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The Role of Innovation and Human Creativity in the Life of Economic Actors

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Abstract: Our aim is to present the contribution of human creativity to the innovation of economic actors based on opinion of regional market players. In this study we wanted to review the connection between human creativity and innovation. This topic appears periodically during research activities; its processing can be seen as significant. Therefore, we are going to think through and focus attention on innovation's human side, and the ability of creativity without a full literature review. Furthermore, we briefly touched on the sources of creativity, how imagination and different mindsets can help to create innovation, how creativity can be improved, how proper environment might be nurtured and what the leaders and organisations can do to support that. We conducted a 22-question survey among regional market players and used the results to provide evidence of how creativity plays a role in life of the economic actors and gained insight into their innovation management processes. Our study contributes to the expansion of understanding the literature in this topic and provides an opportunity for economic actors to improve the connection of creativity and innovation in their organisation. The study may draw the attention of local higher education institutions to how they can support economic actors in this area through their third mission activities.

Keywords: Creativity, Innovation, Leadership style, Organisational culture, Innovation management

Introduction

Innovation and human creativity are inseparable. Although we have entered the era of AI, we still feel that the human side of innovation is becoming more valuable. Our assumption is that the source of all innovation is people, their ability to think creatively, use their imagination with which they can envision something that does not exist yet, but it will emerge during the creative process. Perhaps we can say that the whole process starts with openness and curiosity about our environment. Take the example of a small child who approaches everything with curiosity at the beginning of their life driven by a desire to discover. The imagination of a child allows them to use an object/toy differently from its specified method of use. They are not bound by user manuals; they can invent any function for it and naturally start playing with the object as if it were created for that purpose. The adult parent is amazed at their child's imagination, as they approach that object with a different way of thinking, probably this way of using it would not have even occurred to them. This kind of thinking ability, which a person is capable of in childhood, is increasingly valued in the present. We do not have to fear that we have lost this ability during the process of becoming an adult, or because we feel that we are not the creative type. According to John Cleese, the world-famous co-founder of Monty Python: „It's a myth that creativity is something we're born with. It's not. Anyone can be creative.” (Cleese, 2021). So, creativity can be developed, and we need it in the present and will certainly need it in the future. In its Future of Jobs Report 2025, the World Economic Forum (WEF) ranked creative thinking fourth on its list of 10 core skills for 2025, indicating the importance of this cognitive ability in today's workplaces (Weforum.org, 2025). Creative thinking also ranked fourth on the WEF's list of the Top 10 fastest-growing skills by 2030. This clearly shows that,

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according to the respondents, creativity will still be one of the most important skills for future employees in 2030, which they will need to use in the era of working with AI and widespread digitalization. The European Union has recognized that its competitiveness also depends on the development of future-oriented skills, which is why the European Commission, in its Skills Union document created in 2025, aims to promote the process of creative thinking, among other things, by promoting STEAM fields (European Commission, 2025). According to the document, the role of people, their skills, and their way of thinking, among other things, come to the fore in developing Europe's competitiveness, and we should add that this is very right, because investing in people always pays off in the long term and supports the reduction of social inequalities, with which we could build a more sustainable and stable future.

On the Relationship between Creativity and Innovation

Numerous studies have already addressed the concept of creativity. In their literature review, the authors searched for the appropriate definition from an economic perspective, and based on their research results, they concluded that "innovation is the market realization (implementation) of creativity, but both phenomena can occur without the other" (Derecskei et al., 2012.). In our opinion, the basis of innovation can always be a creative idea. In relation to creativity, the author highlights the creation of novelty and draws attention to the joy of discovery during the process (Csíkszentmihályi, 2022). Creativity is about generating ideas or results that are new and useful for achieving a goal (Amabile, 2011). According to the author, for a creative response to arise in a situation, four components are necessary. Three of these must be present at the level of the individual: specialist skills, internal creative processes, and motivation. The fourth component is the social environment in which the individual exerts its influence. If the internal components at the level of the individual come together fortunately, it is much easier to realize the creative idea in a supportive environment than without it. Creativity, as defined by the OECD (The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), is "the ability to generate diverse and original ideas and to evaluate and develop the ideas of others" (OECD.org, 2025). Among the requirements placed on students is the need for creative thinking, as was also stated in the WEF report based on feedback from labour market players. The author highlights this in his article "The Transformation of Higher Education," in which he refers to the PWC Hungary CEO Survey and names the importance of creativity and innovation, which appears as a demand from the labour market (Kadocs, 2024). The OECD Oslo Manual sets out the internationally accepted definition of innovation: "a new or improved product or process (or combination of these) that is significantly different from the unit's previous products or processes and that is made available to potential users (product) or used by the unit (process)" (Oslo Manual, 2018). The two definitions can almost complement each other, in which creativity, as the "ability to generate diverse and original ideas," is embodied in "a new or improved product or process" as innovation.

In their book, Innovative Intelligence, Weiss and Legrand distinguish between creativity and innovation in that creativity are about new ideas, which can be relevant, useful, feasible, or none of these, while the outcome of innovation represents value for the organization. Based on this, their definition, which can be interpreted in a business context, is that „innovation is applied creativity that creates value for economy" (Weiss et al., 2011). While examining the relationship between the creativity and the innovation, Nakano and its fellow researcher concluded that both are skills of the 21st century, in order to spread which, they called attention to the need for creative education, from primary school to higher education, with the main goal of motivating students to have a desire to learn and to discover new subjects, which goes hand in hand with the need to rethink educational strategies and methods (Nakano et al., 2018). Castillo-Vergara and its co-authors undertook a bibliometric analysis of creativity in the field of economics and found that it is an important topic on a global level, as evidenced by the fact that most research is conducted in the USA, followed by Europe in second place. Regarding the development of the research topic, they highlighted that the foundations related to creativity have already been laid, and that the analysis of the relationship with organizations and the environment is currently emphasized. The creativity is the driving force of the process of knowledge production that influences economic performance, for which the innovation is key, to develop competitiveness. They highlighted that there are two main directions, the first is that the study of the creativity should play a role in the training of professionals, the second is that it is necessary to develop a process evaluation system within organisations for measuring organisational creativity (Castillo-Vergara, et al., 2018).

On the Sources of Creativity

How can imagination, problem-solving thinking, and different thinking styles help create innovation? In his PhD dissertation, Galla discussed the ten factors of the creativity, which she summarized based on the results of

two researchers (Giulford, 1950, Torrance, 1974): general problem sensitivity, originality, fluency, elaboration, flexibility, analysis, synthesis, complexity, redefinition, evaluation. She stated that these characteristics differ for everyone (Galla, 2021). Based on these characteristics, a creative person emerges with the ability to identify the problem and originality, and the role of imagination can also be highlighted. Imagination, the power of intellectual creativity, can be considered a form of manifestation of creative thinking. Based on the interpretation of Galla, problem-solving thinking and thinking creatively can be characteristic of a creative personality. For imagination to fly, it is necessary to break away from thinking in patterns. In contrast, the thinking that enables a series of routine actions and plays a role in our everyday lives, using patterns, holds our processes together, points us in one direction, and helps us solve our everyday, simple problems. In contrast to convergent thinking, divergent thinking branches out, diverges, and considers multiple options when solving a problem. Edward De Bono contributed to the understanding of creative thinking by introducing lateral thinking. „Lateral thinking is not limited to merely problem solving; we can look at the same things from a new perspective, or we can use it to generate new ideas on any topic” (De Bono, 2015). It evokes the ability to associate, which allows us to step out of thought patterns and fly freely through imagination. Imagination thus becomes a source of creativity, depending on whether we create something or recreate something. The authors draw attention to the nature of creativity experimentation, which is based on trial and failure and requires a willingness to transform efforts into learning processes (Santosoa et al., 2019).

On the Development of Creativity

The author highlighted the human factor in the creation of innovation, among the factors influencing the competitiveness of nations. Human capital, or, as the author mentioned, human wealth, which includes, among other things, the creativity and innovativeness of the available labour force, greatly influences the economic performance and social well-being of a country (Csath M., 2021). The study by Dobos and Csiszárík-Kocsir (2025) discusses not only creativity but also the importance of a project-based approach, examining how it affects the intensity of corporate innovation and competitiveness, with particular regard to regional characteristics and the economic environment. The author examined the role of the individual within the organization from the perspective of the development of innovation (Véghné, 2022.). For the author, creativity appears at the beginning of the process of knowledge generation, arising from human presence, which is embodied in the creation of new ideas and the innovation. The author drew attention to the time perspective of people, which can reduce the activity of innovation. As she mentioned in her study, based on research of Zimbardo-Boyd, the present-hedonic time profile supports the development of innovation on the part of people. Among her own findings, she emphasised that time orientation is a learned process and therefore can be modified. The internal drive of individuals to innovation can be stimulated by the appropriate organizational culture and leadership support. Sterczl and Csiszárík-Kocsir (2025) highlights the importance of creativity in qualitative data analysis through a comparative analysis of AI models. They examine how the combined use of human creativity and AI technology promotes deeper and more nuanced interpretation in analyses. Aigner reviewed the OECD Educational Working Paper (No. 280.), Saroyan's work on „Fostering creativity and critical thinking in university teaching and learning”. He praised, among other things, the fact that the document summarized the educational methods that can enable effective skill development and presented the elements of an environment that nurtures creative thinking (Aigner, 2024). The study suggests that these CCT skills are essential in the area of misinformation and disinformation.

On The Relationship Between the Leader, Leadership Style and Creativity

Knowledge, creativity and the ability to create new things appear among the requirements of value creation as a source of innovation (Varga, 2015). Karacsony and his co-authors, in their studies among students of business higher education institutions, drew attention to cultural diversity, which contributes to people being more open, innovative and creative, transforming their thinking. They emphasised that the quality and consequences of cooperation depend on the issue of individual attitude (Karácsony et al., 2022). The willingness to cooperate is important for the creation of innovation.

Why the creative environment is important? How can leaders promote creativity through their leadership style and influence the creation of a supportive environment? Jiang et al. found in their study that if there is a higher expectation for creativity from the leader, this supports the creative self-efficacy of employees within the organization. Leaders must provide a supportive environment where employees have the time and opportunity to experiment and feel that what they do matters. This allows them to be more involved in their work, formulate ideas, and contribute to organisational innovations (Jiang et al., 2017). The authors examined the role of

entrepreneurial leadership style in the relationship between creative self-efficacy and innovative behaviour among employees. In their study, they used data from large Chinese multinational companies and found that creative self-efficacy had a greater impact on innovative behaviour when employees were led by a strong entrepreneurial leader. Entrepreneurial leadership style had a stronger mediating effect on the relationship between creative self-efficacy and innovative behaviour than transformational and participative leadership styles (Newman et al., 2018). The example set by a leader who uses an entrepreneurial leadership style encourages employees. The authors stated that organisations must be innovative, and the role of organisational creativity in this is unquestionable. In their study, they focus on organisational structure, processes, the role of leadership style, and understanding organisational creativity. To manage creativity, they came up practical recommendations regarding the design of organisational structure and job requirements by ensuring a high degree of autonomy, the ability to reuse knowledge, the incorporation of feedback, the diverse expertise of expert team members, and the introduction of idea management (Fetreti et al., 2022). Their study highlights leadership with emotional intelligence and the management of creativity. They also mention the transformational leadership style as a leadership style that influences creativity, which influences both the individual and organizational levels. The role of emotionally intelligent, high-level communication in corporate management and its impact on value creation was highlighted by the authors as the main employee motivation (Farkas et al., 2021). The authors examined the importance of human factors in service innovation and performance among Japanese tourism service companies. In their study, they identified four contributing factors: leadership, employee engagement, trust, knowledge management, and creativity management. The creativity management emerged as a complement to effective human resource management. They saw the role of leaders as developing a strategy that, when implemented, can ensure increased employee engagement and development opportunities, thereby influencing service innovation and business performance. (Tajeddini et al., 2020). The authors concluded a surprising finding regarding the strength of the relationship between creativity and innovation and the relationship between firms with different levels of technological development. They found that the relationship between creativity and innovation is stronger in “low-tech” industries than in “high-tech” industries. Furthermore, the relationship examined is relatively stronger for service innovation than for product innovation (Saroghi et al., 2015).

The authors concluded that the formal context of organisations, the HR system, influences the interactions between the originally interconnected processes of idea generation and idea implementation and employees' perceptions of leadership styles (Černe et al., 2018). They pointed out that it is probably not possible to provide an organization's competitive advantage in the long term by generating ideas without implementation, furthermore they also highlighted that there may not be a perfect solution for organisations to choose which leadership style. They emphasised that context is crucial in the successful innovation process, and they also suggested a holistic approach, that an organisation can be led to achieve the best results by a single HR system. Nguyen et al. found that among the different leadership styles (transformational, transactional, creative) creative leadership has the strongest impact on online knowledge sharing. They found that the influence of leadership is significant in creating a knowledge sharing culture that contributes to increasing the level of employee creativity, which is related to personal development through organisational learning, which can be based on the effective exchange of knowledge. The authors highlighted that creative leadership encourages employees to transfer and collect knowledge, while transactional leadership plays a key role in the spread of “lurking” and “active lurking” “behaviours”. They found that during their research “lurking” and “active lurking” “behaviours” are the ones that contribute the most to employee creativity (Nguyen et al., 2024). The authors found that the creative skills of employees are not equally important at each stage of the innovation process and suggested the importance of reorganising the organisational structure so that the optimal creative potential of the organisation can be fulfilled. The effect of individual creativity can be seen at every stage of the innovation process, and the development of innovation across stages contributes to increasing the production efficiency of economic organisations. They highlighted that previous innovation experiences serve as a good basis for generating new ideas and play a role in transforming them into successful innovations. They recommended hiring employees with creative skills as steps to develop the innovation potential of companies, and they emphasised the ability of managers to create a favourable atmosphere and choose appropriate methods to stimulate creativity to support the idea generation of individuals (Stojcic et al., 2018).

The authors examined the relationship between employee creativity and innovation in the public sector in Indonesia by examining leadership styles (transformational, transactional, servant leadership, authentic leadership, authoritarian leadership) and public service employee motivation. The authors highlighted the positive and significant influence of authoritarian leadership on creativity and innovation, while transformational and servant leadership can also have an impact. The authors drew attention to the importance of public service motivation, which is an essential aspect in facilitating employee creativity and innovation (Ganeva et al., 2024). The authors examined the creative processes of entrepreneurs and innovators. Analysing

the range and relationships of factors influencing market success, they indicated that the interpretation of creativity as a prominent factor of entrepreneurial activity is questionable. Pure, raw creativity is not enough, it must be combined with general business sense (Barnard et al., 2019.).

If the organisational goals include achieving innovation, examining the connections between creativity and leadership styles, it can be stated that the role of leaders is unquestionable in creating a workplace environment and culture where individuals are given the freedom and autonomy to come up with creative ideas, and clear communication helps channel them into decision-making mechanisms with continuous feedback. There are many playful methods and opportunities for developing creativity and organizational creativity, as Deák summarizes in his work (Deák, 2021).

Method and Material

We conducted a survey (22-question online google questionnaire) targeting 50 market players in Szekesfehervar and in its region (Hungary). A small number of the questions are open-ended, we wanted to get completely subjective answers from the respondents to get to know their thoughts on the topic, but most of the questions are closed-ended. Only 10 companies responded within 1 week thus the sample was unfortunately smaller than we had hoped. This is one of the limitations of our study. We classified the companies based on the thresholds set out in the "User Guide to the SME Definition" published by the European Commission in 2020. 40% of respondents are large companies, 40% of respondents are medium-sized enterprises and 20% are small enterprises. The other limitations of our study, there are no respondents from microenterprises.

Based on general questions, distribution of economic organisation according to their activities are the following: 20% of the respondents are engaged in IT services, another 20% in the production of plastic products, 10% in the production of computer, electronic, optical products, 10% in the production of electrical equipment, 10% in the production of metal processing products, 10% in the production of vehicle parts and accessories. 10% of the companies operate in the areas of Human Health Care and Electricity Production and Supply.

The responders are in senior manager positions, 9 with university degree and 1 with secondary degree of which: three of them are managing directors, and the others are a plant manager, an education manager, a strategy manager, a quality management manager, an HR manager, an IT manager, and an operational manager. Among the respondents, 60% had a technical degree, 40% an economic degree, 20% an IT degree, 10% an agricultural degree and 10% a human arts degree (Four respondents had two higher education degrees). State or local governments have no direct or indirect ownership stake in these organisations.

Results and Discussion

When asked "*What do you think of when you hear the word creativity?*", 40% of respondents associated the concept with some kind of thinking ability ("out of the box", "problem solving", "outstanding thinking", "questioning dogmas"), while 60% associated the concept with the ability to create something new ("invention", "intellectual freedom", "creation", "idea", "value", etc.). When asked "*What do you think of when you hear the word innovation?*", 60% of respondents associated the concept with some level of advancement and development (using the words "development", "evolution", "modernization", "innovation"). Other responses included one mention each of "competitiveness", "the need for change", "the ability to create new things", and "AI and science". In 90% of the responses to our question "*How would you describe the relationship between innovation and creativity?*", a close relationship between creativity and innovation can be discovered. In 30% of the responses, it is specifically stated that "without creativity there is no innovation"; in another 20%, the word "necessary" is used to describe the creation of innovation; the idea that the two go together is present in 30% of the responses. Creativity and innovation, as development/value realized from an idea, appeared in 20% of the responses.

To our closed question "*Do you think your company can provide employees at any level of the organization with opportunities to use their creativity during their daily workflow?*" 60% of the responses answered "partly, depending on the job", 20% "yes, for almost all employees", another 10% answered "at management levels", and 10% answered "yes" in general. In the case of a "positive" answer to the previous question, we asked "*please mention in which area of your organization and at what levels this is typical?*" The areas mentioned by the respondents where it is possible to use creativity during their daily workflow were: "technical solutions/engineering areas" in 50% of the answers, "project/organisational development/processes" in 20%,

and human resource development areas ("education/training/specific HR areas/customer relations") in another 30%. *The organisational level mentioned where it is possible to use creativity* (6 responses): "managerial level" (1 respondent from a medium-sized enterprises), "middle management and technology level" (1 respondent from a medium-sized enterprises), "at all levels", "for everyone" (1 respondent from a large company and 1 respondent from a medium-sized enterprises), "job-related" (1 respondent from a large company). According to the respondent from the organisation operating in human healthcare (small enterprises), creativity is expected from those in direct contact with customers, as well as from IT, economists, and marketing specialists.

"Please indicate on a four-point scale how important it is for your company to be innovative (1 is not at all important, 4 is very important)?" 70% of respondents (30% large companies, 30% medium-sized enterprises, 10% small enterprises) answered "very important", and another 30% (10% large companies, 10% medium-sized enterprises, 10% small enterprises) answered "important". There were no respondents who indicated "not at all important" or "not important" on the scale. *"Do you think your company's organisational culture promotes innovation?"* 40% of respondents (20% large companies, 10% medium-sized enterprises, 10% small enterprises) answered "yes", and another 60% (20% large companies, 30% medium-sized enterprises, 10% small enterprises) answered "partly". There were no respondents who would have marked the "no" answer. In the case of a "positive" answer to the previous question, we asked them to *"mention which elements of the corporate organisational culture support the emergence of innovation?"* Six responses were received to this question, of which 30% came from large company respondents, who mentioned "Kaizen", "inclusion of innovation among the company's core values", and "recognition, innovation competitions, rewarding implemented ideas". Another 20% of responses came from the medium-sized enterprise sector ("Competency-based transition between jobs, agile leaders" and "fast approval process, management open to change"), while small entrepreneurs (10%) answered "both".

To our question *"Do you think that those employed in managerial positions can play a role in enabling creativity to emerge in the work of employees?"* 70% of the respondents indicated "yes", another 20% indicated "it depends on the style of the manager", and 10% indicated "this is only true for certain management levels". Of the respondents from large companies (4), three indicated "yes", and one indicated "it depends on the style of the manager". Of the respondents from medium-sized enterprises (4), two indicated "yes", and one indicated "it depends on the style of the manager" and "this is only true for certain management levels". Respondents from small enterprises (2) indicated "yes".

To our open question *"How do you think the manager (senior, middle) can support innovation to emerge in the life of the organisation?"* the answers included the "leaders should serve as a role model", "communication", and the opportunity to "share ideas" three times. The idea of providing "space" and "time" for the employee, "openness" and "joint developments, problem solving" appeared twice in the responses. The idea of "rewarding", the possibility of "making mistakes", the creation of a "forum", "liberal regulation of jobs", and "acquiring resources for implementation" appeared in one response each. When asked *"If an employee comes up with an idea that offers a novel solution to a workplace problem, does the information reach the relevant manager?"* 40% of respondents answered "yes", 50% answered "usually yes" and 10% answered "rarely". In the case of a "positive" answer to the previous question, we asked, *"indicate how many management levels can an employee's idea reach the decision-maker through?"* 78% of respondents indicated "two management levels", another 11% each indicated "one management level" and "three management levels". Several answers could be selected for our question *"In what form can an employee's idea or innovation reach management?"*. Of the 30 nominations received by respondents, 30% indicated "personal conversation", 27% indicated "email", 20% indicated "idea box", 10% indicated "presentation", 7% indicated "upload to a designated location in the cloud", and 6% indicated "online conversation". To our question *"Is there a designated colleague who coordinates these initiatives?"* 50% of respondents answered "yes", 40% "no", and 10% "a separate organizational unit".

"How familiar are you with the concept of innovation management?" We asked them to indicate their level on a scale where "1 = not at all" and "4 = completely aware" means "I am fully aware". 20% of respondents answered, "Not at all", 30% "Yes, I am aware" and 50% "I am fully aware". To our question *"Is there an innovation management activity built into the organisation's operating procedures?"* 40% of respondents answered "no", 20% "yes" and another 40% "partially".

"If there is a lack of specialized expertise/technology in an experimental area within the organisation, how do they try to obtain it?" To our question, 80% of respondents said, "We are open to bringing it in from outside the organisation", another 20% said "We would rather try to solve it from within the organisation".

“Let’s say your company develops a special, new knowledge/product (even in the experimental stage), but later they don’t want/can deal with it. In this case, would you be happy to share it with another economic organisation so that it can continue the work that has been started and later both companies can benefit from its results?” 40% of the respondents answered “No, what we started in-house stays there.” Another 30% answered “Yes, we are open to this type of collaboration.” 20% answered “Yes, there are situations when an external expert can take it further by thinking it over differently,” and 10% answered “If we don’t have the resources to deal with it further, we will share it with someone else.”

“Does your organisation support the development of employee creativity in some way?” 50% of respondents answered “yes”, 40% “partly, at certain employee levels”, and 10% “only at management levels”.

To the question *“Does your organisation support in some way the expansion of employees’ knowledge, with the aim of stimulating innovation?”* 90% of respondents answered “yes”, while only 10% answered “no”.

Conclusion

The aim of our study was to learn about the relationship between human creativity and innovation, as well as their role in the life of economic organisations in Szekesfehervar and its region (Hungary). We see the small sample size as one of the limitations of our study, but the responses still provided an opportunity to gain insight into the views of business organisations on innovation and creativity. Another limitation of the study may be that representatives of large, medium-sized and small enterprises responded to our questions, but representatives of microenterprises did not respond.

To clarify the concepts of creativity and innovation, we invited survey participants to free association, even describing the meaning in one word. Summarizing the responses to *creativity*, the working definition is *a way of thinking that enables the ability to create something new*. Summarizing the responses to *innovation*, the working definition is that *it is a development that leads to modernization and improvement through innovation, the use of artificial intelligence and science as the key to competitiveness*. The close relationship between creativity and innovation is clearly demonstrated by the answers given to the clarification of concepts. Furthermore, in the answers describing the relationship to our last question (in the closing section of this group of questions), creativity appears as a precondition for innovation. This necessity is clearly present in the vocabulary of respondents: “necessary”, “without creativity there is no innovation”, “goes together”, “comes from this”, etc.

As expected, *60% of respondents partially allow the use of creativity during daily workflow, depending on the job*. It should be emphasized that the responses received from all organisations are basically positive, they allow the use of creativity within some framework. We asked in which areas of the organisation this is possible. 70% of respondents indicated the areas of “technical/engineering” and “project/organisational development”, which clearly assume creative thinking in certain jobs. Human resource development areas (“education/training/specific HR areas/customer relations”), dealing with people may also require creativity, this was indicated by 30% of respondents. Regarding the use of creativity, the indication of the organizational level was present in 60% of the answers.

It can be stated that all respondents clearly consider it important for their business to be innovative. The difference can only be detected in the degree of importance, 70% consider it very important, 30% simply consider it important to operate as an innovative organisation. According to 40% of the responses, the organisational culture of the companies promotes innovation, while another 60% say it only partially does so. *The respondents mentioned examples of which elements of their organisational culture support the emergence of innovation.* The responses from the large corporate sector include elements that provide opportunities for employees: *the possibility of continuous development, rewards/recognition and the inclusion of innovation in key corporate documents*. The responses from the medium-sized corporate sector are dominated by supportive organisational elements related to the *management’s attitude (agile leadership role; management open to change, etc.)*.

It can be stated that a significant part of the surveyed senior company managers (70%) believe that those employed in managerial positions can play a role in enabling creativity to emerge in the work of employees. 30% made this dependent on the manager or the specific style of the manager. *Based on the responses, the working definition of an innovation-supporting manager is a role model manager who, through liberal regulation of jobs, communication, and openness, leaves space and time for employees to share their ideas and*

make mistakes, involves them in problem solving and joint developments, uses the opportunity for rewards, and acquires the resources to implement innovation.

Based on the responses (90%), it can be highlighted that if an employee comes up with an idea that offers a novel solution to a workplace problem, the information usually reaches the relevant manager. According to a significant part of the respondents (78%), this employee idea reaches the decision-maker through two management levels. The first three named ways of delivering ideas are, in order: personal conversation (30%), email (27%), and idea box (20%). It is only interesting to mention that these three information channels appear in the case of all respondents in the large corporate sector. 60% of the responding organisations have a designated colleague who coordinates these initiatives. In the case of the large companies, all organizations have one, $\frac{3}{4}$ of the medium-sized enterprises do not have one, and $\frac{1}{2}$ of the small enterprises have one.

Based on the responses, it can be stated that *a significant majority (80%) are familiar with the concept of innovation management*. Representatives of the large companies are familiar with the concept, $\frac{3}{4}$ of the representatives of medium-sized enterprises are also familiar with it, and $\frac{1}{2}$ of the representatives of small enterprises are also familiar with it. *60% of the respondents indicated that there is, or is partially built-in, innovation management activity in the organisation's operating processes*. Representatives of the large companies reported that they carry out some level of innovation management activity, $\frac{3}{4}$ of the representatives of medium-sized enterprises indicated that they do not carry out such activity, and half of the small enterprises indicated that they do.

We also wanted to get information about their attitude to Chesbrough's open innovation theory (Chesbrough et al, 2013). *Based on the answers of the senior managers, it can be stated that a significant part of them (80%) are open to knowledge flowing from the outside in*. The representatives of the large companies are completely open to this solution, $\frac{3}{4}$ of the medium-sized enterprises, and half of the small enterprises indicated that they did. Our next question concerned the inside-out type of open innovation. *Based on the answers, it can be stated that many of them (60%) are open to knowledge flowing from the inside out and cooperation*. $\frac{3}{4}$ of the representatives of the large companies are open to this solution, $\frac{3}{4}$ of the medium-sized enterprises are also open to this solution, and the small enterprises answered no to this question.

Based on the responses, it can be stated that large companies support the development of employee creativity in some form; medium-sized enterprises only "partly, at certain employee levels", half of small companies support it, and the other half only at the management level. 90% of the respondents support the expansion of employee knowledge regarding the stimulation of innovation.

In our opinion, despite the small sample size, we were able to come to some conclusions. In the study, based on the reviewed literature, we discussed the role of different thinking styles, the relationship between innovation and creativity, and summarized how creativity can be developed, and what role management and different management styles can play in this. By analysing the answers of the interviewed company senior managers, we were able to learn how many of them enable employees to use creativity during their daily workflows. It is clear to them that their economic organisation must be innovative, and we have shown with examples which elements of their organisational culture support this. Based on their responses, we were able to formulate a working definition of creativity and innovation, but we could also characterize a leader who supports innovation. What chain of command must the ideas of employees navigate to reach decision-makers, and through what channels this is achieved. A significant majority of the respondents are aware of the concept of innovation management, and a smaller majority apply innovation management processes. A significant part of them is open to the outside-in knowledge acquisition of the open innovation theory, while only a smaller majority are open to the inside-out knowledge acquisition of open innovation and the cooperation that achieves this.

Our study contributes to understanding the opinions of economic actors on the relationship between creativity and innovation, the role of leaders and leadership styles, innovation management and touched on open innovation. It would be worthwhile to conduct further research in the region on a larger sample and compare the results with the literature and this study. In our opinion, the basis of innovation is always a creative idea. Developing creative ideas is accessible to everyone, and this can lay the foundation for innovation. Let us not dismiss the possibility of a new idea by saying that "we are not creative". The experience of creative creation is an opportunity for everyone, which can represent value for us and our community.

Recommendations

Local higher education institutions must enter the field of innovation cooperation through their third mission activities. Furthermore, the local HEIs need to catalyse these processes and expand knowledge transfer, support innovation management. Their important task is to build trust and strengthen social capital, with which they can even encourage open innovation cooperation during the development of a helix model-like operation. They can contribute to the sustainable development of the region and its urban development.

Scientific Ethics Declaration

* The authors declare that the scientific ethical and legal responsibility of this article published in EPES journal belongs to the authors.

Conflict of Interest

* The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest

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