

CHANGE LEADER AS KEY TO IMPLEMENTING INNOVATION IN THE ORGANIZATION

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Purpose: The main objective of the article is to demonstrate the importance of the leadership role in the implementation of innovation in the company.

Design/methodology/approach: The article's conclusions and findings are based on an extensive analysis of the literature. This was followed by a verification of the documentation of innovative projects implemented under the INNOVATION IN THE ECONOMY operational programme (Priority Axis I). The next stage was to conduct interviews with project leaders. On this basis, conclusions were clarified and directions for further research were established.

Findings: The research carried out made it possible to define the most important attributes of change leaders. The importance of the leader in the implementation of innovation was highlighted. The functioning of the leader in the team, its importance for the success of the project was presented. Also described are the ways in which leaders deal with conflict, pressure and resistance. The interviews conducted are an excellent foundation for further research.

Research limitations/implications: The main limitation of the research is the small number of leaders taking part in the interviews. The research is one-sided, based on the leaders' point of view. In the next stage, observation of the work in selected teams is carried out in order to also take into account the opinions of the other team members and to avoid subjective feelings of the interviewees.

Practical implications: The research has the potential to create a set of good practices in the implementation of innovation projects. The characteristics of a change leader are the basis for educating modern managers, so necessary in today's demanding market.

Originality/value: The main value of the article is the opportunity to find out what leaders think about the principles, problems, success factors of leading innovation projects. An attempt has also been made to define a change leader in order to identify the market requirements for executives.

Keywords: innovation, change, leader, team, project.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

In today's volatile, challenging environment, the importance of the role of the leader in an organization is increasing. Lack of stability, and at the same time emerging opportunities require from the leader not only unique competencies and skills, but the implementation of modern management models, a new approach to management.

Leadership plays an important role in the functioning of organizations, often determining their survival and enabling proper development. Its purpose is to effectively schedule tasks, give employees the competence and provide the necessary support, constantly improve the efficiency and quality of the team's activities. It should also be noted that it is the leader who is responsible for the process of implementing change, especially creating innovation.

The article characterizes the roles of a leader in an organization, the required leadership competencies, and the management model of the innovation process. Also presented are the results of a pilot study on the role of the leader in the implementation of innovation in the Opole Province.

2. Literature review

The current times, turbulent, full of change and, consequently, bringing numerous threats and opportunities, require a new management approach from organizations. The new style of management is all about peculiar working conditions, rules of coexistence, culture and, above all, intelligent, charismatic and creative leadership.

Nowadays, a leader is largely responsible for creating the organizational culture, plays an important role in organizing work, helps resolve unexpected conflicts, responds to the needs of his or her subordinates and supports them in their daily activities. To meet these challenges, a leader must have certain competencies, flexibility in action, the ability to take legitimate risks (Gergen, 2022).

To meet the indicated tasks and responsibilities, a leader must possess a number of qualities, skills and qualifications. The ability to lead, to effectively motivate team members to achieve the company's mission and goals is a key factor, but the requirements for a leader are much broader. We should mention organizational skills that guarantee harmonious cooperation with subordinates and effective planning of activities, the ability to cooperate with people, the right choice of ways and tools to motivate teams and individual employees (Haldeman, Henke-Cilenti, 2022). Good relations with customers or partners of the enterprise are equally important. In addition, the leader should be characterized by the ability to think globally, to see the organization as a whole. He or she should understand how the individual elements

contribute to the collective success, perceive the relationships between the various factors that create a specific solution. The leader should have a high degree of creativity in decision-making and problem-solving, as this increases the possibility of developing innovative solutions. Table 1 presents a set of characteristics of the leader's role.

Table 1.
Characteristics of a leader

No.	Quality	Description
1.	The ability to create a vision	Clear vision, accepted mission support efficient management, create "team spirit". It is the vision that creates a kind of roadmap for success of the company.
2.	Effective communication	Effective communication is the key to the success of any venture, any organization. It creates bonds, creates an atmosphere of understanding, support. It is the foundation of creativity and the determinant of motivation.
3.	Ability to assess the situation	Having knowledge of the mistakes and success factors of previous ventures, about the conditions shaping the current situation. It is also fairness in assessing the situation.
4.	Motivation	Motivation has a direct impact on the effectiveness of completed tasks. The leader knows the team, and is able to select tools and methods of motivation that effectively affect its members. He or she creates a desire for self-motivation and self-development among team members.
5.	Optimism	Positively thinking people are a source of inspiration and ideas for colleagues. They give meaning to action and improve relationships among people working together. Having this trait facilitates its spread and propagates enthusiasm.
6.	Generosity	The best leaders are generous. They show trust and give out enthusiastic praise. They treat the success of their subordinates as their own.
7.	Emotional stability	A leader's ability to find psychological balance, realistically assess the situation and act in a principled way. The ability to function under stress.
8.	Self-confidence	Only a self-confident, self-aware person can convince others of his or her own ideas, gain respect. It does not exclude dialogue, but implies making decisions based on the leader's own convictions
9.	Determination	A leader must be characterized by courage, decisiveness and patience. He or she must be a determined, motivated person. The leader is expected to be involved at all stages of the team's activities.
10.	Responsibility	Responsibility for their own decisions, but also for the actions of the entire team.
11	Ability to distribute tasks	A leader has the knowledge to estimate the duration of individual tasks. Skills and competence to accurately allocate tasks and the necessary resources to complete them. When allocating tasks, they take into account the competence, skills and experience of individuals. A leader is guided simultaneously by logic, intuition and the good of the team.
12.	Pursuit of knowledge	Leaders learn from diverse experiences. Leaders know that they must constantly update their skills and knowledge to succeed. Knowledge helps minimize risks and make confident decisions. A leader must know and understand the organization's processes.
13.	Empathy	The art of empathy, the ability to take the point of view of others and making judgments in this way. The ability to read the feelings of co-workers enables a leader to choose the right tools and methods of motivation, but also to create an atmosphere of trust and respect.
14.	Charisma	It gives a leader the ability to explain, to convince. Charisma makes a leader unique compared to other people. Remarkably, research shows that charisma is a competence that can be consciously built and developed.
15.	Ability to build a team	A leader should have the ability to inspire a team, create a positive atmosphere, build an effective system of communication between its members. A leader through his or her actions should be the one who leads the organization forward, but at the same time look for possible directions of development.

Cont. table 1.

16.	Out-of-the-box approach to problems	An out-of-the-box approach to various problems, the ability to look for relations between concepts and facts. Being original, creating innovative solutions. A leader not only needs to be creative, but also needs to foster creativity and innovation throughout the team.
17.	Openness	A leader should be open to ideas, other point of view, discussion and communication.

Source: own elaboration based on Hao, Yazdanifard, 2015; Borgelt, Falk, 2007; Gill, 2002; Mansaray, 2019.

The main role of a leader in a team is to inspire or stimulate what is in people, so as to release the energy necessary to carry out changes, overcome difficulties and perform tasks. His or her job is to help people believe in their own abilities, which is the key to achieving results. A leader does not give team members ready-made solutions but motivates people to seek and find them on their own (Manfred, Kets de Vries, 2022).

A true leader is full of passion, drive, enthusiasm and charisma. He or she inspires and motivates the team to strive and grow. They take the time to get to know their own people, to determine their strengths, priorities and needs. They make team members feel valued and appreciated.

According to J. Adair (2010), the actions of an effective leader regarding the team are:

- building a team maintaining its spirit,
- creating working methods to ensure the smooth operation of the team,
- setting standards and maintaining discipline,
- establishing a system of communication,
- training the team.

On the other hand, the most important functions of a leader in the areas:

- definition of tasks,
- definition of objectives,
- planning the work of the team,
- allocating resources,
- providing answers,
- monitoring progress and controlling performance,
- quality control.

It should be noted that everyone can develop their own leadership qualities, to become a good leader it is necessary to learn: to listen (and hear), build relationships, positive reinforcement.

In the implementation of individual projects, each leader faces different types of challenges and opportunities, unleashing the potential of team members, so that the synergy of knowledge, skills, competencies will enable the achievement of the set goal. A leader is responsible for the results achieved by the team. The leader's actions should lead to the greatest possible efficiency and to the professional development of team members.

One of the most sensitive functions of a leader is to lead change. Incentives for change can include factors within the organization, as well as those arising from the environment. Figure 1 presents examples of sources of changes.

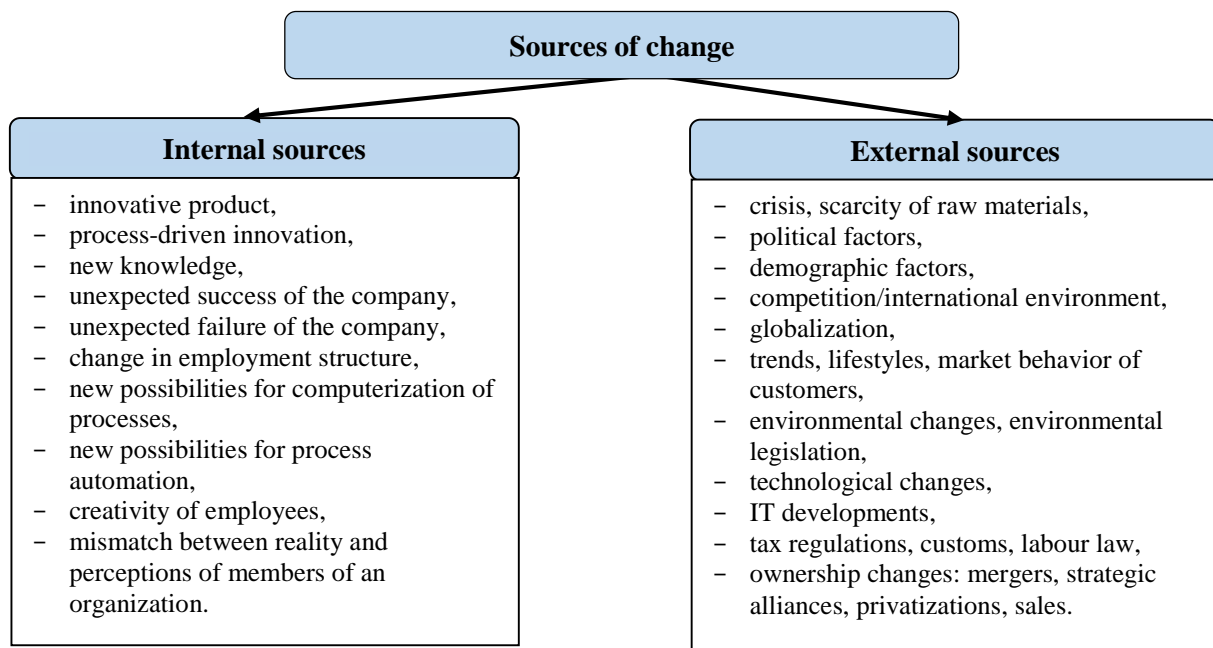


Figure 1. Sources of changes.

Source: Own elaboration based on Highsmith, 2005; Paulsen, Maldonado, Callan, Ayoko, 2009) Al-Ali, Singh, Al-Nahyan, Sohal, 2017.

A special source of changes are those that result from the desire for self-development. Change management involves making decisions about the best, effective use of one's physical, capital and human resources to accomplish specific tasks (Mayle, 2006).

When changes result from the desire to improve or develop the organization, they are usually more widely accepted, arousing less resistance among employees, than those resulting from changes in the broader environment (Sońta-Drączkowska, 2018).

It should be remembered that the goal of change management in an enterprise is not only to introduce change effectively, but also to constitute it regardless of its source. As there are many sources of change, there are also many scenarios for dealing with it. After all, implementation should be adapted to the structure of the organization, the nature of the change, the needs of the company or even the time available.

Among the sources, the impetus for change in the organization is a business concept - reengineering. This is a special type of change in a company, as it involves making radical changes to business processes. The goal of the changes is to achieve maximum efficiency of the organization and reduce costs. Business Process Reengineering, due to the agility and comprehensiveness of its course, requires a lot of attention, knowledge, commitment and often expert support (Orridge, 2009). However, its effects contribute to a significant increase in the

competitiveness of the company in the market. The main objectives of reengineering include (Tidd, Bodley, 2002):

- increase in efficiency,
- increase in competitiveness,
- reduction of costs (general running of the business and/or individual departments),
- increase in the quality of manufactured products or provided services,
- improvement of customer relations, increase in the quality of customer service.

The process of reengineering, i.e. the implementation of specific organizational changes, is therefore similar to the process of change management, but its ubiquity in the enterprise and forward-looking intent should be noted:

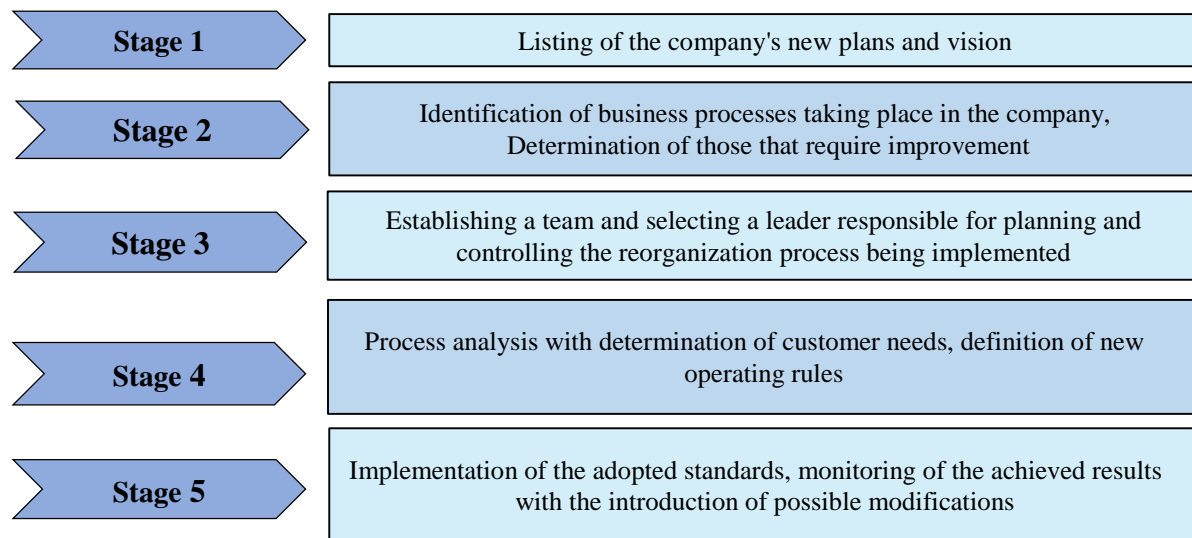


Figure 2. Reengineering – the process of implementing strategic changes.

Source: Own elaboration.

However, it cannot be overlooked that reengineering also involves a very high risk for the company. The most common risks include (Salerno et al., 2015):

- resistance to change, boycotting ideas,
- downsizing which results in dissatisfaction, may lead to late revealed deficiencies in employee skills,
- uniqueness of the enterprise, there is no way to predict the exact course of the process, each organization and change is unique.

Seeking opportunities for change and adapting to a turbulent environment is the impetus for change in any thriving organization. However, change is a process that must be managed. Change should be led by a leader who will not only implement it efficiently, but also perpetuate it. A leader who will see change as an opportunity to develop, improve, increase efficiency in operations, and not as an unpleasant chore.

Change management is a process that demonstrates the maturity of an organization. Readiness for change, willingness to seize opportunities and agile response to threats allow a company to survive and to grow. Change can in many cases be considered synonymous with innovation. Hence, it is worth quoting after Krzywicka-Szpor (2020) the division of change into:

- structural changes - changes in functional, overall scope,
- cost reductions - elimination of unnecessary activities, more efficient use of resources,
- process changes - changes within the selected process, improvement of its course,
- cultural changes - changes within the organization's culture, values, organizational environment.

Knowing the type and characteristics of the change and the expected result, it is necessary to prepare for the process of implementing and managing it effectively.

Proper management of the change implementation process is a fundamental factor that determines the success of the entire operation. One major factor that disrupts the process is employee resistance to change. Therefore, the basic condition for change is correct diagnosis. That's the reason for the proposal to expand the process into further phases.

The model presented below focuses more on the nature of the organization itself. This is because the process begins with the identification of its needs, the exploration of opportunities and the establishment of goals.

Management does not follow ready-made schemes or scenarios. Each entity studied makes changes around its system. However, change management should always lead to the previously assumed results of the change, which is why correct diagnosis is a basic prerequisite for change.

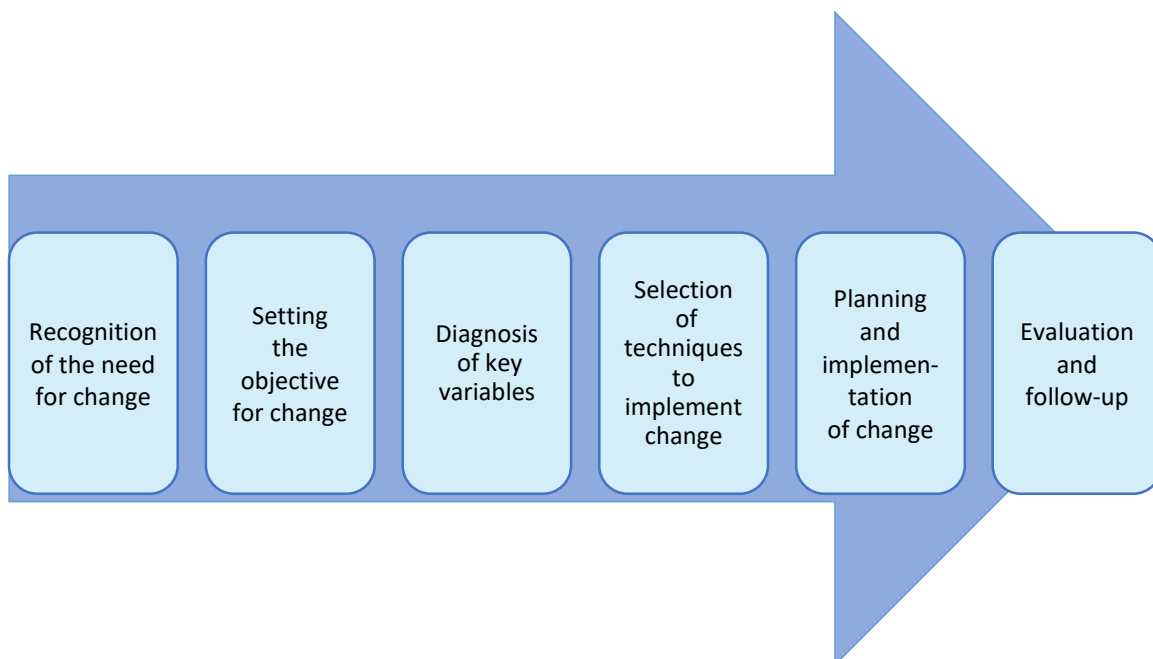


Figure 3. Stages of the change implementation process.

Source: Own elaboration based on Serrat (2020).

A common mistake in the change implementation process is to skip the final step. Failure to cement the change can lead the organization to revert to old habits before long. Lack of evaluation and feedback will discourage future efforts to implement further changes.

In conclusion, the change implementation process is fraught with risk. When managing change, one must be prepared for various adversities and turbulence. Anticipating difficulties, preparing for them in advance will enable quick and effective responses to them. And once implemented, the change should be consolidated and become the beginning of the next stage of self-development.

Ineffective change management in the company will not produce the desired effects, resulting in a negative impact on the operation of the company. It may prove to be unnecessary effort and high cost. It can also lead to strained relations among employees and their dissatisfaction. Incorrectly implemented change in the future may result in increased resistance among the team to make further modifications.

It is worth noting that in today's competitive market, making changes in companies is mandatory. New products, solutions, strategies, computerization and automation require rapid and efficient implementation of changes. What is more difficult is that the rapid pace of these changes in the environment requires a virtually flawless response to them. Failure to keep up with the needs of modification can result in a company's failure to survive in the market (Okoń-Hordyńska, 2010).

Effective change management not only takes into account the requirements of the organization's environment, but also its characteristics and culture.

Effective change management must be linked to the competencies of the leader, his or her ability to lead. The leader's task is to examine the attitudes of the workforce and respond appropriately to their concerns. The leader should properly mobilize employees, prepare them substantively to implement new solutions. Employees should feel that they are participating in the implementation of the change, that they are understood, that they can share concerns and ask for support at any stage (Kopczyński, 2014).

The following figure may be helpful as it shows the successive stages of implementing the change in relation to the leader's message to their team members.

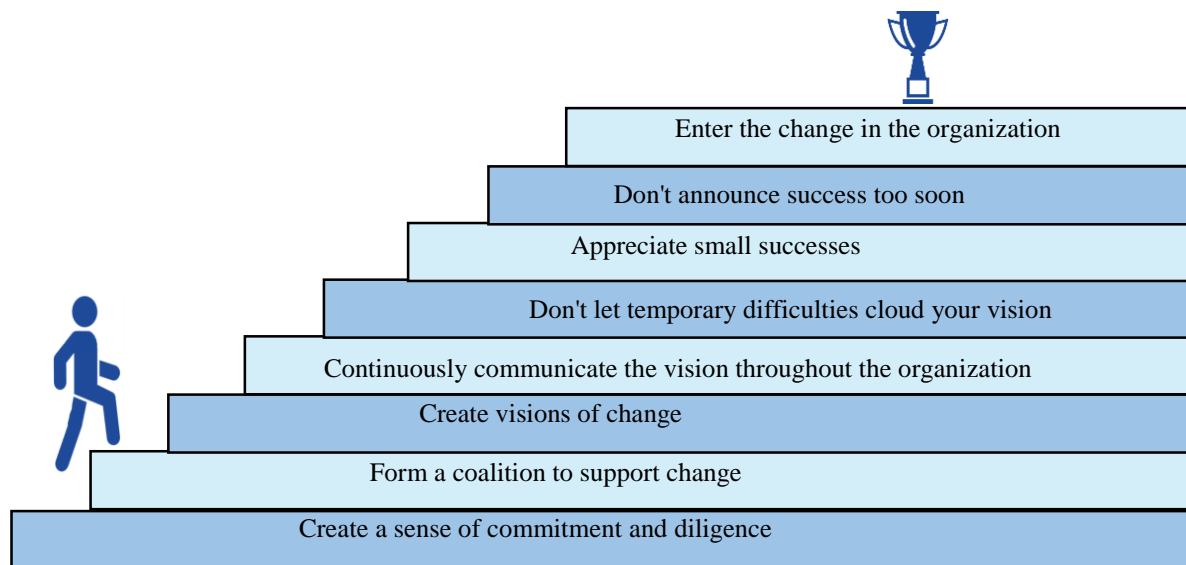


Figure 4. Model for change.

Source: Kotter (2012).

The following most important guidelines have been collected to indicate recommendations for change management practice:

1

Communication and more communication - ensuring a proper information flow system is key to implementing change. Employees must have quick access to up-to-date information provided by authorized persons, and not learn about planned changes through rumors. It should be remembered that it is what is new and unknown that causes the most anxiety. Warning employees about the planned change, presenting the stages of its implementation, allaying fears will result in employee involvement and greater understanding in the event of errors or difficulties.

2

Motivation - designing a motivation system for people who will support the change management process with their attitude and commitment. Motivation should also be based on identifying and rewarding change leaders who, with their optimism, inspire other employees to be active in the change process. Motivation is nothing more than the promotion of behavioral patterns such as openness, creativity, fierceness, desire to improve.

3

Vision of change - creating a document that will synthesize the change. As many employees as possible should participate in its development. The development of the document will help convince employees of the benefits and the need for change. The vision of change should be understandable and acceptable.

4

Team - leaders of change, a group of people who will lead the change. These professionals should have the right qualifications and character. They should inspire action. However, they themselves need support, providing the necessary resources and authority.

5

Delegation of authority and power - change leaders, those responsible for implementing the change should have the tools and authority to lead employees. They should have access to resources, most importantly information. Delegation should go all the way down to the lowest ranks of the organizational structure. Employees involved with the change, being part of the change process, will more easily emphasize it and make an effort to its implementation.

6

Positive attitude - employees should be infected with a positive thinking style, an open attitude. Change should be associated as something good, providing opportunities for development, the prospect of a great future.

7

Following the example - when outlining the vision of change, creating an open attitude of employees, it is worth using positive examples from the past. It is necessary to present positive aspects of change, its important results, It is worth showing that change is a challenge that has already been taken more than once and turned into a success for the organization.

Following the principles presented, it is important to remember that each organization has its own characteristics and culture. The implementation of change should be tailored to it, and the right selection of the team leading the change will be the key to success.

3. Research methodology

The research initiated aims to identify the key characteristics and competencies of a change leader that enable him or her to effectively implement innovative solutions.

The pilot research stage has now been completed, involving leaders implementing innovative projects subsidized under Priority Axis I Innovation In The Economy, Measure: 1.1 Innovation In Businesses. Enterprises in the Opolskie Voivodeship received support for the implementation of innovative solutions as part of the call for proposals organized by the Opolskie Centre for Economy Development.

Some of the project leaders (24 out of 126) implemented between 2016 and 2020 agreed to take part in the researches. Due to the number of people participating, but also the detailed and specific nature of the research, it was decided to use a personal interview for the pilot study. The leaders were selected according to 3 criteria:

- diversity criterion - the leaders represent different industries,
- diverse types of innovative solutions - product, process, organizational,
- the criterion of data availability - the leaders had to express their willingness to participate in the research.

The following data sources were used in the research: available domestic and foreign literature, available documentation of the surveyed companies and the results of interviews. In the next stage, the research will be complemented by participant observation in individual organizations, which will allow an in-depth examination of team-leader interactions and elements such as, culture, communication, work environment, creativity development.

It should be noted, however, that already after the first stage of the research, interesting conclusions and recommendations can be drawn, which will be presented in the article (Fig. 5).

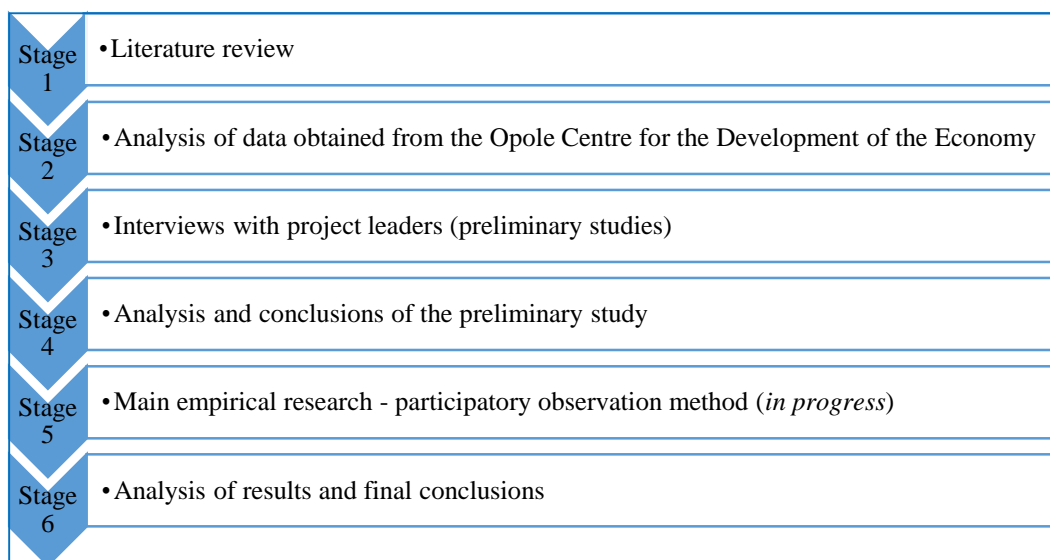


Figure 5. The research scheme.

Source: Own elaboration.

4. Research process

Interviews with individual project leaders lasted between 2 and 3 hours. To structure the interview process, main and auxiliary questions were prepared. Special attention was paid to the leader's freedom of expression, insights, emotions, personal reflections.

Main questions

1. What is your experience in implementing projects, especially innovative projects?
2. Where did the idea for the innovative solution come from?
3. what are the main success factors in innovation projects?

4. What are the main risks in the process of designing and implementing an innovation?
5. Which character traits of a leader are most important in the implementation of innovation projects? What competencies, education, experience should a leader in innovation projects have?
6. How did the leader-team communication work?
7. How do you overcome resistance, encourage employees to implement change and innovation?
8. What should be done, what methods should be used when conflicts arise?

Supporting questions

1. What other ideas have been analyzed related to the implementation of innovative solutions?
2. What sources of innovation would you identify as the most valuable and why?
3. List, describe difficult situations, emerging problems during the implementation of the innovation project.
4. Which of your competences and qualities proved to be crucial during the implementation of the project? Give examples.
5. How did the team communicate - describe. Was communication always effective? If not, what were the most common noises?
6. Describe an example of the use of motivational tools. Were they effective?
7. Describe situations of employee resistance to change. How did you deal with it?
8. Characterize an example of a conflict situation in a team. How did you deal with it?

Analysis of the results

All participating project leaders showed commitment and professionalism. They justified their statements with examples. Each of the leaders had more than 5 years of experience in project implementation, only 9 of them had previously implemented innovations.

As a source of ideas for innovations, they indicated mainly the organisation's own resources: research departments, employees, business owners and management.

Only in two cases did the idea come from consumers. Importantly, consumers were not later involved in the product design process itself. Demand-side innovations are therefore sporadic in the surveyed group, and it would be worth paying attention to this extremely valuable source of ideas. Innovations implemented according to the concept of user-driven innovation are characterised by lower risk, often also lower costs associated with promotion.

In their statements, the leaders paid particular attention to the coherence of the concept, adaptation of solutions to current trends and customer types. Among the main success factors, they mentioned: speed and agility, use of new technologies (not only in the innovation itself, but also e.g. in the communication process or promotion), a creative team, openness to change, and a flexible working system.

As main sources of risk, they mentioned above all: bad budgeting (underestimation), faster and more agile competition, mistakes in communication, shortcomings in the competences of team members, incompatibility of the innovation with the client's expectations.

Project leaders unanimously indicated the importance of their role in the team. They stressed repeatedly, the need for authority, charisma and strong intrinsic motivation.

Among the key qualities a leader should possess, they mentioned: interdisciplinary knowledge, speed of learning, experience, communication skills, seeing connections and relationships (between people, events), strategic thinking, adapting to change, flexibility in action, energy.

In addition, leaders mentioned empathy, openness, creativity as some of the important personality traits.

None of the leaders indicated the need to have a degree in a field, but the need for continuous development was emphasized.

The topic of communication was the most widely discussed issue. It was adapted to the team members, the situation. Interestingly, in 19 cases virtual communication tools were used in addition to traditional communication. Leaders unanimously pointed out that communication became easier with the duration of the project, there was less noise.

The following were identified as communication noises: language problems related to working in international teams, inactivity of some team members (especially in online meetings), intergenerational differences.

Attention was also drawn to the different working styles and priorities of team members, which not only hindered communication, but contributed to conflicts.

The most common situations of conflict and so-called employee resistance to change are collected below. In the statements of the leaders, these situations were combined and intermingled, hence the collective compilation.

Table 2.

Dysfunctions in the team

Reasons for conflict and resistance	Methods of proceeding
inconsistency between the manager's vision and the employees' vision	strategy building workshop, reminder talk on project plans, objectives and targets
miscommunication, failure to pass on information	removal of communication noises, reminder of rules related to the communication process, exercises on effective communication methods, team integration
a feeling of unequal sharing of responsibilities	participation of team members in the distribution of tasks
inaccuracy of task performance	reminder of team rules, warning, no bonus, disciplinary conversation
a feeling of favoritism towards employees	participation of team members in the division of tasks and decision-making, frank discussion
gossiping	admonition, confrontation
miscommunication, transmission delay	use of new tools to support the communication process, removal of communication noises, reminder of rules related to communication

Cont. table 2.

lack of empathy and understanding	integration of team members
failing to see the bigger picture, "focusing on oneself", not understanding the principles of teamwork	co-creation of team rules, integration, discipline talks
negative attitude towards new solutions	demonstrating the benefits of new solutions, training, creating a support team - leading change
short term, template thinking	creative sessions and training
time pressure	incentive bonuses, flexible schedules, modern tools to support work

Source: own elaboration.

The study preliminarily showed the importance of the role of the leader in the process of implementing innovative solutions. It should be noted that the conclusions are based solely on the feelings, experiences of the project leaders. Hence, it is necessary to expand the research by observing the performance of entire project teams.

5. Summary

Implementing innovation projects requires team commitment, flexibility and speed activities and a charismatic leader. It is the leader who carries out the management functions, in particular inspiring and motivating the team members. He or she creates a shared vision, strategies, team cohesion. He is the inspiration for the creation of new concepts. Leadership is a success factor towards building a permanent change in the environment and operating culture.

A leader should both promote and enable change. He or she should motivate employees, ensure that they understand the need for change and the benefits of continuous improvement. Example from the top has a positive effect on creating a sincere desire for change. The last task is to provide opportunities, needed resources such as time, tools, access to knowledge.

The research carried out was aimed at outlining the characteristics of a change leader, creating a catalogue of competences that he or she should possess. They are an excellent introduction to further extensive research on the role of the leader in implementing innovative solutions. They provide a rationale for creating a learning or development programme for change leaders, the future.

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