

# The Innovation Manager

**Author: Richard Heijen**  
University of Twente  
P.O. Box 217, 7500AE Enschede  
The Netherlands

**ABSTRACT:** With innovation manager becoming a more popular function title and the call for standardization within the innovation management field, this study looks at the tasks and responsibilities of innovation managers, with a focus on leader behaviors. By conducting interviews and doing a literature review, it was found that the function of innovation manager is very diverse and therefore it is hard to measure performance. More research is suggested to narrow down the function of innovation manager.

**Supervisors: Dr. A.H. Reekum and Prof.dr.ir P.C. de Weerd-Nederhof**

## **Keywords**

Innovation manager, innovation management, leader behavior, leadership styles.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Looking through vacancies for innovation managers they seem to have varied job descriptions, ranging from something that looks like a project manager on the one hand to something more resembling a sales person on the other. There is an obvious reason why this is the case, since although there is a lot of literature about innovation management as a field, there is little literature about the function of an innovation manager. No clear definition has yet been formulated and thus the tasks and responsibilities of innovation managers are up to own interpretation. This is a problem that should be solved since innovation management is getting more important and a need for standardization in this respect is rising. The need for standardization for innovation management is clearly displayed by the fact that ISO currently has a technical committee working on "Standardization of terminology tools and methods and interactions between relevant parties to enable innovation."<sup>1</sup> And although the Netherlands is currently just an observing country, 34 countries are participating, including most of the western countries.

Coming to a better definition should get rid of most of the ambiguity surrounding the function of an innovation manager and will help companies assess their innovation managers' performance. As we have seen in marketing management, the lack of performance measurement leads to a worse position within the company (O'Sullivan & Abela, 2007). It will also help the whole innovation process of a company, since the innovation managers' job description will be clear, and therefore he will be more efficient and help the whole innovation process. Besides that, other functions within the company also will know what the innovation manager does and therefore they do not have to perform tasks that they are currently doing but should be done by the innovation manager.

## 2. RESEARCH QUESTION

I will try to address this issue by doing literature review combined with interviews with innovation managers from different branches of industry. The main research question will be:

-What tasks and responsibilities should the function innovation manager have according to the literature on innovation management and managers in general?

Since this question is purely based on the theory found, and the theory is expected to be limited on the subject, I will try to answer the following sub questions as well. The sub questions are more related to the interviews and other perspectives besides the literature review. They give another perspective on the subject, helping to get a better overall picture.

The sub questions are:

-How does the theory differ from what innovation managers (perceive) to do within companies?

-How to explain the gap between the theory and practice? And what, if anything, then needs to be changed?

To answer the main question I will first start with the literature review. This literature review will be aimed towards innovation, innovation management and management in general. The focus will be on leadership styles and leader behavior.

After that, interviews have been conducted and the analysis of these interviews will take place. I end with a discussion combining the chapters.

## 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

As stated before, for the literature review I will be looking at articles dealing with the topics innovation, innovation management and management in general. With a focus on leadership styles and leader behavior. The review will start with innovation in general, since this is a broad introduction. After that the topic of managers in general will be discussed, followed by a quick analogy about marketing managers. Lastly leadership styles and behavior will be discussed to get a deeper understanding of the subject. The literature review should give us an idea of what the function of innovation manager should be.

### 3.1 Innovation in general

To understand what is important for an innovation manager, we first need to have an idea what innovation is. Innovation is recognized to be of high importance for companies in order to survive and sustain a competitive advantage. Bessant et al. (2005) stated the following on this subject: "Innovation represents the core renewal process in any organization. Unless it changes what it offers the world and the way in which it creates and delivers those offerings it risks its survival and growth prospects." There are many definitions of innovation.

Baregheh et al (2009) have done research on the definition of innovation by comparing many different definitions from different perspectives and looking at what words or aspects come up the most within all these definitions. After doing so they came up with the following definition: "Innovation is the multi-stage process whereby organizations transform ideas into new/improved products, service or processes, in order to advance, compete and differentiate themselves successfully in their marketplace."

Since this last definition looks at most of the other definitions and then makes a conclusion, it is the most complete definition and will be used as this definition in this paper.

Within innovation there are two main sorts of innovation. The first is product innovation, which is what is suggested by the name, the introduction of new products or services to a market in order to satisfy a certain demand or want from the customers (Barras, 1986).

The second one is process innovation, which is more focused on improving efficiency and productivity within the production process. It introduces new elements to the process, like new technologies or new production methods all together (Ettlie & Reza, 1992).

An important distinction that can be made within innovation is the difference between idea generation and application. Although some studies have taken both these aspects in one construct (Scott & Bruce, 1994). Some of the more recent studies actually recommend to keep these two aspects separated (Mumford and Licuanan, 2004). As we will see later, Den Hartog (2007) also follows this suggestion and I intend to do so as well.

Idea generation is the first phase, where employees generate ideas by looking at performance gaps, exploring opportunities or finding solutions for current problems. The transition to the second phase, application or implementation, finds place when an idea is produced. The second stage ends at the point where the

decision is made to implement the innovation (King & Anderson, 2002).

### 3.2 Managers in general

Now that we have an idea what innovation is, it is also important to know what a manager is and what he does. The problem with this is that the job of a manager can be very diverse. Even managers do not exactly know what it is that they do. Or as Mintzberg (1975) said: "If you ask managers what they do, they will most likely tell you that they plan, organize, coordinate, and control. Then watch what they do. Don't be surprised if you can't relate what you see to these words."

Despite it being written some time ago, Mintzberg's theories are still considered relevant these days and taught in most business related educational programmes. He came up with 10 roles that managers have, and these roles are divided into three categories; Interpersonal roles, informational roles and decisional roles. These three categories are then further divided into the following distinctive roles: figurehead, leader, and liaison roles, monitor, disseminator, and spokesperson roles, and entrepreneur, disturbance handler, resource allocator, and negotiator roles. Each of these roles have to be fulfilled and integrated in order to be a good manager. Another point he makes, which is also of importance for my research, is that it is hard to share a managerial position with two or three people, since dividing these roles between them would be next to impossible. Especially the informational roles are hard, since all information has to be shared without distorting it.

Mintzberg (2004) later stated in his book that "management is a craft, meaning that it relies on experience—learning on the job. This means it is as much about doing in order to think as thinking in order to do." He says that management is neither a science nor a profession. Which is exactly why it is hard to teach to people and to quantify what it is exactly.

Khandwalla, P.N. (2004) did research in India on the competencies that managers need. In Appendix A conclusions are shown.

Since we have not concluded what sort of role the innovation manager actually is, we have to look at all parts of this figure to understand what Khandwalla thinks are important competencies for managers. These are competencies every manager should have. For the innovation manager, which as we have seen before in the definition of innovation is about change and transforming ideas into new products or services, the sense of timing for introducing changes may be more important than for a general business manager.

For the strategic roles "preference for new tasks, tolerance for new settings and people" is one that should stand out for an innovation manager. Again, related to changing things. The strategic roles might be the most important for innovation managers, since most of these competencies are related to getting new projects going and making deadlines that are challenging to make, which relates well with innovation.

Other important factors are the capacity to inspire and enthuse others in the leadership roles. Stimulating employees and their creativity will help to stimulate innovation. Keeping them inspired and enthusiastic leads to higher engagement. Markos & Sridevi (2010) stated the following about engagement: "Engaged employees are emotionally attached to their organization and highly involved in their job with a great enthusiasm for the success of their employer, going extra mile beyond the employment contractual agreement."

The operations roles description within this figure is limited to one point, but is something to keep in mind as well. Making sure that tasks are followed up on and executed effectively is part of

what every manager needs to do, and thus this goes for the innovation manager as well.

### 3.3 Marketing manager analogy

To get a better understanding as to why it might be important to have a clearer function description for innovation manager, I will look at marketing management and managers as an analogy. This will help with defining innovation managers' job description and tasks by looking at what happened with marketing managers.

Marketing management has changed a lot over the past three decades (Webster, 2005). These changes are a result of well-known forces like globalization and technology advancements. Marketing activities have become more diverse and are often carried out by several companies and/or in several functional areas, all of which use information as a key raw material of marketing (Wyner, 2008).

Gök & Hacıoglu (2009) concluded by looking at the marketing literature and practice that marketing was looked at more as a set of values and processes and less so as a function. It appears that for innovation management the same holds true, making the marketing manager an excellent analogy.

In their research they also find that marketing managers are assigned one or more of six responsibility dimensions. These six dimensions are:

- (1) Marketing mix management
- (2) Managing internal relationships network
- (3) Strategy development and execution
- (4) Managing external relationships network
- (5) Data and knowledge management
- (6) Managing marketing productivity and performance.

Because there are these six different responsibility dimensions, there is quite a difference between different marketing managers that have the same title within companies.

O'Sullivan & Abela (2007) realized that marketing managers increasingly have to prove their added value to the company. Since this has been hard for the marketing department and marketing managers to do, their standing within companies have been undermined. They did research on senior marketing managers in high-technology firms to examine the effect of measure marketing performance (MPM) on firm performance. Through their research they concluded that MPM ability has a significant positive effect on firm performance. It has a positive effect on return on assets, which is an indicator how profitable a company is proportionate to its assets. Furthermore it also has a positive effect on CEO satisfaction with marketing.

This means that the lack of ability to measure performance for innovation managers could also form a problem for their actual performance. Since there is no definition of what an innovation manager does, it is hard to measure their performance.

### 3.4 Leadership styles and behaviors

As explained at the start, the focus in this paper will be on leadership styles and behaviors. In this chapter we will look at the literature on that subject.

De Jong & Den Hartog (2007) did research on leader behavior that is likely to stimulate innovative behavior of employees. Starting from the 14 managerial practices of Yukl's (2002) taxonomy, they came to a list of 13 leader behaviors that are connected to innovative behavior. Some of them are related to

the idea generation and some to the application, as shown appendix B.

These behaviors are interesting for me in this paper, since they are leadership behaviors that influence innovation. Depending on what the innovation manager is more focused on, idea generation or application, some behaviors are more important than others.

Another factor that is going to be important for this research is the leadership style the managers have to use.

Burns (1978) identified two types of leadership styles, transformational and transactional leadership. Burns considered the transactional leader as a leader who tries to motivate his employees by exchanging rewards for efforts. While the transformational leader is someone who engages with other people in order to get everyone to a higher level of motivation and morality.

Burns felt that transformational leadership is not the polar opposite of transactional leadership, but more a complementary leadership style. Transformational leadership includes transactional leadership, and adds more on top of it. One of the key competencies for transformational leadership is charisma.

Transformational leadership has been demonstrated to positively influence employees in two key areas; directly increasing their optimism and indirectly increasing their performance. (McCull-Kennedy & Anderson, 2002)

Bass (1985) said that the transactional leader is risk averse, pays attention to efficiency and time constraints and acts mostly in an existing culture or system. According to him, they are most effective in stable environments.

J.A. Aragón-Correa et al (2007) concluded the following about leadership style "Specifically, results support all our hypotheses, showing that in our sampled firms, a management style of transformational leadership and the collective capability of organizational learning both simultaneously influence innovation."

Chang, Bai & Li (2015) did research on the combination of innovation and leadership style. They investigated the influence of both leadership styles on both process and product innovation and concluded that while both transactional and transformational leadership have a positive effect on both types of innovation, transformational leadership has a stronger effect on product innovation and transactional leadership has a stronger effect on process innovation. According to them transformational leadership promotes the motivation of employees and thus stimulates their creativity, which helps with product innovation. Transactional leadership is more focused towards supporting refinement and improving efficiency, thus helping with process innovation. (Jansen, et al., 2009; Pieterse, et al., 2010)

The research done by Chang, Bai & Li might be a little different for western countries, since their research was based in China. The different culture might influence the preferred style of leadership. They acknowledge that transactional leadership has also been found to negatively influence innovation by other researchers.

Looking at these sources, a transformational leadership style seems to suit an innovation manager better than a transactional style. Since the transformational style will positively influence creativity and motivation of employees. However there are some indications that there is a difference between product and process innovation. Since this paper is not making a direct distinction between process and product innovation due to lack of time and sample, transformational leadership will be the best option for innovation managers.

Although there are several views on leadership and management, and whether or not they are in fact different things, in this research I will keep Kotter's (1990) view on it in mind. He recognized that management and leadership seek different outcomes, leadership seeks to produce change while management wants to achieve order and predictability. However he also says that both are not mutually exclusive within one person, therefore an innovation manager can play both roles of manager and leader.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

Combined with the literature review in the previous chapter I also did some in-depth interviews with several innovation managers. This qualitative research method is well suited for somewhat unexplored subjects like this one and can provide a fresh perspective on the subject (Eisenhardt, 1989). The combination of both the interviews and the conducted literature review in the previous chapter will complement each other. According to Strauss & Corbin (1990) there are three components of qualitative research. Data, procedures to interpret the data and lastly written and verbal reports. In this case the data are the interviews and the written reports include the previous chapter. Interpretation of the data will follow in the next chapter.

### 4.1 Respondents and data collection

In order to find managers that were willing to participate in this research by doing an interview, I searched for people with the function "innovation manager" on the networking site LinkedIn. Since innovation managers work in all sorts of fields and markets, I contacted a couple of managers from several different fields. In total six innovation managers were picked from 4 different sections. These included animal food section, construction section, publisher section and the IT-section. Unfortunately the IT-section cancelled the interview at the very last minute, so I ended up doing 5 interviews spread through 3 sections or specialties. Having managers that work in very different types of companies will help to get a better idea about the differences between the function of innovation.

Some of the interviews were held face-to-face, while others were done through the phone. They were mostly open, semi-structured interviews. The questions guiding the interviews can be found in Appendix C. I started out by explaining what my research was about. After that explanation I started every interview by asking if they could explain what their job consisted of according to them. What were their responsibilities, tasks and how was the function positioned within the company. From there the previously mentioned 13 leadership behaviors of De Jong & Den Hartog (2007) dictated the way I probed for answers. In addition to these leadership behaviors, I wanted to know some more general things. I included what their background was, what kind of jobs did they have before this and what kind of education did they enjoy. This extra bit of general information helps with getting a better picture of what the job entails in those companies and what the companies were looking for when they hired these innovation managers. The interviews lasted 30 to 45 minutes and were recorded and later transcribed. In some cases extra information was needed to better explain some answers, these were asked and answered through e-mail communication.

### 4.2 Analysis

For the 13 leadership behaviors I studied the interviews to see if they are consistent between the managers or if there are differences to be found. The same holds true for their background, role in the company and their general description of their function. Below I will explain the differences and

similarities between each leader behavior in more detail and after that the more general information.

## 5. RESULTS

In this chapter the interviews will be analyzed. As stated before, the interviews have been conducted based on the 13 leadership behaviors of De Jong & Den Hartog (2007) with some additional, more general, topics related to the tasks and responsibilities of the innovation managers added. These topics will be analyzed one by one in this chapter, with some examples of answers for each topic.

### 5.1 Innovative role modelling

Although De Jong & Den Hartog (2007) concluded that innovative role modelling may stimulate both idea generation and application behavior, none of the interviewees really clearly commented on being a role model for other employees. In some cases this was because they mostly were focused on their own job. There is recognition that they have a leading role, for instance someone stated: “We educate the company to move along with innovation, change, a different way of thinking about things, being more flexible in processes. Especially about innovation.” Though there is no clear awareness of role modelling involved.

One manager did mention that “You do not just become innovation manager straight out of university. Because you first have to show that you are willing and capable to do that research. And the relation to how you apply that research.” This combined with the innovation manager being the one leading the innovation project in this particular company, infers that the manager is in fact a role model for the people below her.

### 5.2 Intellectual stimulation

Intellectual stimulation was something that most innovation managers have thought about and implement in their job.

“We also have brainstorm sessions where everyone tries to come up with brand new ideas. We do this in cooperation with a partnership with another company.”

However, one of them stated: “We used to have a central innovation lab that did not have a P&L responsibility. They had idea-boxes and brainstorm sessions. But we do not really do those sort of things, because they are usually too far from the strategy we want to follow. The idea is nice, but in practice we can’t do anything with it.” Intellectual stimulation according to De Jong & Den Hartog (2007) is “increasing the employees’ awareness of problems and stimulating them to rethink old ways of doing things.” Intellectual stimulation is related to earlier mentioned transformational leadership and can therefore be considered a positive influence on innovative behavior.

Most managers did mention they held regular meetings and talked about problems within the projects they were working on with the entire team (or in some cases just the division leaders). In these meetings they try to come up with solutions together.

### 5.3 Stimulating knowledge diffusion

Open communication, related to stimulating knowledge diffusion was something all innovation managers brought up during the interviews. Usually they would organize some formal meetings to keep the team up to date on all fronts, but have informal meetings in between these formal meetings.

Statements like “Eventually we all decide together on what is needed, we create support about division and which direction we want to go”. And another manager said “We talk a lot with the

sales department, because we also want to know if there is anything they need and we can help them with. Then we can help them think.”

This sort of open communication is a part of the transformational leadership style (Berson & Avolio (2004), which in turn we found earlier was positive for innovation managers.

### 5.4 Providing vision

All managers seemed to have a clear idea about where they want to go. Their vision was stated in the interviews mostly. The difference was in the clarity of the visions.

One manager told me “Our standpoint is that about 10% should be radical innovation, 30% product innovation and 60% incremental innovation.” This was communicated to all the employees and was something that the company strived to achieve. However the numbers did not seem to add up. Since radical and incremental innovation together should stack up to 100%. While process and product innovation is another distribution that should add up to 100% as well. When asked to explain what this meant in their case, the manager replied with an explanation of what these three types of innovations are and a reference to an article mentioning a 70-20-10 ratio for innovation portfolio management. Although there is some clear overlap in the definitions used, the writer of the article (Nagji & Tuff, 2012) talks about core, adjacent and transformational innovations. Where core innovations are optimizing existing products for existing customers (incremental innovation related), transformational innovations are developing breakthroughs and inventing things for markets that do not exist yet (radical innovation related). And adjacent innovations are expanding from existing business into new to the company business (something in between radical and incremental innovation).

The vision was very clear, but the explanation lacked some clarity at first. Knowing about the article and theory related to the vision cleared it up.

Another manager stated: “It is about us keeping up with all the new research that is being done in this field. We either apply that research or we are the ones doing the research. Obviously we prefer the latter, that we think of new things and do the research.” Although this is certainly a vision, it lacks the detail of the previous vision.

### 5.5 Consulting

Consulting is linked to the transformational leadership style we have seen before in stimulating knowledge diffusion. Although stimulating knowledge diffusion is more about sharing knowledge and consulting is about incorporating ideas that people come up with and checking with people before changes are made that might have an effect on them, they both rely upon open communication. Therefore it is not surprising that all interviewees also brought up consulting as something they feel is important.

Some of them claimed they were not very strict and one stated about ideas brought up by employees in her team: “If I do not see any benefit in it at all then we do not do it. However something like that has never happened, those employees have a high sense of responsibility.” Meaning that the ideas of the employees are actually incorporated and executed.

### 5.6 Delegating

“I think the death of innovation is micromanagement”. This was one of the most obvious statements made in the interviews. While

all the other managers seemed to have the same train of thought, that delegating and giving employees the freedom to do their jobs, no statement was as clear as this one.

Other statements include “So they need to generate certain outcomes, but how they achieve those outcomes is up to each individual”.

De Jong & Den Hartog (2007) mention multiple studies that have found a positive relation between delegation and both idea generation and application. The studies they mention include, but are not limited to West & Wallace (1992), Frischer (1993), Nijhof et al. (2002) and Judge et al. (1997).

## 5.7 Support for innovation

De Jong & Den Hartog (2007) state that support for innovation helps to motivate employees in both phases of the innovation process, idea generation and application.

Although some managers seemed to support ideas generated by other employees, there were not many clear statements given. Most of it was derivable from larger answers and context. Quotes like “If people would not come with ideas ever, that would be way worse.” support this notion.

Some of the support for innovation also overlaps with recognition.

## 5.8 Organizing feedback

Feedback by the interviewees was organized in different ways. Some of them held regular meetings where employees could give each other feedback. “Giving each other tips, I think this test is not worth the money at all, can’t we outsource this? Anything like that, it is all discussed within the entire team.”

While others maintain more informal ways of giving feedback. Like one of the innovation managers said “You speak with each other a lot since you are working in the same hallway. Lines are short, you just walk into someone else’s office to ask for something or to make sure you’re on the same page.”

Feedback, and more importantly positive feedback, have been linked to innovation. Hellström & Hellström (2002) came to the conclusion that employees are stimulated when they receive positive feedback and then want to go for more innovation.

## 5.9 Recognition

This includes many things like giving compliments, celebrations and extra awards. (Yukl, 2002) and has been linked to motivating employees.

None of the interviewees explicitly mentioned anything regarding recognition. They would usually instantly think about financial rewards, which is actually the next leader behavior mentioned in 4.2.10.

One of the interviewees did however mention: “Most important is a sense of appreciation for your work. Eventually that is what gives you the satisfaction to go to your work with pleasure.” How that appreciation was shown was never mentioned however.

## 5.10 Rewards

Most interviewees stated that both they, as well as other team members, get financial rewards when achieving their goals. One of the innovation managers stated:

“Yes, there is bonus involved. There is a sort of encouragement to do your best so to speak. However it’s not that if your test fails,

you will not get a bonus. The riskier the idea, the newer it is, the bigger the chances for failure are of course. So people do not get penalized if it does not go well. If people would not come with ideas ever, that would be way worse.”

A clear indication that not only bonuses are given as a reward for performance, but that the bonus also takes in to account how much risk is involved. It is not necessarily a reward for a certain outcome, but more for showing initiative.

When we look at the explanation De Jong & Den Hartog (2007) gave about this subject, we see that a financial reward might not necessarily be a good way of stimulating innovative ideas. And when they are helpful, they should be aligned properly with the other leader behaviors like providing support and recognition.

## 5.11 Providing resources

Mostly related to the application phase of innovation, providing resources is something that is important when an idea is accepted and moves toward implementation.

One of the interviewees stated: “But the tests cost easily 80.000 euro. So we need to think long and hard before we decide which test we want to do.”

Another one claimed: “We have a yearly budget that we can play around with.”

None of the managers however mentioned how they provide support for idea application specifically. None of them said anything about it being important or unimportant. While in the literature there are multiple examples available that show a positive relationship between providing resources and the application phase of an idea or innovation. One of the most important examples of companies that does this very well, that is constantly brought up, is 3M, where personnel should invest 15% of their work time on their own innovation projects (Brand, 1998).

De Jong & Den Hartog (2007) mention a research of Ekvall & Ryhammer (1999) that found the strongest variable that influenced innovation was actually the availability of resources.

## 5.12 Monitoring

Opinions were mixed on the monitoring. Though most interviewees seemed to set deadlines and certain minimal deliveries, they usually let their employees rather free. One thing that was mentioned by multiple innovation managers was the fact that it is hard to monitor their performance and that of their team.

“That is pretty hard to judge, because it is hard to make my performance measurable. I do have KPI’s, but is difficult to check those with six months performance reviews. Like well, you hit 80% of your KPI’s. My work on food and health is not black and white. And there is no on- and off-switch. When are you successful and when do you do more than average? That’s hard to actually measure.”

Another interviewee mentioned how she would monitor her team: “I have week starts in my project that really help. It’s not necessarily a control tool, but more like, are we all still focused on the right priorities?”

De Jong & Den Hartog (2007) conclude that monitoring has a negative impact on both idea generation as well as idea application. Though this is mostly the case when the monitoring is too strict. In the idea application when monitoring is too loose there is also a negative effect. Thus it is desirable to apply some monitoring, but not be a “big brother” that is always watching.

### 5.13 Task assignment

Though almost all managers mentioned that they assign certain people to certain tasks, none of them mentioned anything about the relevance of handing them challenging tasks. Unfortunately I cannot comment on the content of the tasks that employees were assigned to, and whether they are related to their individual skills or preferences.

### 5.14 Function description

It was interesting to see that the interviewees had, like expected, very different jobs while having the same function title. One of the innovation managers that were interviewed had a function that resembled a pure researcher. He states that: "The most important goal in my function is increasing knowledge in a specific area. With the purpose of using this knowledge in continuous improvement in quality of food."

All managers had some interest and focus on increasing knowledge and improving, however for this manager it was the main (and sole) focus of the function.

Another manager responded very differently: "For me the title means that I am responsible for new products and services within the company. I facilitate everything around the new product, so we have a product developer that does all the technical aspects, and my job is to develop a business plan that goes with the product. To make sure market research is done, to organize subsidies and patents, finding clients for pilot projects, to report to the board about planning and budget, to do the marketing and communication. All based on a product roadmap that I develop together with the product developer."

This paints a very different picture, where the innovation manager does a lot of things that help a new product to succeed. Not actually coming up with new products, knowledge or processes, but facilitating the whole process from idea to application.

### 5.15 Knowledge and background

In the background and knowledge of innovation management of the interviewees we see a big difference as well. This makes sense, since the function description were very different, different skills and knowledge would also be required.

Whereas the innovation manager that acted the most as a pure researcher had a very technical background in the field that he works in, some of the other managers had backgrounds in business administration, communication or project management.

The background did seem consistent with the type of function description that the interviewees gave. The innovation managers more focused on actual research had a background that was more technical and related to the field they operate in. While the innovation managers that worked as a broader function had a more business related background.

I asked the interviewees what kind of knowledge and skills one should have to fulfill their jobs as well. The responses were once again very different. While some focused mostly on soft skills like "You have to be very stress resistant and flexible. (...) You also have to be critical, I think that's important. And you have to be able to communicate well, because you have so many people and chains. You also have to be persistent and focused on results, those kind of things."

Others were more focused on the research side of things again: "You have to be a curious person, with a mentality that you want to know things and solve problems. You have to have an

analytical mind and be creative. And on top of that you have to be articulate in writing."

One thing that struck me, was that more than half of the managers made statements that they did not know anything about any innovation or innovation management theories. With the function being called innovation, I expected this to be a core part of their knowledge.

One of them stated, when asked if he knew anything about the innovation management theories: "No, not at all." One of the other interviewees realized that usually an innovation manager would have an academic education in innovation or something related to innovation, but did not have this kind of education herself. She stated: "I just got more and more experience in the field about what kind of innovations there are in my field of expertise, how did others innovate, what kind of new things are there?"

An explanation for this phenomenon is the Peter principle (Peter & Hull, 1969), which is a concept that employees might get promoted based on their performance in their current role, rather than on the qualities needed for their new role. This leads to employees being promoted as long as they perform well, until they reach a point where they no longer perform well.

### 5.16 Position in the company

After the last two parts it should not come as a surprise that the position within the company also differs between the interviewees. While one of the interviewees worked in a team of three people that work on the same hierarchy level with no one below him, another manager was the leader of a large team consisting of up to 50 people. The others were all somewhere in between these two. With roles ranging from a supporting role to a leading role and a mix of both depending on the project they were working on. Most of the interviewees had a role within the company that has to deal with other departments a lot. Communication with the other departments seems to be a central core task that almost all innovation managers that I interviewed shared.

### 5.17 General remarks

I would also like to include some of the general remarks that I got during the interviews. These might provide some insight in to how the interviewees think of their function and about the research in this paper.

One manager said the following: "I can imagine that you should not need an innovation manager at all, because innovation should be in every employee. In his own tasks should be a sort of responsibility for this. But that is easy to say, however in practice someone's performance is reviewed by whether he makes his targets between 9 o'clock and 5 o'clock. And this is all extra." Making the innovation manager sound like a necessary evil. Something that should not be needed in an ideal scenario, but is needed because that scenario cannot be achieved.

One of the other interviewees made a comment on what she thought about the function of innovation manager and the differences there are: "You will see that there are differences per industry branches and even in one industry branch between different companies. Because I used to work at another company, where I also did innovation and research in international affairs, but they chose with a fusion to separate research completely. Support for the other staff, training for fieldwork, all those kind of things are strictly separated from the research. So you will get a very different description of the same job there."

To a question whether the interviewee thought there should be a more concrete description of what an innovation manager is, I got the following answer: "I think it's good there are differences, especially if you follow an education in the field of innovation management. No one person is right, and for someone the more marketing related approach of Apple might be the right fit, while for someone else the more technical industry specific knowledge might be the right fit. And in between those, there is a whole other world."

## 6. DISCUSSION

After the literature review and conducting and analyzing the interviews, it is now time to discuss the results. The last chapter will be a conclusion based of the research questions from chapter 2 and the research conducted in this paper. Finally there will be a discussion about some of the limitations of this paper and some recommendations for future research.

### 6.1 Conclusion and implications

Innovation manager is a job title that shows up ever more often in the job market. However the way this function is described is very diverse. When looking through the literature, I found there was little to be found for the specific function of innovation manager. To answer the main research question has proven to be quite hard with the literature that is currently available on the topic. In the literature we found that even for a manager's job in general it is hard to answer this question. For an innovation manager there are several things influencing what the tasks and responsibilities should be. For example the sort of innovation, either radical or incremental, has an effect on the processes used. This in turn should also influence what the innovation manager should do. The phase in which the innovation is also influences this. For idea generation the innovation manager should stimulate employees to explore opportunities and to find solutions for problems. While in the idea application phase, the innovation manager should work towards the initiation and application of the ideas that were generated and approved. The literature on managers in general showed us that there are several roles that can and should be played by a manager. For example Mintzberg mentioned 10 different roles that have to be integrated. Khandwalla came to a similar conclusion where managers have to integrate several roles. When attention turned towards leadership styles and behaviors we came to a list of 13 leader behaviors by de Jong & Den Hartog that are beneficial for innovation managers. These range from innovative role modelling to reward systems and have been proven to stimulate innovation. As seen before, they also make a distinction between the idea generation and idea application phase on which leader behavior has a positive effect.

So while the tasks and responsibilities that an innovation manager should have might not be set in stone, these roles and leader behaviors should be used by an innovation manager.

The fact that there is no definitive answer to the main research question also makes answering the sub questions hard. Since there is no definitive answer, it is impossible to compare the tasks and responsibilities an innovation manager should have according to the theory to what they are in practice. However from the interviews we can gather that the innovation managers that have been interviewed have very different jobs. While most of them use the 13 leader behaviors described earlier to a large extent, none of them were explicitly aware of these behaviors actually helping with innovation. And only one of the managers had an academic background in innovation. Most of the innovation managers actually stated that they had no theoretical

knowledge about innovation management at all. The function being called innovation manager implies that the person with this function title should possess knowledge in that field. The lack thereof is surprising to me.

Opinions about this research of the innovation managers that were interviewed were mostly skeptical. They believe that the differences for the same function in different companies and different branches of industries is normal and probably the way it should be. Since the industries are different, the innovation manager also plays a different role.

However this is not necessarily true. As shown in the analogy about marketing managers, research by O'Sullivan & Abela showed that the lack of ability to measure performance related to that function actually gave companies a hard time. The lack of ability to measure performance in that case was directly related to the fact that function was so different between companies and thus unclear. When the ability to measure this performance increased, the value of the marketing management also increased within the company and the total company performance went up. Since the innovation manager function title is so different between companies at the moment, it is also hard to measure performance. The interviewed innovation managers also stated this. In turn, a more standardized description for innovation managers could lead to improvement of the ability to measure performance of innovation managers.

To summarize, we have not gotten a clear answer to the main research question, but the roles the innovation managers should play and the leader behaviors they should use have been defined. This leads to a limited comparison between what the managers do and what they should do according to the theory. Most of the interviewed managers tend to use most leader behaviors. What managers perceive to do on a daily basis is extremely varied, the jobs differ a lot from each other.

### 6.2 Limitations and future research

There are some limitations to this research. For one the sample size used for the interviews was very small. Although I tried to get innovation managers from different branches of industry to get a broader picture, this is still a very small sample size. A bigger sample size might yield different but especially more reliable results. Having a bigger sample would also make it possible to make a clear distinction between radical and incremental focused innovation. For a radical innovation focused company different processes would be used than for an incremental innovation focused company. One could argue that this is not necessarily part of the innovation manager's job. This might be more of a general strategy choice within the company, but it would have implication on the job and tasks of the innovation manager.

Another limitation of this study is that I was just able to interview the innovation managers. While this is a valuable source of information, the interviews only led to the leadership behavior and role they played in the company that they perceived to be the truth. Multiple perspectives would lead to better results, for example seeing what they actually do throughout a week could paint a different picture. One would then be able to compare the perceived and actual. Another option could be to interview someone else in the company, maybe a human resource manager that was tasked with hiring the innovation manager. To see what he or she thinks the innovation manager should be doing, and what kind of qualities he or she should possess.

A last limitation and recommendation for future research is that this study did not compare innovation managers to any other functions within the companies. This means that a clear



definition of what should be included in the function of innovation manager is difficult to create, since it is not taking into account what other functions already do.

These limitations make that answering the main research question is not something I am able to definitively do. More research is needed to state what tasks, responsibilities and authorities the innovation manager should have. And even then there might be arguments to not define this so strictly.

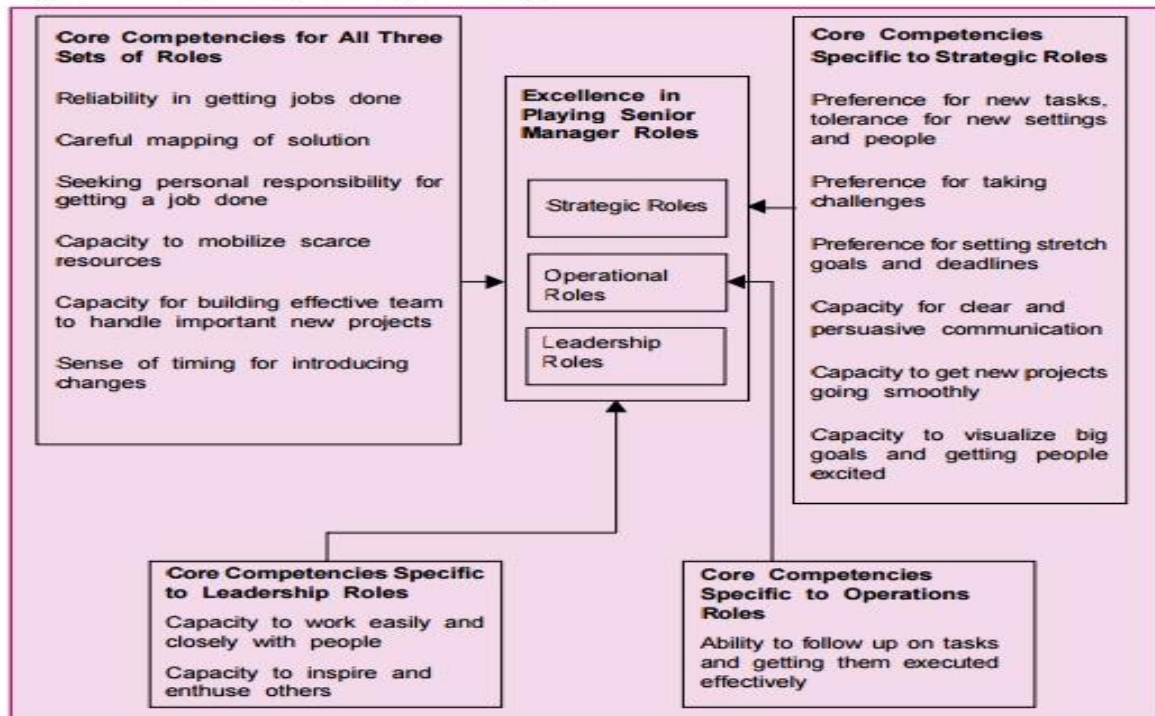
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## 8. APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Khandwalla (2004)

Figure 1: A Summary of Major Findings



Appendix B: Leader behaviors (De Jong & Den Hartogh, 2007)

Behaviour		Consists of	Relates to	
			Idea generation	Application
1	Innovative role-modelling	Being an example of innovative behaviour, exploring opportunities, generating ideas, championing and putting efforts in development	✓	✓
2	Intellectual stimulation	Teasing subordinates directly to come up with ideas and to evaluate current practices	✓	
3	Stimulating knowledge diffusion	Stimulating open and transparent communication, introducing supportive communication structures like informal work meetings	✓	
4	Providing vision	Communicating an explicit vision on the role and preferred types of innovation, providing directions for future activities	✓	✓
5	Consulting	Checking with people before initiating changes that may affect them, incorporating their ideas and suggestions in decisions	✓	✓
6	Delegating	Giving subordinates sufficient autonomy to determine relatively independently how to do a job	✓	✓
7	Support for innovation	Acting friendly to innovative employees, being patient and helpful, listening, looking out for someone's interests if problems arise	✓	✓
8	Organizing feedback	Ensuring feedback on concepts and first trials, providing feedback to employees, asking customers for their opinion		✓
9	Recognition	Showing appreciation for innovative performances	✓	✓
10	Rewards	Providing financial/material rewards for innovative performances		✓
11	Providing resources	Providing time and money to implement ideas		✓
12	Monitoring	Ensuring effectiveness and efficiency, checking-up on people, stressing tried and tested routines (negative relationship)	✓	✓
13	Task assignment	Providing employees with challenging tasks, make allowance for employees' commitment when assigning tasks	✓	

### **Appendix C: Questions guideline interviews**

Hoe ziet de functie eruit, wat doe je een op gemiddelde dag?

Is het een ondersteunende rol, een project leider etc?

Wat voor soort innovatie zijn jullie op gericht? Ideëen genereren, verwerken?

Budget?

Incrementele innovatie of radicale innovatie? Processen, producten?

Mensen onder je? Wie staat er boven je? Afdeling?

Wat voor kwaliteiten zijn belangrijk volgens u?

Waar komt uw kennis over innovatie vandaan, opleiding? Hoeveel ervaring?

Wat doet u zelf om innovatie te stimuleren? Hoe stimuleert u anderen hierin?

Hoe is de communicatie binnen het bedrijf? Worden beslissingen eerst gecommuniceerd met betrokkenen?

Bepaalt u wat andere werknemers moeten doen? Niet alleen op gebied van innovatie, maar algemeen? Hoeveel vrijheid krijgt iedereen hierin?

Worden klanten om hun mening gevraagd? Zijn er overleg momenten met collega's/andere werknemers?

Hoe worden werknemers beloond? Niet alleen financieel, maar allerlei manieren.

Hoe worden hun resultaten/prestaties in de gaten gehouden en beoordeeld?

Hoe gaat dat voor uw eigen resultaten en prestaties?

