

The practice of innovation: A qualitative study

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Abstract—Innovation has become a reality in the business world and is the engine of success and survival. Given this provision, interest in understanding innovation, its implementation and its role with SME managers could contribute to better invest in innovation management.

The goal of our research is to provide a theoretical analysis of innovation in small and medium enterprises.

In this article we try, through a content analysis to identify the drivers of innovation. The qualitative study of Tunisian companies operating in the food sector shows that innovation, the result of the business, is a matter of all stakeholders and is based on a set of values and norms.

Keywords—innovation, process innovation, implementation of innovation, small and medium Tunisian enterprises.

I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, innovation is an asset. Indeed, the need for a differentiation and the acquisition of competitive advantage are weapons against a globalization, competition and rapid increase or decrease of the lifetime of products.

Innovation is also a support growth and development. Considered an activity of sustainability [1], it enhances

the search for continuity. Thus, it is set as a means of profit and performance.

Innovation, however, suffers from a lot of recovery and remains mostly risky as it is often centralized in top management. The challenge of studying innovation remains also linked to the researcher and the vision he has adopted to solve the problem.

We are ambitious to specify the practice of innovation in small and medium Tunisian enterprises (SMEs) in the agribusiness sector from a managerial point of view.

It's about understanding the different approaches to innovation management. The theme comes in various fields that we will try to synthesize an emphasis on the conceptualization of innovation in SMEs.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Definition of innovation

Innovation is often seen as an irresistible factor for the success or sustainability of many organizations [2, 3 and 4] or rather a mandatory survival strategy [5].

However the reality is that few organizations are able to reach it. Even if innovation is at the heart of debates and a key objective for most organizations, its implementation remains difficult and has several constraints and risks [6 and 7].

Thus, the work focuses on the normative aspect of innovation. It also specifies innovation every time since its nature in different eras. According to this point of view, the standard contemporary is invalid for other times and hence managers ensure the management of innovation in a clear cut arrangement process [8].

It's has been agreed that innovation is a long-term survival activity of organizations and a means of profit [1]. Defined by the introduction of a new product, a new method, a new process, new materials in the market [9], innovation is both a workable outcome and a process used to achieve this [10].

We can say thus assert that innovation is at the same time a tool to launch an implementation process of a new product or process and a way to reshuffle organization's working process.

B. Innovation Process

The innovation process describes each stage of the activities development. This process is usually affected by the use of research and development [8].

TABLE I. TYPES OF INNOVATION PROCESS

Types	Description	Sources
Iterative	It allows an iterative development of new products predictably targeting performance, variety, standardization and cost	[11, 12, 13, 14 and 15]
Interactive	relations between individuals, departments and external partners	
Cognitive	change thought patterns, designs, objects and rules	
Intented	to change practices and meet the needs and expectations of various stakeholders in the organization	
Uncertain	We can't predict the effects and results of an innovation project	
Complex	is characterized by the proliferation of theories and state of the art in this topic	
Creative destruction	new technologies take over the old	

Thus, innovation is adopted on the material (new materials, new products, new processes, and new technologies) and immaterial (new modes of coordination, new forms of information sharing, and new forms of work ...) levels.

However, the success of innovation depends on the company's assets:

- The availability of material and immaterial resources;
- The existence of a performing information network;
- The liability to use new technologies;
- The potential for an abundant creativity;
- The creation of a reliable relationship network and an innovative management technique.

The absence of these criteria is synonymous with innovation failure. The empirical studies of innovation are very abundant. We will explore the context of SMEs to innovate, and identify the areas that can foster innovation and understand its nature in Tunisia.

II. RESEARCH DESIGN

A. Methodology

In order to bring the theoretical insights to the observation of practices, we will adopt a method and follow a research process. However, to seize a fact, it is possible to borrow more channels and therefore use various research methodologies. To develop our methodology based on the specificities of the research context, we will adopt an approach that allows both to effectively respond to the research question and to get relevant results. Thus, to study the innovation term conceptualization, implementation and promoting elements, our research adopts the process of exploration.

B. Data collection and analysis method

In this work, we seek to discover the concept of innovation among managers of SMEs in Tunisia. The exploratory approach is recommended as we seek to understand the phenomenon in-depth analysis.

In order to study innovation in SMEs, it was necessary to understand the context of the phenomenon. To achieve this, we conducted interviews with executives of SMEs in the food sector.

The empirical device consisted of a qualitative study, exploratory, semi-structured interviews to provide a degree of freedom for the interviewees to ensure objectivity and generate ideas that may not be considered in a theoretical analysis.

The first part of the guide comprises the identification of the interviewees and their socio-

demographic status, the second part aims to answer three open questions:

- How do you define innovation?
- How do you ensure its implementation?
- What role might it have?

We opted for a content analysis conducted through QSRNVivo.7 software. Our approach to content analysis is based on three steps outlined as follows:

- The pre-analysis to define the categories, organize clues emerged from the corpus and draw the most explicit themes.
- The operation of the equipment to cut the corpus recording units called encoding.
- The treatment of results to provide a solution to the issue.

C. Sample

Choosing our interviewees wasn't an easy task because we had to target enterprises already involved in the pursuit of innovation in addition to volunteer's entrepreneurs who willingly answer our questionnaire in one hour.

The sample size was determined after taking into account the principle of saturation semantics [16]. A total of 09 interviews were considered sufficient. Respondents will be named leaders, entrepreneurs or innovators.

We recorded all interviews and reorganized the scripts for data analysis by using the NVivo software. Data was transcribed and cleaned. Then it was imported into the NVivo interface to be analyzed by decontextualization / recontextualization. The software was first used as a manager of the database. Transcripts allowed us to include all transcripts in extracts. Each extract was related to the topic corresponding to it which are:

- The concept of innovation: concept, definition, objectives
- The implementation of the innovation process, stakeholders
- The role of an innovation and engine failure.

TABLE II. THE SAMPLE OF STUDY

Enterprise (E)	Industry activity	Age of respondent	Age of respondent's Occupation	Profession	Innovation	Opportunity to develop
1	Milk and derivatives	52	15	Administrative and financial director	Diversification of products and process	Creation of a power plant
2	Other food industries	52	25	CEO	Technological	Growth
3	Drink	35	4	Owner	Organic products	Diversification range
4	Oil	53	17	CEO	Creating	Extension product range
5	Drink	57	37	CEO	Product Innovation	External Growth
6	Fruit and vegetables	33	1	Owner	Diversification products	External growth
7	Meat	58	31	General manager	Organizational Innovation	Compagny Extension
8	Fish	28	2	Owner	Creating products	Forage water
9	Cereals and derivatives	37	5	Accounting	Technology Innovation	Innovation in business

III. CONCEPT OF INNOVATION

Innovation a multi-dimensional concept

The interviews show that the concept of innovation is multifaceted. One respondent (E7) explains that: *Innovation is the key to several factors: human resources, management, marketing ... It appeals to almost all disciplines. Innovation doesn't only has to do with the product itself, but also with the education of the staff and the personal ways to motivate them.* (E7).

Thus, innovation is viewed as enterprises' achievement mirroring its internal performances [10].

Other interviewees refer to the concept of product in the conceptualization of innovation like the Schumpeterian work [17].

Innovation as a means of survival and sustainability for our organization, it is mainly an innovative product that essentially seeks to meet customer needs and market requirements as well as process innovation (E3).

Innovation is far from radical. We opted for an innovation strategy dictated by the socio economic environment deviated choice. We are now called upon to create new processes and new methods (E1).

It is thus the process of implementation of product, method or process requiring adaptation and change .It also along the lines that leaders ensure innovation. Thus: *defining Innovation varies from one participant to*

another, is either due to the pre-existence of innovative practices or in the entrepreneur's orientations (E2).

Some participants pointed out that innovation should meet their need to cope with specific issues to ensure the continuity and survival of the organization [8]. In other words, *innovation is the key to satisfy the workers' expectations and the customers' requirements (E8).*

IV. IMPLEMENTATION OF INNOVATION

Innovation: a state of mind!

For some interviewees, innovation is a state of mind or is closely connected to the culture that exists in an organization [8 and 18].

According to E1, innovation cannot be concretized without everybody's motivated of participant. For he asserts having had a practical training abroad on how to implement innovative strategies in his firm, but unfortunately the experience remained incomplete. The co-managers didn't share the same objectives (E1).

Some interviewees value the innovation and the need for development of a Charter of innovation within the organization because the values can solve problems and create innovative paths [19].

Innovation is not a private program within the company. It seems more like an ideology, a spirit, an orientation. Using a research center that meets the needs of the market like the developed countries is a necessity that arises from one day to another (E5).

Indeed, to implement innovation, a company has sought to build an organizational culture and values for the supply of innovation. Accordingly [20], innovation is reached by the diversity of ideas, beliefs and experiences. It is established after applying for an apprenticeship that is based on a culture. Thus, management practices should support and influence the culture of innovation.

V. INNOVATION: INCLUSIVE

Market: a driver of innovation

The interviewees were unanimous that innovation is interactive. They pointed out that the market was source of innovation to operate and access to innovation in order to meet expectations.

Innovation is throughout the year. Large companies allow for innovation every three or four years, we need to innovate even every moment. In order to ensure our survival, and into account of globalization, we need to market organic products. We are always listening to novelty (E4).

In this respect, the market is usually specified as a strategic benefit to innovate [21]. This dimension is called outbound on the model of [22] it aims to establish relationships with external sources to ensure the transfer of technology and knowledge to exploit the markets [23 and 24].

Providers: providers of ideas

The involvement of suppliers is particularly important in the process of innovation. To this end, Bernard[25] stressed the importance of innovation by suppliers and highlights the need for relationships, partnerships and "win-win" with them to promote the profitability, growth and survival. Thus, the procurement function should be involved in issues of finding innovative solutions supplier market and the supply of innovation [26].

There are committees of thoughts in terms of innovation. Sometimes it is the main shareholder proposing the introduction of hardware or changing a process, sometimes it's one of our suppliers who offer to process more efficient practices. For our managers, their intervention is essentially organizational and mainly structural (E6).

Customers: source of inspiration and innovation

We are also innovating following customer feedback. For example, although we are exporters of vinegar, we have created gluten-free bread and respond to requests from our customers (E3).

Indeed, [25] clearly specifies that "*in the context of a continuous search for innovation, most companies do not only focus on internal resources but also are increasingly using outside solutions, whether their external partners (customers, suppliers, subcontractors ...) or strangers via the open-innovation experts. [...]*"

It is in this same framework of ideas that inbound dimension struggles to increase capacity and supply of innovation [27 and 28].

Innovation and job creation

Some interviewees mentioned that innovation created jobs. Indeed, innovation is often related to entrepreneurship, for the sake of creativity, and is recognized as supporting growth and job creation [17].

Innovation as a means of business performance led to the development of projects. We opted for a control energy costs. We are creating power station within the company. For us it is an innovative project of setting up energy that will create jobs (E1).

To meet the needs of our business, and to promote our development without restrictions, we opt for the creation of a feed water to firstly minimize our costs in water on the one hand and to create jobs on the other. We fear our water demands didn't may be met while we choose an expansion of our activities (E8).

For successful innovation, respondents stressed the importance of using a staff and possess the necessary skills. The specificities of high growth SMEs are its export-oriented innovation and productivity [17].

VI. CONCLUSION

The results obtained show the relationships between organizational factors (structure, resources, management style), managerial (performance, behavior, potential) and cultural (values, norms) and their importance in the supply of small and medium enterprises innovation. These are important results even if the sample size does not permit an unconditional generalization thereof.

Nevertheless, the awareness of the Tunisian entrepreneurs about the importance of innovation includes the internal conditions and management system. Thus, to promote this perspective, the manager should not hesitate to promote entrepreneurial behavior by establishing a network of several actors, overcome organizational challenges and create a style exporter of innovation management, and undertake actions likely to raise awareness to promote a work environment conducive to innovation.

We suggest that this study could be checked with a significant sample and a confirmatory in order to highlight the relationship between innovation and system management methodology.

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