

## INNOVATION AND CHANGE: PERSPECTIVES FROM THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN THE UPPER-SILESIAN REGION

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**Abstract:** The paper is a presentation of the overview on the problem of innovation and innovativeness in enterprises located in the Upper-Silesian Region. The author demonstrates that the phenomenon of innovation is inseparably connected with the notion of change, novelty, reform or an idea perceived as new. What differentiates innovation from change is its influence on competitiveness, as well as on accrued benefits and economic and social effects. Each innovation is a change, but not each change is an innovation. The paper presents a part of the results from qualitative research conducted amongst the graduates of the Silesian technical and economic universities who work in the marketing departments, but also directly deal with innovation implementation in various enterprises and science and research institutes. The objective of research is to diagnose the graduates' level of knowledge, emotional attitudes and behaviors towards the problem of innovation and innovativeness and also to the accompanying notion of change in the enterprise.

**Keywords:** innovation, innovativeness, change, innovation management.

### 1. Introduction

The development of regional enterprises and employees is one of the basic requirements for the evolution of regional economy and its adaptation to changes occurring in the world. The increasing significance of the knowledge-based economy and increasing competition, and also the effect of globalization processes have made innovation one of the greatest challenges for contemporary enterprises.

In a various range of innovation perception, two most emphasized features can be distinguished, that is novelty and change. In practice, when putting into place innovative solutions, it is necessary to understand change in its two dimensions. The first is value change, which is expressed in products offered by the enterprise, as well as in processes (ways, methods) that facilitate product creation and customer delivery. The second dimension is the degree of

novelty (Brzóska, 2014, p. 41). Treating change as innovation is determined by certain characteristics. Among these are: 1) change considered by a given subject as innovation should be introduced on purpose, consciously and permanently; 2) innovation is a change that induces a more effective functioning of the enterprise; 3) innovation consists of change and triggers a bettering of function; 4) the usefulness increase of the results of material product or service function enhancement is reflected in better technical or usability quality; 5) innovation is an effect of change that lies in modifying or introducing completely new elements to the way or effect of the subject's functioning; 6) more effective functioning of the subject is manifested by a shorter time of the subject's reaction to the external stimuli; 7) change should be able to disseminate amongst other subjects (Brzóska, 2014, p. 41; Świtalski, 2005, pp. 68-69).

A qualitative technique of research on innovation and innovativeness in the enterprise of the Silesian region and the mutual relationship of change, innovation and innovativeness in this enterprise, was focus group interviews (FGI). The research group in FGI consisted of the graduates of the Silesian technical and economic universities who took part in the first stage of the project *Silesian personnel for innovative entrepreneurship*. The project is directed to the future management personnel and highly qualified professionals who will be responsible for the course of innovative processes (from idea to implementation) and to the graduates who plan to set up their own businesses. All the participants work in the marketing departments or directly deal with innovation in their enterprises (this was one of the recruitment requirement in the project).

Purposive sampling was used and within its frames, three representatives of the main area of national economy – light and heavy industry, services and trade, science and research institutes, were under research in equal proportions. In each of these areas, innovation implementation is a necessity. Additionally, the market share and size of the enterprises, whether micro, small, medium and large, were addressed in equal proportions.

The research included 72 respondents: 51% were of women and 49% of men. The largest age group (68.5%) were people of age 26-44. Most of the personnel have worked for 11-20 years (27.63%). 43.3% of those examined have worked for their current enterprise for 1-5 years and 21.85% for 6-10 years.

In the first part of the paper, the author defines the notion of innovation, the types of innovation, innovativeness and innovative enterprise. The second part of the paper is a report from research, where the research method was focus group interviews (FGI). The interviews were conducted in a form of discussion, directed by a moderator, basing on a scenario. For each of the four focus groups, the participants were chosen purposively so that each focus group consisted of the participants from light and heavy industry, services, trade, science and research institutes. This provided the possibility for a free discussion and confrontation of the opinions and views, or broader attitudes. The choice of the interview and FGI method was dictated by the fact that using the assumption of mutual stimulation of the discussion participants, it is possible to get to the views and motivations of respondents, and these may be not fully aware

convictions and imaginations about the issue that the researchers are interested in. The paper ends with the summary of research results.

## **2. Innovation and its significance in the enterprise**

Innovation is always a response to real market needs. 'It must always be close to the market, oriented towards the market and, in essence, inspired by the market' (Drucker, 1992, p. 153). A key objective of innovation is leading to the improvement of administration rationalization for all the subjects functioning on the market and to the improvement of the quality of life in the society. Transferring from the post-industrial society to the knowledge and innovation society requires many solutions on a macro-economic scale, most of all to execute the policy of innovation development, the goal of which is to create an innovative economy.

Innovations are deemed as successful in economic terms when new ideas are implemented (Weryński et al., 2014). They are rather treated as a continuation of technical and organizational changes, covering on one hand, simple modifications of the existing products, services and on the other hand, processes. According to the glossary of innovation and technology transfer: 'the phenomenon of innovation is inseparably connected with the notion of change, novelty, reform or also an idea considered to be new'. Innovation is also thought to be various facts, processes and phenomena of technical, organizational, social or psychological character. In this approach, the name 'innovation' may be given to all phenomena, processes and products that have been created as a result of the introduction of changes, or the considered factors which triggered changes, for example, in the way of utilization. The main objective of innovation in this regard should be the improvement of the quality of human life. This translates into the development of a science and knowledge-based economy (Weryński, et al., 2013).

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2017) compiled a list of all terms connected with innovation. In 1997, the Oslo Manual was issued, which currently constitutes a broadly accepted, international standard used in research on innovation. According to the OECD, innovation means 'the implementation of a new or significantly improved product (good or service), or process, a new marketing method, or a new organizational method in business practices, workplace organization or external relations' (OECD, 2017, p. 48). The manual lists four types of innovation that are correspondent with the most frequently appearing classifications of innovation strategy due to the criteria of area that they refer to (the subject of innovation). These are: product innovation, process innovation, marketing innovation and organizational innovation (Weryński, 2012).

The necessity of innovation implementation and dissemination is emphasized by one of the classicists in the approach to innovation management, Peter Drucker. This approach claims that innovation that does not succeed on the market is only a thought, an unachieved idea. Moreover,

innovation may have its source both inside every organization and outside, in its environment (Drucker, 1992, p. 29). The most innovative ideas are also created thanks to a methodical analysis of seven basic areas of possibilities. Inside the enterprise or industry, the source of innovation may be an unexpected occurrence, different types of inconsistencies, process requirements, as well as market or industry change. Outside the enterprise, innovation comes from demographical changes, and/or changes in the way of thinking and using newly gained knowledge. The aforementioned sources partially overlap one another, therefore, the potential of innovation creation may be embedded in several sources at the same time. What is more, knowledge-based innovations have the greatest impact on the market, but they arise slowly. The created sources of innovation are utilized more easily, yet, managers should reach beyond the action standards in force, so that they use them properly. Here, it is clear that innovators must search for simple and concrete solutions to real problems.

Consequently, innovativeness is defined as an ability of the entities and organizations to create and to effectively implement a technical, market and organizational innovation in order to allow the enterprise to achieve the strategic goals in a competitive environment (Haffer, and Karaszewski 2004, p. 341).

In the subject literature, it is also often indicated in an operational sense that innovativeness is a feature of such enterprises that in the examined period, implemented at least one technical innovation or participated in the creation of new or significantly improved products introduced on the market within the last three years (Kozusznik, 2010, pp. 14-15).

### 3. The typology of innovation definitions

The varied and multi-threaded ways of defining the notion of innovation in the current subject literature, both economic and sociological, may be subjected to a typology process. The basic criterion of assigning the particular conceptualization of the definition to a given type will be the relation to the category of novelty, advance and complex variable-action synthesis (Weryński et al., 2014, pp.16-21).

The basic and most often functioning way of thinking in the colloquial awareness of the analyzed notion is **innovation as a novelty**. This approach constitutes the simplest way of innovation conceptualization, in that it refers to the element that sees the process as novelty, that is the creation of something objectively new. However, it omits its further and necessary steps – social and economic acceptance in a broad sense (implementation and diffusion). This type of innovation definition is used, among others, by Percy R. Whitfield. From this perspective, innovation is regarded as a sequence of complicated actions aimed at problem solution, and as a result, a novelty that is developed extensively, arises (Whitfield, 1979, p. 26). Innovation is similarly defined by Stefan Kasprzyk, as being a cutting edge, previously

unknown way of satisfying new needs (Kasprzyk, 1980, p. 26). On the other hand, Genrikh S. Altshuller defines innovation as being a different way of organization, synthesis, knowledge expression, world perception and creation of new ideas, perspectives, reactions and products (Kozusznik, 2010, p. 29). Piotr Sztompka also uses this approach. Herein, innovation is reflected mostly in novelty, is connected with a departure from a previous tradition, is a manifestation of originality, creativity, innovativeness (Sztompka, 2009, p. 420).

The second, classical type of conceptualization of the examined definition is **innovation as a novelty application**. This approach views innovation as a supplement to the previous type, that is the creation of something objectively new, that is later implemented and disseminated as new. This concept is one of the theoretical depictions most often used in the subject literature. This type is promoted by the aforementioned classicists – Schumpeter or Drucker. Joseph A. Schumpeter states that innovation is a new combination of various elements and human labor power. Their essence is to create a new product or the introducing of a product with new features into the market, using a new production method, finding new markets for sales, gaining new sources of resources or implementing a new organization of some industry (Schumpeter, 1960, p. 104). Peter F. Drucker defines innovation as ‘the specific tool of entrepreneurs, the means by which they exploit change as an opportunity for a different business or a different service’ (Drucker, 1992, p. 29). Moreover, Charles Freeman identifies innovation with the first market introduction of a new product, process, system or tool (Janasz, and Koziół 2007, p. 14).

Innovation may also be perceived as a **novelty**. In this approach, it is not important whether it exists objectively, but there is a perception of innovation by the interested parties and the notion or item is thought qualitatively to be new. It is sufficient to gain the status of innovation intersubjectively perceived as new, for example by a certain professional circle. This is how Philip Kotler describes the phenomenon: innovation is related to some good, service or idea, which is perceived as new by someone (Kotler, 1994, p. 322). Furthermore, Everett M. Rogers thinks that it is not important for human life if an idea is objectively new, that is recently discovered or created, but the fact if it is perceived by people as new (Rogers, 2003; Stefański, 2008).

Another way of defining **innovation is as an advance**. This approach has axiological characteristics as it introduces an assessing category – advance, that is a better condition, more complete and efficient than that previous. The operational application of this type of definition of innovation is limited to the situations in which the advance criteria exist, and is accepted at least intersubjectively by certain groups, social and professional circles. Social innovation is very often described in this way. For example, Zbigniew Pietrusiński uses the notion of advance *expressis verbis* – innovation here is viewed as a change introduced on purpose by a man or designed by a cybernetic configuration that consists in replacing the previous state of things by other ones, positively assessed in the light of particular criteria that translate into advance (Janasz, and Koziół 2007, p. 16).

Finally, the fifth type of conceptualization views **innovation as an action synthesis**. This is currently very popular, even considered as a standard, theoretical and methodological pattern. It encompasses all the innovation creation, testing and dissemination stages, it also indicates the areas in which the innovations are executed. An example of such approach to innovation is a definition adopted by OECD, where innovation means: ‘the implementation of a new or significantly improved product (good or service), or process, a new marketing method, or a new organizational method in business practices, workplace organization or external relations.’

#### **4. Innovation and change in the enterprise – report from focus group research**

The focus research on innovation and innovativeness of Upper Silesian enterprises was aimed mostly at the description, understanding and interpretation of the opinions and attitudes of the respondents and, to a lesser degree, at explaining and discovering the regularities, as well as predicting the behaviors of those examined. In terms of the undertaken diagnostic research concerning innovative enterprise, the following research questions have been set, ordering the analysis:

*In what way do the employees understand the terms: innovation, innovativeness and innovative company?*

*Which company, in your opinion, could be considered as a leader in innovation? / How can one recognize an innovative company?*

*Which differentiators of innovative enterprise do you consider to be the most important?*

*Who or what has the decisive influence on whether the company is innovative or not?*

The final analysis and interpretation of results took place in reference to the research questions successively, following this order: ordering of raw data – gathering facts (data descriptions) – interpretation. The analysis of behaviors of interview participants, their doubts and questions, their motivations and concerns regarding the examined subject were deemed to be important. The order of research in terms of the main qualitative technique used, focus group interviews (FGI), was determined by the focus scenario in which the main research questions were operationalized. The interviews were conducted in a form of discussion under the direction of a moderator and were focused on the main thematic threads determined by the aforementioned research questions.

The way of analyzing data acquired through the use of focus group interviews were influenced by the assumptions of the grounded theory. An inductive way of analyzing the collected research material was utilized as there was a lack of adequate and full theoretical assumptions and conceptualization which would deductively order the research in the

aforementioned range. This is why no initial assumptions concerning the character of the relation between the variables were determined, and no hypotheses that would be subjected to verification in the course of testing research were made. Potentially, the initial assumptions that turned out to be not entirely accurate concerning the new research issues, e.g. the attitude of specific groups of those examined towards the subject of the research, could determine the way of interpreting the results achieved.

Four researchers participated in the presented research plan in the role of FGI moderators. In such case, one can speak about researcher triangulation, that is introducing few observers or supervisors into the research procedure, who then can mutually verify their research. Such a type of triangulation is especially useful during research on the issues burdened by a subjective valuation. It introduces a corrective context of intersubjectivity. In a way, it is a certain kind of supra-individual ethno-methodological sense. The researcher or observer triangulation makes it possible to build an intersubjective view of the research subject using non-repetitive autopsies, intuitions or associations of the particular researchers with a similar set of source data.

The choice of people to the groups subjected to research was purposeful. That means that obtaining the fully representative distributions of social and demographical factors in the composition of particular focus groups was not as important as saturating them with people with diversified and grounded attitudes, knowledge, judgments and opinions regarding innovation and innovativeness. It was also accepted, according to the rules of the grounded theory (Konecki, and Chomczyński, 2012, pp.285-287; Jemielniak, 2012, pp. 89-113), that the data collected in certain groups will be continuously compared with one other in order to distinguish the ordering and interpreting codes for the research material from the focus research. Next, more generalized categories were created (through grounding them in similar cases) to show the relationship between the categories.

The results received show that those examined associate innovation with a change, new product, improvement and rationalization of current processes or use of new technology or presence of new model of behaviors. This association is confirmed by their statements. *In my view, innovation is above everything a novelty, novelty in the way of perceiving the product, service and of solutions brought by this novelty or perfecting of what already is there. Innovation is a change, change for the better, perfecting something. Innovation is a development, future, the direction in which we should move, as well as the [offer of] modern products, service systems, modern management [practices].*

*I agree that the innovation is a change, but I believe that one can speak of innovation if it is accepted by the customers (...).* Therefore, according to those examined, the attitude of entrepreneurs towards their clients, described by one of the respondents as *a type of symbiosis company – customer* is crucial. An innovative enterprise should care about its customer, as well as about the ability to acquire new customers successfully. Thus, for such a company, a key element of the functioning is a well-developed marketing plan. Another important element

turned out to be respecting the assessment of customers in the innovative enterprise, and this should be reflected in adjusting the activity, products and services to their suggestions.

A term that appeared most often in the statements of those examined was 'change'. Regardless of what consequences it brought, positive or negative, innovation in almost 100% of cases was associated by the respondents with change.

*Innovation isn't necessarily a change for the better, it is something new, but it does not have to be better in assumption. Yes, innovativeness is implementing solutions, however, not always a new solution is proven to be better in time. One can say this only after the fact, not in the moment of implementing the change. An idea itself is innovativeness. Innovation can also have a negative effect, really with any action you take, regardless whether it is of marketing or another character, you don't know if you achieve success.* For the majority of those examined, however, innovation had strong positive connotations. Their opinions were dominated by the perspective of the utility of the implemented innovation generating financial profits in the end.

In addition to the aforementioned themes, participants recognized the need to introduce *novum* to the enterprises. They indicated that innovation is using all new technical and technological elements, as well as new products, services and organizational solutions that were never used by anyone else or were not utilized in the given enterprise. Characteristic for the majority of the opinions of those examined was that *creating and implementing entirely new ideas, objects and solutions* is necessary. For many of them, the term of innovation is identical to the term of perfecting. Many of them understand innovation as *perfecting already existing solutions*. For the respondents, this constant perfecting is at least the condition of the survival of the enterprise, which in favorable circumstances, within the business environment, can become a condition for its development.

The descriptions of innovation summoned during brainstorm or other techniques utilized during the focus interviews contained such statements as *innovation in the enterprise is a step forward – advance. Innovation changes the existing status quo*. The size of this step is dependent on the size of the enterprise and it does not have to be a revolutionary change. They also notice the fact that the innovativeness which is based on constant perfection should embrace as well, or maybe even most of all, these elements of the enterprise's activity that seem to be in the given moment satisfactory.

The fourth theme emanating from the participants that were examined, is perceiving this type of the business activity as not only implementing changes, improvements and novelties, but being rather something in the categories of atmosphere and attitudes that is characterized by the readiness and motivation to implement them, as well as developing positive attitude towards innovations in a broad sense. Not everyone agreed, however, that the improvement of already existing solutions, products or technologies can be understood in the categories of innovation. For some people, *innovativeness (...) has to be based on introducing new quality and new solutions that have never been used before*. The understanding of innovation as a process and not a result during the conducted focus research was often emphasized,

and the proof of that is the definition created by one of the focus groups, wherein: *innovativeness is a very broad term by which we can describe every attempt at implementing new quality into the product or service, the way of the enterprise's functioning and its relationship with the customer and environment.*

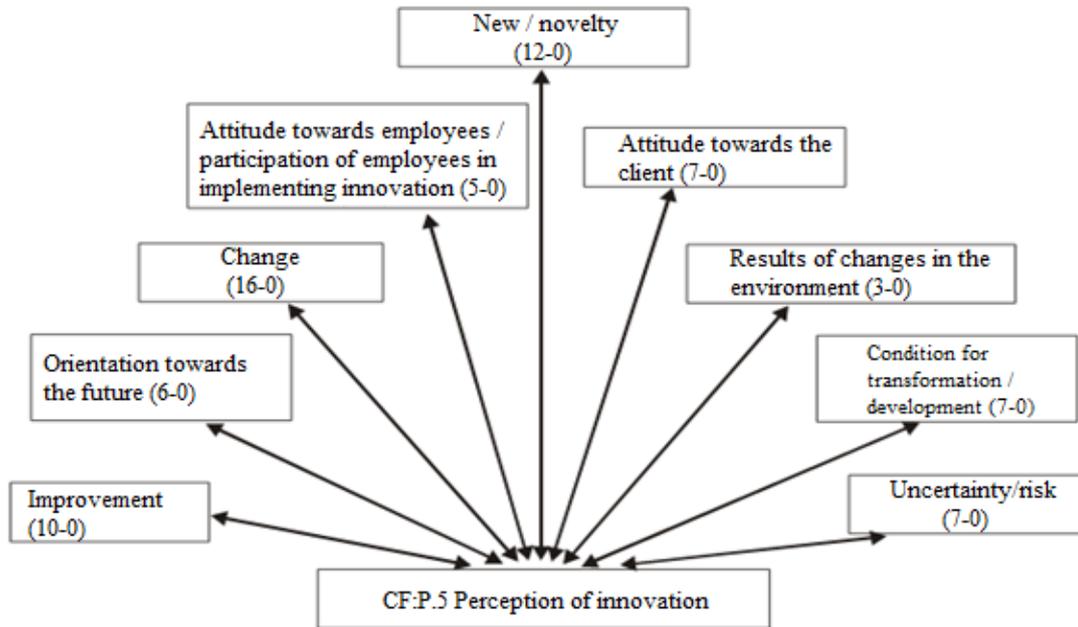


Figure 1. Perception map: perception of innovation. Source: author's work.

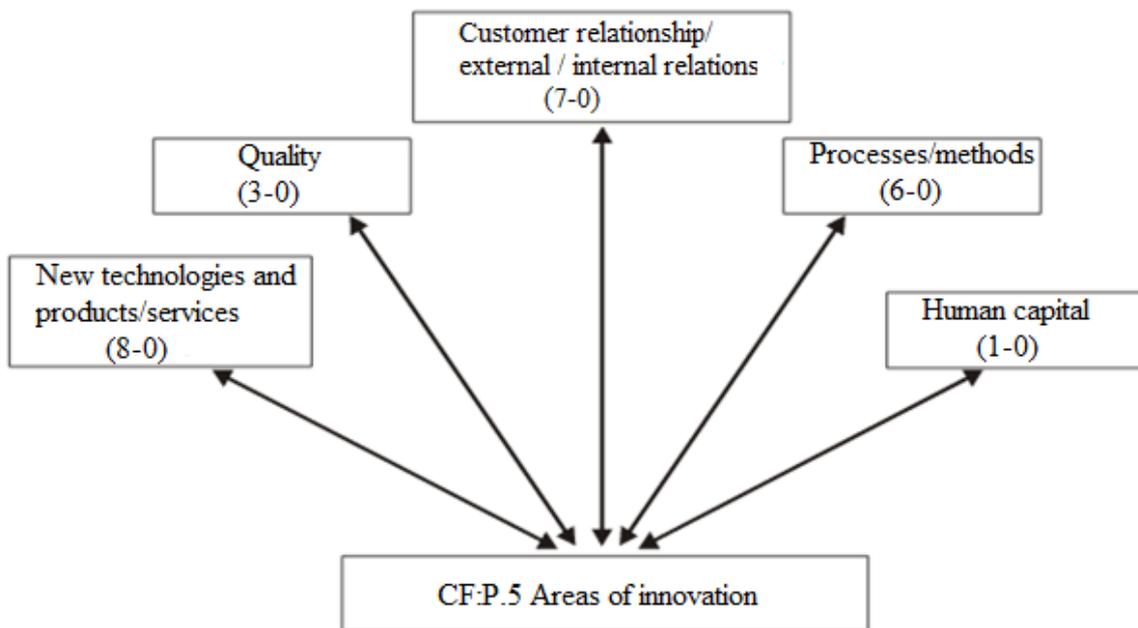


Figure 2. Perception map of areas of innovation. Source: author's work.

For the majority of the respondents the plane of communication and attitudes that exist in the field of cooperation between the employer and employee is of particular need to implement the innovation. Employees were recognized as an element of the enterprise that should have a significant participation in the decision-making processes taking place within the enterprise. A positive atmosphere in the enterprise is, according to the participants of the research, a sign that the business cares about its employees and this is another indicator of an innovative enterprise, as content employees constitute a strong support point in the business when implementing the innovation. The essence of communication within the enterprise becomes significant in such case, and thanks to it, it is possible to create an atmosphere aiding innovations. It is, hence, considered important to build in management and in employees a conviction that the innovation does not mean losing security, but a chance to enhance the functioning of the enterprise, thus securing jobs. In this final point, those examined emphasized that innovation is not possible to be achieved without the institutional support for it. According to those examined, it is important that everyone in the enterprise, regardless of position, should be convinced that the innovation is the element thanks to which the situation of the entire enterprise and each member of this organization will change in a positive way. The respondents say that *it does not make sense to implement or suggest changes if the employees are unwilling, but also the other way round, as when the employees want it, the manager has to want it as well.*

When asked about the features of an innovative enterprise, using the stimulation effect, those examined placed stress upon such features as: displaying courage in undertaking prospective actions; having the ability to adapt to quickly changing conditions on the market and showing specific flexibility; accepting loneliness as an innovation leader; maintaining an optimistic approach to risky actions (without fear), having ability to react quickly, holding emotional independence despite hearing negative opinions, keeping vigilance and having the ability to observe the environment and competition accurately and thoroughly". Just as strongly, they emphasized the significance of specific organizational and decision-maker intelligence or such organizational culture that makes it possible to utilize the arising opportunities. An innovative company is, therefore, *such that keeps constantly searching for new solutions and ways for improvement.* The fact that, to a large degree, this description corresponds with the features of innovative business that can be found in subject literature, indicates that this held opinion is specific for this typology created by the respondents (Sosnowska, and Łobejko, 2006, pp. 8-10; Jasiński, 1992).

To tell one innovative enterprise from another means that the innovative will always be a leader and will be created as a leader in a given area, it introduces something new into the market and indicates new directions and ways of attracting customers. The main areas of activity of the enterprise in which the examined entrepreneurs see a possibility for innovative actions include enhancing customer relationships, improving existing and developing new external and internal relations, instituting novel processes and methods, enhancing quality,

successfully apply new technologies, offering new products and services and developing human capital.

The respondents firmly emphasize the occurrence of risk related to implementing innovations. This risk is inseparably tied to the focus on future of the enterprise in which the innovations are implemented. Only few respondents stated that innovative actions are merely the results of chasing the competition; for the majority, the enterprise that wishes to describe itself as innovative, should adopt the position of a leader, and, on its own, determine new, innovative standards.

A definitive majority of those examined decided that the consequence of not accepting the pro-innovation attitude may result in being forced out of the market. It was emphasized that, even in case of enterprises offering traditional products, a need to implement the elements of innovation is necessary, for example, in the area of creating and improving communication channels or other promotional and marketing actions.

## **5. Final summary**

Innovation is currently a key category and factor from the point of view of driving social and economic development, shaping a competitive advantage on the market, and influencing the attitudes and behaviors of the recipients. The main objective of innovation should be bringing about quality improvement of human life. This translates into the development of science and creating an economy based on knowledge and sustainable development (Weryński et al., 2014, pp. 13-16). Gaining a competitive advantage is possible to a great extent thanks to the ability of the enterprise to introduce and utilize a varied type of innovation in a clever way. Such innovation can be both closed (own) innovations, as well as open (external) innovations applied thanks to the transfer or diffusion of particular solutions (innovation from external relations). Such an ability to create and implement innovation, due to the accompanying risk and complexity, constitutes a challenge for the enterprise and determines its functioning and growth (Brzóška, 2014, p. 37).

Based on the aforementioned, the findings of the study are that an innovative enterprise shows the following features: has the ability to generate innovation constantly; possesses good customer relationships and recognizes their current and future needs efficiently; knows how to gain, store, utilize and develop knowledge on innovation processes; possesses information enabling a proper assessment of the reality in which the enterprise is functioning; shows high knowledge absorptivity; is open to new concepts; cares about the permanent development of personnel competencies; possesses an effective motivational system that will activate entrepreneurship and innovativeness; conducts research and development activity and cooperates with specialists drawn from various areas; cares about having positive relations with

local society; manages knowledge effectively; is aimed at constant learning; cares about shaping an innovative culture amongst the employees; adjusts flexibly to changing conditions in the environment (Weryński et al. 2013, p. 180; Sosnowska, and Łobejko, pp. 11-12; Dolińska, 2010, pp. 26-27).

The focus research conducted showed that entrepreneurial-type individuals recognize the complex, and, at the same time, dynamic character of the problem of innovation in the enterprise, as well as the relation between innovation and change.

The final conclusions derived from our research are as follows:

1. Innovativeness is a wider aspect than innovation itself. Innovation is associated with a product or service, however, innovativeness is a type of process in progress, not only in the scale of the enterprise, but in the scale of the whole economy. One may, therefore, talk about innovative ecosystem.
2. Innovation is perceived and defined as a process of positive change of the enterprise, providing an opportunity for development (gradual or radical), opening the door for new action possibilities and allowing financial success.
3. Innovation is linked to undertaking necessary risk and the taking on of the role of lonely leader, also to the requirement of building trust amongst all the innovation stakeholders.
4. The implementation of innovation requires the increase of employee competencies, awareness of brand building and providing stable customer relationships.
5. Knowledge of the examined entrepreneurs is relatively large; the represented attitudes are pro-innovative and correspond to the scientific standards concerning innovation.

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