

MANAGEMENT OF WORKING GROUP BY INNOVATION IN ENTERPRISE

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Abstract

The paper deals with innovation and it looks at innovation in enterprise from the perspective of a manager of a working group. It comes out from the fact that any innovation cannot originate and to be used in practise without a human factor. The human factor can be represented as an individual or as a working group. The relevant question of the content and forms of management of a working group in innovation remains in the centre of this paper.

Key words: innovation, innovation phases, management of a working group

Introduction

Globalization, modernization as well as the internalization of entrepreneurship influence business environment which gets new dimensions. One of them is a stiffer competition experienced by all enterprises and organizations. Quick and serious changes in the business environment raise the demands on the preparation and activity of the management of enterprises. We can see the effort to survive as well as endeavour to be long term successful.

The history of successful enterprises shows that the secret of their success is in innovations. Innovations mean, first of all, to think and act in an innovative way. The important prerequisite of innovation in the enterprise is the change in perceiving a human factor and the transition from perception of a human as a dutiful instructions executor who should respect all technological procedures, given tempo, to the situation when he/she is perceived as an independently thinking and collaborating element who could be a source of new thoughts and author of new solutions. To be opened to innovations and to change man's understanding of innovation is not easy.

It is necessary to abandon rooted procedures and attitudes and to change the way of thinking and managing at all levels of management. It is necessary to change the organizational culture. It should be pro-innovational and it should create a favourable atmosphere for innovative thinking or activities in the organization. Also the employees should change themselves. They should with no fear make use of the opportunity and show their creative potential. Our work experience as well as analyses of Slovak organizations, where a foreign strategic partner works, make us to be alert to the fact that in the process of innovation a human factor plays an important role and doesn't figure as an individual but it works as the work group. It is a relatively new moment which has several interesting aspects. The elaboration of innovation conception in outline, work group, as well as the concept of its management in specific conditions help us to better understand this topic.

1. Innovation and human side of innovation

Problems of innovation are not new. Their principles were put into use already in the ancient Greece. The interest in innovation increased in the last century. It was caused by modernization, scientific and technical progress, as well as by the changes in business environment. Today, it is supported by the need of searching and applying new thoughts, procedures and products. Schumpeter belongs to a group of important authors who devoted himself to innovations and he contributed to their development by application in business and economics. He argued that industries must incessantly revolutionize the economic structure from within, that it is innovative with better or more effective processes and products. Further development of the topic of innovation was characterized by the opinion of a diversity of authors. They argue that the fundamental element and the primary prerequisite of innovation is a human and his/her creativity. The stories of great discoveries confirmed that without creativity and creative thinking nothing new could originate. The authors agree that innovation is only that what is new, characterized as novelty-newness, unusual or not-traditional solution which is useful and beneficial.

From the practical point of view, there is besides the content of innovation also the course of innovational process actual. Adair understands the process of innovation as the link of two diverse activities – creativity as the source of new ideas and the process of their realization. Hunter and Cushenbery (2011) see in innovation three phases: generation of an idea, its evaluation and implementation. Most of authors perceive the innovation as the process, as the sequence of several activities which are internally interconnected and they divide the process into phases. The first phase is

the discovery of contradiction, the analysis of the situation and the formulation of the problem. The core of the second phase is the problem solution. The third phase presents the technical solution itself and its use in practice (Košturiak, 2009). Kováč (2003) offers a more detailed view. He asserts that innovation has to begin with a discovery and sense of the problem. Thanks to creativity an innovative idea arises – as the reaction to the problem detected. In further phase the elaboration in more detailed way is necessary. The application of an innovative idea depends upon its viability, market potential and economic asset. If the innovative idea is assessed as favourable, it is transformed into innovation opportunity and processed into a material form. The final phase stands for implementation the innovative idea into practice. The entire process ends with the assessment of the profit.

We identify ourselves with the perception of the innovation as the process which has several phases. We add that it is necessary to keep in mind the concept of „human side of innovation“. Human side of innovation – we mean human preconditions accompanying signs and human consequences – is in comparison with technical side of innovation specific. Creativity, endurance, attentiveness, eagerness, determination, patience, and many other attributes cannot be planned nor directed and without them no innovation idea can arise. They do not come automatically nor under any conditions. The probability they appear can be increased by the attitude to the understanding of a human factor and can treat it in an adequate way.

Innovation starts thanks to the active approach of an employee to the environment where he/she is working. It begins thanks to his/her attention, sensibility, awareness to problems, thanks the discovery of an element or situation where it is necessary or appropriate to delete, substitute, refill, or exchange something – in one word – to change something. An important role is played by the active, constructive interest of a human in events in his/her environment, his/her attentiveness, good intention to help, also the courage to point out to the problem and to suggest improvement. Such attitude is impossible with an employee who does not identify himself/herself with an organization. With such attitude we cannot count on the employee who does not care about the prosperity of his/her company, who is passive.

The process of innovation goes along with considering, analyzing and creative thinking about the discovered problem. It is not an autotelic analysis of the problem but a constructive approach and solution search. The solution should be new, useful and the change should improve the situation. In this phase creativity has the dominant position. Helpful to creativity is open mind, natural intelligence, ability, interest and endurance to deal with a problem, to consider the problem from more than one point of view, to see the problem in other connections. What is important is imagination,

variant thinking, use of analogies, modification, or adaptation of existing solutions. It is not possible, unless employees are loyal, if they do not want or do not have the opportunity to help their organization. It is not possible in a climate of fear, excessive pressure and high tempo of work, lack of interest of the supervisor and unwillingness to change anything.

The next phase of the innovation process takes place outside the author's innovative ideas. An innovative idea must be assessed and evaluated from several points of view. This phase is also very important. If an innovative idea meets with understanding it can be fully developed. Otherwise it may stop completely. Also in this phase people who evaluate and assess an innovative idea play an important role. What is important is their attitude to new ideas and suggestions. Their attitude is formed by positive, progressive and comprehensive thinking, empathy, foresight, optimism, and objectivity. On the other hand, a serious barrier is conservatism, subjectivism, superficiality, unwillingness/inability to understand an idea in deeper way, professional parochialism, unwillingness to change things, but also jealousy and pessimism. Misunderstanding or incorrect assessment of innovative ideas, inappropriate communication of evaluation, disproportionate extension /delay can have negative consequences. It is preceded by the phase of transformation of an innovative idea which is supplemented by observations and adjustments that are necessary. Our experiences show that only strong personalities are able to accept comments and suggestions on the completion and improvement of the original idea. For many authors, it is difficult to accept cooperation, partnership of others. The fear of the loss of authorship or impairing the recognition is expressed. A reluctance to assist in the implementation of an idea, real or fictitious lack of resources or unwillingness to create conditions for implementation may be major obstacles. Again, the people who are not willing to adopt and apply in their activities innovation may be a major barrier. This is a classic problem of resistance to change. Our research has shown that if all the pitfalls of innovative process should be managed by the author of the idea himself, he needs a lot of energy and endurance. The situation may have a different course and character when an individual is not involved in the innovation process, but the working group.

2. Working group and its management

Modern management of innovation counts upon a human factor and considers it to be an important part of innovation. There are a few authors and managers who think that a human factor can be perceived not only as an individual but also as an active working group. It is not seen very often but with effort to support and develop innovation in organization it is neces-

sary to count with such possibility. A human factor acting as an individual and as a working group represents two different social subjects. Managers confirm that between work behaviour and work behaviour of the individual working groups there are significant differences. They confirm that to manage an individual and working group can not be done in the same way. The particularity of the working group is that it consists of more than one individual, but it is not simply the sum. Joint action, common place of work, common goal, common values, interactions, collaboration and group culture form from the group a social unit of a distinct quality. A working group represents a specific social environment with formal and informal internal structure. It is the environment where formal and informal rules exist and they affect the group members.

The working group is an organized and empowered body, which is integrated by common needs, interests and objectives of its members in the work area. Integration is supported by interlinking of its members, which is based on effective cooperation, on common and organized implementation of activities towards a common goal. The working group is a platform for the joint implementation of activities and work tasks which can not be achieved individually and which are necessary in order to achieve impersonal – business objectives. A group enables its members to saturate their emotional and social needs. For manager the working group (in comparison to individual) is another object of management. The working group is a relatively independent social organism which receives and deals /handles tasks in different ways. It processes, experiences and reflects the events around in a specific way. The working group thanks to several members knows more, has more experiences, has more options and thanks to the cooperation and synergy is able to do more. This is true when the subject of management/group manager knows well the essence and mechanisms of the inner life of the group, its specifics and according to them he also applies adequate ways of managing.

The concept of managing the working group is based on the knowledge that the basis of socio-economic objects is a managed subsystem – object of management. There is the core business of the system ongoing as well as processes and activities liable to the purpose of socio-economic object. From the organizational point of view the particular parts of a company are the object of management, i.e. the working group. The managerial system consists of the parts of the company, whose role is to manage the controlled system – the object of management. Managers are the people, the main element of this system, who according to certain principles by use of appropriate means affect the controlled object. The task of the control system is to

ensure the rational and effective behaviour of the managed object, that is, to have an active role towards it. We can say that management is the activity of the subject of management (authorities, departments, managers) acting and effecting the object of management (working group) in accordance with the objectives and principles of management using the appropriate methods and tools. The application of this concept in context of innovations enables to consider the content and form of the management of the working group at the time of innovation in the enterprise in a more detailed way.

To manage the working group at innovation in the enterprise means:

- purposefully and systematically affect the working group in such way that the innovation should be a part of the interest and work of the group and is not considered as space only for active and creative individuals,
- to achieve by means of direct and indirect means of management work and social behaviour of the working group, which supports and helps to achieve business goals through innovation in its immediate organizational space as well as outside it,
- to affect the working group in such a way, that it will not perceive the existing situation in the company /in the group as unchangeable, but it is necessary to observe and discover the places and situations that can change and improve the current situation and submit new useful solutions,
- to ensure that the working group is informed about the assumptions, essence, mechanisms and phases of the innovation process, as well as about opportunities how to become involved in this process,
- the program of special training for the group should include topics related to creativity, analytical and creative thinking, group problem solving techniques and methods of cooperation,
- to strive that the working group itself or as the case may with the help of the manager modify its internal rules of cooperation in order to understand and adopt the call for innovation, it should take positive and constructive attitude to innovation and in this spirit influence its members,
- to make sure that the working group could utilize the knowledge and skills of its members to be able to engage in innovation efforts and to master all its phases.

The main task of the working group in the management of innovation in enterprise is to develop priority – strengths of working group and better use of its knowledge and social potential in order to generate and implement innovative ideas. The main task is specified by the activities of the head of the working group in three stages of innovation process.

In the phase of generating innovative ideas the head of the working group should:

- create and maintain a safe environment in the group – an atmosphere that does not prevent but welcomes and supports innovative activity,
- incorporates innovation as a challenge into the main tasks of the working group (not as a string) and seeks to accept challenges,
- encourage the working group to increase their interest, attention and search for possibilities to improve himself and to warn group responsibility to create space for alerts of potential and actual problems inside and outside of the group and to initiate innovative activity,
- lead the group to the critical self-reflection of working conditions, methods, and work results of the group,
- involve the group to analyze the cause of problems, failures and difficulties of group and to lead the group to look for the ways of possibilities for improvement,
- require of the group to keep a critical and constructive attitude towards the situation in the company and to apply the rule: “uncover – resolve”,
- create and maintain the atmosphere in the group that encourages creative and original thinking, to take the risk of possible failure in finding solutions and to create a safe environment,
- take care about education and training of the group in sphere of constructive and creative problem solving processes, develop creativity and problem solving techniques,
- lead the group to the group problem solving and to apply the methods of the team under the rule „TEAM = Together Everybody Achieves More“, to strengthen cooperation and feeling common responsibility, equality of group members and emphasize the power of synergy effect,
- emphasize strengths of the working group, its potential, possibilities and ways of its use in generating ideas,
- organize workshops where creative methods are learned,
- provide resources for the group that are needed to elaborate innovative ideas,
- supervise that the innovative idea was elaborated and presented in accordance with company rules and to avoid unnecessary administrative barriers.

In the evaluation phase of innovative ideas the head of the working group should:

- supervise the effectiveness of the presentation of innovative ideas, their objective evaluation and protect them against unjustified obstacles,
- present the innovative idea (with a representative of the group), explain it and provide additional information,
- inform the working group on time in truth about evaluation process and eventual comments,
- ensure completion of the innovative idea or present additional information for the evaluation,
- in the case of negative evaluation inform the group and lead group to a constructive attitude according to the rule: „failure = stop on the road to success“,
- perceive dissatisfaction and disagreement of group members with understanding and prevent the negative impact of the failure of the innovation efforts,
- in the case of positive evaluation appreciate the group activity, lead the group to transform the idea into a real form, organise cooperation on implementation of comments,
- provide support and resources to the group for the finalization of innovative idea.

In the implementation phase of innovative ideas, the head of the working group should:

- prepare/participate in the implementation of the idea;
- if the innovative idea is implemented in the working group, the leader organizes and manages the different steps of the implementation process according to the rules of change management;
- this is done by providing thorough information on the idea, its benefits and implementation procedures, taking organizational measurements, securing resources for implementation, helping the group to get used to the innovative idea, solving potential operational difficulties, and monitoring the contribution of ideas;
- if the innovative idea is implemented in another department, the group leader acts as a consultant, provides expert advice, and helps with the implementation of the idea.

Successful management of the working group throughout the innovation process requires of the group leader to be able to use the right management style. Innovation is a process that cannot be dictated or prescribed from above. In our experience, the group leader must adapt his leadership style according to a transformational management style. This has proved to be

the most efficient approach. Donnelly (1997) describes the transformation manager as a person who uses charismatic management, inspirational leadership, intellectual stimulation, and a relaxed atmosphere. He has a vision and can formulate and communicate this vision effectively. He has a reputation of an approachable person with respect for others. He is known for his fair judgement, integrity, and resolute action.

Conclusions

Innovation has become the focal point of attention – it is a good trend. It broadens and deepens the knowledge of the circuit assumptions during success of an innovation. Involving the working group and their innovation and knowledge can be used for its social potential. This particular practice has not been fully utilized. This contribution draws attention to this line of thinking on the development of innovation in the enterprise.

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