.

Future studies

It would be interesting to do a further study on how these results would change by compare sample sizes based on which program the student is reading. Would the results be different in an economic class comparing to a class that educates in sport science. Also it would be interesting to compare Halmstad University with other universities in Sweden about the students' knowledge of innovation.

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