COLLECTION OF PAPERS
NEW ECONOMY
Volume 3, No. 1, 2025

INNOVATIVE MANAGEMENT METHODS IN CONTEMPORARY BUSINESS ORGANIZATIONS

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Received 29.03.2025. | Send to review 11.04.2025. | Accepted 18.07.2025.

Original Article

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JEL Classification:
M1, O1

Doi: 10.61432/CPNE0301189k

UDK: 658:005.5

ABSTRACT
The discovery and application of innovative management methods for strategic decision-making in all global business organizations is becoming a comprehensive process for achieving sustainability in all spheres. Given the great popularity and importance of the topic, both in practice and in theory, the number of publications on it is increasing rapidly. The search for innovative forms and methods for managing organizations is the reason for writing this report, the whole issue is to create a research framework for innovation in management. Its application will help scientists and managers to understand, analyze and guide organizational processes when introducing innovations in management. The framework outlines the key variables, the relationships between them and the analysis system, giving guidelines on how to collect, analyze and interpret data, in accordance with current strategic and/or current tasks and problems. An in-depth review of specialized literary sources was conducted, based on which findings were drawn about the most used innovations in the management of all different organizations. A methodological tool was created and a survey was conducted among managers in Bulgarian business organizations. Based on the results of the empirical study, a synthesized review of the current state and their requirements for innovation in the context of the modern dynamic market environment is made.

Keywords: *innovation in management, strategic and current management, managerial decision-making, research framework for innovation, management effectiveness, innovative methods in management, growth and sustainable future*

1. INTRODUCTION

This report aims to lay the foundation for developing a universal research framework for generating innovations in management, applicable to all management processes and activities. It is based on the results of theoretical and empirical research on existing innovative theories and practices related to management, which have proven their usefulness. For this purpose, an empirical tool has been created to further establish the extent and type of innovations introduced in the management of Bulgarian business organizations.

The article is structured in six sections: introduction; description of the methodology for the overall study; presentation of the results of the literature review of studies conducted in the field of management innovations, the existing types of such and the most applied of them; discussion and analysis of the results of the empirical study; formulation of conclusions and description of the process for designing innovations in management with structuring a conceptual framework for creating innovations in management; conclusion, including notes, limitations and opportunities for future research.

The relevance of the topic under consideration is dictated by the need for modern management to respond adequately to everyday challenges in business, with a view to sustainable existence of companies despite the many unpredictable circumstances of the market environment. This is a prerequisite for their constant search for new solutions for change towards a new stability achieved through dynamics. In our time, it is known that the success of any such organization based on knowledge depends on the innovations, creative resourcefulness and ingenuity of its creators and employees (Martins, E.C., Terblanche, F., 2003). As a result, innovations as a factor that affects the overall organizational performance have become the main goal of most business organizations oriented towards sustainability over time. More precisely, this statement applies not only to technological innovations, but also to the so-called non-technological – organizational, marketing and management innovations (Manual, O., 2005; Hamel, 2006), the latter being the subject of this study. Referred to the development and implementation of new management processes, models or systems, management innovation (MI) has its own characteristics that distinguish it from other innovations. Unlike the familiar technological ones, those in management (MI) encompass more collective "social" aspects than the physical technologies themselves (Krasnicka, T., Głód, W.&Wronka-Pośpiech, M., 2018; Nelson & Sampat, 2001).

It turns out that the statement established after a 2006 study that "despite their importance, innovations in management remain poorly managed and poorly understood" (Birkinshaw J., Mol, M., 2006) is still relevant. Quite a few articles on MI have been published in recent years and the topic still maintains great interest in business, where the need to improve management activities is palpably felt. At the same time, there are few scientific studies that could explain and frame the mechanisms for creating MI, and could confirm their importance and impact on technological innovations and economic results of business organizations. It is necessary for these future studies to emphasize the important role of top and middle management, which in itself does not directly influence technological innovations (Elenkov, D. S., Manev, I. M., 2005), influences strategically and tactically through its way of management and development of non-standard business solutions.

Changing the organizational format from accepted practices, structures and approaches in the company in a way that is new for it and/or the business sector is a key characteristic of MI and an indicator of its innovativeness, productivity and competitiveness (Volberda, Van Den Bosch & Heij, 2013). In this regard, the question of the significance, connection with the strategic concept and the mechanisms of creation and implementation of MI remains open, with many unknown answers and unfinished discussions.

From a comprehensive review of the literature on this topic, it is evident that many reasons stimulate research on MI and, more specifically, encourage attempts to operationalize them in a conceptual framework, as a kind of tool for generating innovative management practices. The present study aims to contribute to filling this gap in the existing innovation theories for the management of organizations, by providing a broad-spectrum approach and at the same time specific recommendations for the creation and implementation of innovations in this area. The aim is to achieve the development of a management tool in the form of a conceptual framework, with the help of which it is possible to implement MI. This effort will provide an opportunity to get to know their nature and impact on the final results, as well as on the overall performance of organizations.

2.RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To find a solution to this problem, the present study was initiated, with the aim of better understanding how innovations in management occur and how they can be introduced into all management processes. The methodology of secondary research includes an initial examination of some known cases of innovations in management, and then their study is expanded to other literary and electronic sources, where data for a number of studies in many areas are stored. The studied information is analyzed and systematized in several more important directions, so as to serve as a basis for formulating conclusions and recommendations necessary for the conceptual framework. For this purpose, a combination of data from case studies in business and the results of the survey were used, which testify to the experience of a large sample of managers in Bulgaria. Attention is focused on understanding the conditions and stages in the process of the emergence of innovation in management and discovering the roles that *leading individuals* have in the *formation and stimulation* of MI.

2.1. METHODOLOGY OF SECONDARY RESEARCH AND DATA ANALYSIS

(conducted research of sources by Bulgarian and foreign authors on the use of innovations in the management of organizations)

The methodology for secondary research on innovations in management encompasses a systematic review of published data on them regarding their understanding, research and implementation. The aim is to access old and new information that demonstrates the significance of this type of innovation and the effectiveness of their implementation in real management processes. The methodology supports finding data on the types of innovations and those of them that are most used in modern management, as well as the discovery of patterns and trends in the processes of their initiation, creation and implementation.

The purpose of the secondary research is to obtain up-to-date information, which can be collected and processed so that it can serve as a basis and form a research framework for creating future MI. The chosen research method has a number of advantages, some of which are speed and low cost, providing an additional opportunity to present the information descriptively and systematized by direction.

The methodology used for the secondary research includes the following *five stages*:

- *The first stage* is to define the objectives and research questions of the study. It involves formulating and refining them so that they are directed towards the specific search without implying ambiguous answers.
- *The second stage* includes: selecting and collecting sources by relevant keywords, finding them in international and national databases (Scopus, ResearchGate, Google Scholar, specialized journals, national libraries, etc.) and selecting appropriate publications and materials on the topic.
- In *the third stage*, different criteria are applied for inclusion and exclusion of certain publications (filtering the results found) according to their relevance to management innovations.
- *The fourth stage* covers the review and analysis of the content from the selected sources, with the aim of extracting important information on the supporting points of the research framework, which is intended to be structured as a result of this study. The stage also includes conducting a comparative analysis between the selected data in the context of the study, synthesizing them to form a more comprehensive picture by extracting the essential moments and identifying trends and gaps in the literature.
- In *the Fifth Stage*, the collected data are interpreted and interpreted, the most important results of the analysis are summarized in order to formulate conclusions about how MI is implemented in management processes and affects organizations. The findings are used to compile and offer useful recommendations and guidelines in the form of a systematized research framework for practical application.

These steps ensure a structured and clear conduct of the secondary research, which allows for a systematic, consistent summary and analysis of the literature on the topic of management innovations.

Thus, the secondary research can cover the necessary amount of data for a proper understanding of the meaning of the MI, as well as a sufficient amount for an objective analysis of the trends affecting business processes in modern management. In this way, the generated data provide the necessary information to gain a real idea of their significance and influence on the business climate and the results of organizations.

2.2. METHODOLOGY OF EMPIRICAL SURVEY AMONG MANAGERS

(survey among managers from Bulgarian business organizations on the most used innovations in management by them, as well as on the need for specific innovations, according to their most pressing problems, taking into account the effects of the innovations in management used so far)

The empirical study among managers of Bulgarian companies is necessary to comprehensively examine MI in the context of the overall study in order to establish how business organizations in Bulgaria can create better business results by incorporating innovations at all levels of their management.

The sample in the study includes a group of different managers in Bulgarian business organizations, selected randomly, regardless of their field of activity and the industry they represent.

Access to the participants who completed the survey was achieved online through the mediation of various associations of managers of Bulgarian companies established in the country, such as: Bulgarian Industrial Chamber (BIC), Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI), Association of Women Entrepreneurs in Bulgaria „Selena", Union of Business Initiative (UBI), Confederation of Employers and Industrialists in Bulgaria (CBI), Bulgarian Executive Search Association (BESA), National Association of Small and Medium-sized Businesses in Bulgaria (NSMBB), Club 9000 Association, United Business Clubs (UBK), etc.

The answers to the questions included in the questionnaire will supplement the information on the implementation of MI in business organizations in our country, will provide guidance on the used, preferred and necessary innovations that optimize activities and processes when solving real business problems identified by the respondents.

The analysis of the results is based on data obtained from current company managers, which implies that their answers are based on information they personally use in practice, are professional and have a full understanding of the innovative practices that are applied in their organization. Subjective answers are not excluded, due to the lack of such understanding, but expectedly in a much smaller percentage, insufficient to affect the objectivity of the answers in the sample.

The results are processed using statistical methods and presented graphically. The combination of research methods aims to complement each other, minimize the shortcomings of their separate application, and increase the reliability of the results obtained.

The theoretical model of the study is built from four thematic blocks, each of which includes a different number of questions with the following content:

I. Innovations in management practices..

II. Needs for new methods for initiating innovations.

III. Strategic management and problems in the organization.

IV. Innovative management solutions and future prospects.

The survey was conducted using the Google forms application, and the respondents reached received an active link to it. It guarantees anonymity and confidentiality to encourage openness in responses. Each questionnaire was completed remotely within about 5 to 7 minutes.

The sample is random, as the answers were obtained based on the responding managers from Bulgarian business organizations.

The collection, analysis of data from the completed surveys and their organization is in electronic format. A quantitative analysis (statistical processing of closed questions) and a qualitative analysis (content analysis of open questions) were conducted.

The results are interpreted in relation to the research questions to draw conclusions about the most popular MI and the need for specific new actions necessary to outline a framework of recommendations necessary for their creation.

This structure provides a clear approach to conducting the empirical study through a survey, with each task in it being specifically defined and aimed at identifying current management innovations and the needs for innovations in the management of contemporary Bulgarian organizations.

3.SECONDARY SURVEY RESULTS

Management innovations, in their essence, involve changing the overall organizational form in business companies, in their processes and practices in a way that is previously unknown to the given company or the industry. In themselves, they lead to new technologies and processes in organizations that change their appearance in terms of productivity, innovation and competitiveness. The latest research studies indicate that innovations in management largely explain the overall innovative performance and achievements of companies. Increased stimulation of MI and, accordingly, their impact on new technologies, products or services, as a result, would be crucial for increasing com-

pany competitiveness and sustainability. Therefore, more in-depth research is needed that would clarify what is important in different types of MI and how they can be generated. Their development and promotion also require constant study of their key elements for success, as is the case with technological innovations. Similarly, a systematic development and research work on AI is needed (Volberda, H.W., Van Den Bosch, F. A.J. & Heij, C.V., 2013). The framework that is the aim of this study should cover precisely these common points between technological and non-technological innovations, as well as the conditions that need to be created in order to be successfully managed. In this regard, measurements are needed in the process of creating MI, the determining factors and the results. The collected and verified data are systematized in this framework, which represents a kind of program for MI research in the future.

3.1. RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS OF SECONDARY SOURCES

Determining the exact number of publications related to MI in Bulgaria has proven to be a challenge due to the lack of a centralized database that would cover all scientific and practical research in this area. However, the presence of specialized publications and studies shows that the topic is a subject of significant interest among Bulgarian practitioners and scholars. For example, the periodical of the Department of Administration and Management at the New Bulgarian University publishes articles focused on effective management models and approaches, including MI in institutions and in the business environment. In addition, in 2013, an association for innovative management was established in our country, namely the STOOS "Network Bulgaria", which aims to discover, share and promote the use of innovative management approaches to build an effective and balanced organizational environment (www.stoos.bg).

Although it is not possible to provide a specific number of publications on the topic, the presence of, albeit a few, specialized studies and initiatives in Bulgaria testifies to the emerging interest and progressive development in the field of MI. This is also observed in the information from foreign sources, where again it was impossible to establish their exact number. Additional search in them is hampered by the frequent confusion of the concepts of "innovation in management" and "innovation management", whereby publications on the two topics were mixed up in the result lists of various online search engines. This necessitated the consideration of only the frequently cited publications and those of them that are positioned in leading positions in the samples.

From the selected sources, it was interesting to find that some MI in pioneering companies are indeed their main and lasting competitive advantage (Mol, M., Birkinshaw, J., 2009). While in others, for example, such as analyzing the investment portfolio and introducing environmental requirements for production materials, create more benefits for society. Taken as a whole, both types of innovations, aimed as a result at organizations and at society, are equally important for social and economic progress. But most of the unknowns come out in MI, where far less research has been done on the effects of their introduction into management processes. Based on these findings, the question arose: "Do organizations invest enough in MI?".

Despite the high importance given to them in the researched sources, MI remain categorically poorly managed and not well understood. It was found that most of the organizations do not have an established internal process for promoting them. Most often, experience shows that innovations in management activities are left to happen in an intuitive way, for which successful innovators in management have repeatedly noted that they created their innovative discoveries in this area "despite the system", and not with its help (Vaccaro, I. G., Jansen, J. P., Van Den Bosch, F. & Volberda, H. W., 2010). In addition, academic circles have also proven to provide little help in this direction, which is surprising. They discuss studies related to the dissemination of already created MI, for which literature can be found. But there is very little when it comes to their origins and the generative processes that give rise to them in the first place (Birkinshaw, J., Mol, M., 2006). The current search in various databases proved this, as thousands of peer-reviewed articles were found that examine technological innovations, but only hundreds focused on MI. A small but important part of the recent findings are summarized below, but overall they also provide businesses with scarce essential tools for engaging with MI and more specifically for their creation, development or improvement in the management of organizations.

Relatively few studies were found in Bulgaria devoted to innovation in the management of organizations.

These studies cover different aspects of the topic and provide some insights into the integration of innovations into business processes. One of them, which stood out as more significant, is the monograph "Integrated Management of Innovations in the Business Organization" (Yordanova, Z., 2020), which examines the possibilities for integrating their management among other business functions through the use of information systems. It introduces the concept of the "innovation mix", which encompasses 16 elements of innovation in the organization and 32 management activities for innovations. The author makes a reference precisely from "innovation management" to "innovation in management".

Another important study is the article "Innovations and their role in the anti-crisis management of organizations" (*Ivanova, R.*), which analyzes how innovations can be used in the development of anti-crisis measures that correspond to the market situation, the goal being that they be provided to organizations and used by their management in extreme situations.

In the first part of Volume 24 of the Almanac "Scientific Research", a study entitled "Innovative Management Practices for Good Governance" was published, which presents innovative practices in business organizations and emphasizes that "organizational innovation is a key factor for sustainable management of the modern business organization" (Assenov, A., Aleksieva. D., Stoyanova, S. & Roussenov, G., 2017). The focus is on the need to successfully combine the applied management tools and experience to achieve the set goals.

Last but not least is the treatment of innovations in management in the article "Information Systems in Business Organization Management" (*Slavova, P., 2015*), offered by information systems in the management and design of business processes through them. The author defines this MI as one of the criteria for successful and sustainable development of business organizations.

The reviewed studies and publications by Bulgarian authors provide important guidelines and examples of good practices in implementing innovations in the management of business organizations, which the authors determine to be of significant importance for increasing their competitiveness (Ivanova, D., 2009) and adaptability in the dynamic business environment (Alexandrova, M., 2015).

3.1.1. STUDY AND ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH CONDUCTED BY FOREIGN AUTHORS ON THE USE OF INNOVATIONS IN THE MANAGEMENT OF ORGANIZATIONS

From the studied foreign sources, several more significant studies emerged that discuss various innovative processes leading to innovations in the management of business organizations. These studies target practical steps for creating new management tools for business that lead to better results and strong competitiveness.

The report "Global Innovation 1000: How the Best Innovators Keep Winning", published by Strategy&Business, analyzes innovation practices in 1,000 of the world's largest companies and provides insight into the strategies that leading innovators use to achieve success. Based on the results of the study, the relationship between innovation management strategy and its impact on corporate financial performance is better understood (Jaruzelski, B., Schwartz, K. & Staack, V., 2015). The findings contributed to the selection of strategic guidelines necessary to compile a conceptual framework for stimulating and introducing innovation management in various organizations.

Separately, Gary Hamel's article "Why, What and How of Innovation in Management" (Hamel, G., 2006), published in Harvard Business Review, discusses management innovations and more specifically how they can provide long-term competitive advantages to business organizations. Each of the cases described in it provided useful information for the purposes of this study, as did the book "The DNA of the Innovator", which analyzes the behavior of successful innovators and leaders (Dyer, J.H., Gregersen, H.B. & Christensen, C.M., 2011). The five main key skills identified in it, which they possess and increase the innovativeness of their companies, showed another element for the targeted conceptual framework with which to stimulate the process of creating innovations.

A contribution to this search is also made by the book "The Future of Management" by Gary Hamel, which discusses how traditional management practices can be transformed through innovation to meet the challenges of the modern business world (Hamel, G., 2007). A significant part of its content

is useful information about new management techniques that can be used in the management of organizations of different types.

Another interesting source related to MI is the book "How Today's Entrepreneurs Use Continuous Innovation to Create Radically Successful Businesses" by Eric Ries (Ries, E., 2011), in which he presents an approach to managing organizations that encourages continuous innovation and adaptation. His arguments are based on the experience of start-ups and established companies, which he studied in depth, similar to James Moore in his book "The Death of Competition: Leadership and Strategy in the Age of Business Ecosystems". There, the author explores how companies can use innovation to create and manage business ecosystems that stimulate growth and competitiveness (Moore, J.F., 1996). Thus, he provides valuable conclusions for practice that can serve as guidelines for future research in the field.

Another author who has made a significant contribution to management science and whose insights also provided guidance for this study is Clayton Christensen, known for his concept of "disruptive innovations". His book "The Innovator's Dilemma" examines how successful companies can lose their leadership position if they do not adopt radical innovations in their management (Christensen, C.M., 1997). The concept of radical innovations is expanded in the book "Lean Startup: How Today's Entrepreneurs Use Continuous Innovation to Create Radically Successful Businesses" by Eric Ries, who presents the "lean startup" approach, which encourages rapid testing and adaptation of ideas to achieve sustainable innovations in management and product management (Ries, E., 2011). For their part, Michael Tushman and Charles O'Reilly, in „Lead and Disrupt: How to Solve the Innovator's Dilemma," explore how organizations can simultaneously manage their current business and adapt to the changing business environment by introducing radical innovations into the management of their companies (O'Reilly, Ch.A., Tushman, M., 2016).

Another innovator in management science is Henry Chesbrough, who introduced the term "open innovation" in his book "Open Innovation: The New Imperative for Creating and Profiting from Technology", where he discusses how company managers can use external ideas and technologies to accelerate the innovation processes in their businesses (Chesbrough, H., 2003). Similarly, the book with a collection of essays "Open Innovation: Exploring a New Paradigm" (Chesbrough, H., Vanhaverbeke, W. & West, J., 2006) provides an in-depth analysis of the concept of open innovation and how it is applied in different industries and organizations. For this purpose, they are also included in the questions to the respondents in our empirical study.

In summary, these sources provide valuable information on important starting points in MI design that help to understand this process so that it is actually applicable in practice for different organizational contexts. An in-depth look at different aspects of innovation in management helps to understand how they can be applied in real business conditions by managers, regardless of the type of organization they lead.

3.2. KEY INNOVATIONS IN ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT

For the purposes of this study and more specifically to formulate the questions in the empirical survey, it was necessary to identify the most frequently applied MI used by managers in making management decisions and their other activities. The sample showed that the innovations in management processes preferred by modern management have the potential to truly contribute to more effective and adaptive management in a much more dynamic business environment, as well as to shape the future shape of business. Here are the more important MI that have emerged as key in the management of modern organizations:

- *Group decision-making*. Modern approaches encourage collective participation in making management decisions. This includes the use of methods and techniques that support effective interaction between team members, combining different perspectives and expertise. Some of them that are applied are design thinking, Collective Intelligence Platforms, game techniques for decision-making (Gamification), Holacracy Decision-Making, artificial intelligence as a co-decision partner in group sessions (Decision-Making via AI Co-Creation), etc.

- *Change Management*. The introduction of this management approach in today's dynamic business environment is becoming a critical factor for success. Structured approaches for transitioning to the desired future state help organizations adapt quickly and effectively to new business conditions, technologies, and market requirements.
- *Organizational culture that encourages innovation*. Creating a culture that supports and stimulates innovative thinking is essential for the creation and adoption of innovations in organizations. Such a culture motivates employees to propose new ideas and solutions, which gradually leads to sustainable development and increased competitiveness of companies.
- *Open innovation*. Organizations are increasingly seeking collaboration with external partners to jointly develop innovations. This approach allows for the pooling of resources and expertise, which speeds up the process and increases the quality of new products and services. It represents co-creation with sharing of knowledge, resources and risks in innovative products, services or technologies, from the perspective of management and business processes, management strategies, monitoring and control.
- .*Integrated decision-making models*: Common models are being developed that unify different stages and methodologies in the decision-making process. These models facilitate the understanding and implementation of management decisions, especially in the operational activities of organizations (Lean startup/Agile", VISE Model, Scenario Planning/Real OPtions, etc.).
- *Information systems for supporting management decisions* (Decision Support Systems - DSS, Management Information Systems - MIS, Executive Information Systems - EIS, Expert Support Systems - ESS, Business Intelligence - BI Systems, Enterprise Resource Planning - ERP, Group Support Systems - GSS, etc.): These systems provide managers with the necessary data and analytical tools for making informed decisions. They integrate internal and external sources of information, which facilitates the analysis and assessment of different scenarios (Lazarov, M., Rashidov, A., 2014).
- Digital transformation and artificial intelligence (AI). Technological innovations, especially in the field of artificial intelligence, are significantly changing human resource management. AI is used to automate processes, analyze data, and improve decision-making, leading to more effective personnel management and more. Examples of such intelligent systems and platforms supported by AI and used in the work of managers are: AI-Powered Predictive Analytics (for predicting future events - sales, customer market behavior, etc.), Intelligent Process Automation (robotic automation with AI for managing complex business processes), Digital Twin (a virtual copy of a process, product or system for analysis and optimization using AI and sensor data), Augmented Decision-Making (AI providing recommendations, analyses and simulations), AI-Driven KPI Monitoring (AI monitoring for anomalies and suggesting actions to fix problems), Natural Language Processing (AI analyzes data from surveys, emails and chats), AI-Based Strategic Scenario Simulation (AI simulates various business scenarios, market crises, price changes or regulations and predicts what the consequences will be), etc. (Westerman, G., Bonnet, D., & McAfee, A., 2014)

The conclusion that must be drawn is that all these management innovations demonstrate the importance of technology and a collective team approach in making management decisions. They emphasize the need for adaptability and proactivity of modern management in order to meet the challenges of the new business and market environment.

3.3. ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS OF THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

Management innovations need to be part of the culture of companies and a generator of their competitiveness. They must constantly add new elements to their creation system in order to maintain their relevance and adequacy to the changing business processes and activities in organizations in relation to the dynamics of the environment inside and outside them.

The conducted literature study showed that IE are sought after by every successful business organization in the world that strives to be at the forefront of the market. In recent years, business companies have been tracking trends in the return on their investments from every innovative activity they undertake. This provoked the present specialized in its nature empirical study among managers

from various companies in Bulgaria, which included 68 respondents. The qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data obtained from the survey gave the results described below.

There is a trend towards a clear orientation towards "Lean management" (25.2%), "Agile methodologies" (20.7%) and "Design thinking" (15.5%), which indicates a desire for flexibility, efficiency and user-oriented thinking of Bulgarian managers (Fig. 1). Increased attention is paid to open and innovative management with cooperation, confirmed by the significant share of those who indicated "open innovations". Underestimating goal setting may be a signal of the need to develop the analytical culture and strategic approach in organizations. Predominant in the choice of managers are methods that are easily applicable in practice and with proven quick results, which suggests that Bulgarian organizations are looking for rational, not conceptual-theoretical solutions.

92% of respondents assess the effect of the innovations introduced in their organizations as positive, and only 31% define it as "extremely positive" (Fig. 2). This may mean that managers' expectations for transformation through innovation have not always been fully met and they do not have enough confidence in them. 6% of respondents cannot assess their impact, and 2% do not see their effect.

Figure 1. Question 1 from a survey on the management innovations used by managers in Bulgarian business organizations

Figure 2. Question 2 from a survey on the management innovations used by managers in Bulgarian business organizations

This may be due to several reasons: lack of clarity in the indicators of innovation success; a short implementation period that has not yet allowed for reporting on results; and poor internal communication or monitoring, which obscures the effect of MI on organizational performance. The reason may be existing internal barriers (such as lack of resources, organizational culture, resistance to change) that limit their maximum impact. A good sign is that no one indicated the answer "rather negative" effect, which is a strong indicator that MI is perceived as a valuable effort, even when it does not lead to remarkable results. From the answers to the second question of the survey, it can be summarized that MI is perceived almost unanimously as a positive phenomenon in management. Most organizations have not yet achieved the full potential of the effect of innovations, which may be a signal of the need for: strengthening leadership or other internal mentoring and capacities in innovation; clearer metrics for innovation impact and better strategic positioning of the MI with more targeted support of all innovation processes from management.

The results of the third question (Fig. 3) in the survey „In which areas do you notice the greatest improvement after the implementation of innovations?" show that after their introduction, the efficiency of processes improves the most significantly (63%). This emphasizes the role of innovations as a driver for the automation of activities, their optimization and for reducing costs. In second place, respondents indicated decision-making (57%), which indicates that the introduced new management methods have probably led to better transparency and an analytical basis that facilitates the managers of business organizations. A significant improvement is also noted in the competitiveness of the company in the market (45%), which is a clear indicator that innovations not only improve processes within them, but also positively affect their external position vis-à-vis the competition. Significant, but more moderate, are the results in customer relations (35%) and risk management (26%), which is a sign that organizations are truly aware of the indirect impact of innovation on relationships with external stakeholders, as well as business sustainability. The percentage that employee satisfaction received - 23% is the lowest, which may mean that innovations are not yet

connected to employee well-being or have not yet been implemented by the managers participating in the survey in this way - with a focus on motivation and internal culture.

In the question in Fig.4, related to the choice of new methods by managers to stimulate innovation in their organizations, the highest share is given to collecting ideas from employees or external partners (61%), which is an indicator of a strongly expressed attitude towards open idea generation. It can be seen that organizations have increasingly begun to rely on the team intelligence of their employees and partners to strengthen innovation processes. There is a clear indicator of a transition to more democratic and horizontal models for managing innovation in Bulgarian business organizations. The next most preferred innovative management methods with 44% each are partnerships with startups or scientific institutions and digital platforms for managing the innovations themselves, indicators of the importance of external knowledge and fresh ideas, and of the pursuit of traceability, structuring and digitalization of innovative business processes. In the preferences of managers, internal entrepreneurial programs follow with 37%, which is an indicator of increasing attention within organizations to creating an entrepreneurial spirit. It is a resource for sustainable innovation with high value, but the percentage generated shows that it still needs understanding or stronger internal support. There is relatively low interest in innovation workshops and hackathons (16%), although they are creative and interactive formats, they may be perceived as one-off events with limited strategic scope, especially when they are not related to a long-term innovation process.

Figure 3. Question 3 from a survey on the management innovations used by managers in Bulgarian business organizations

Figure 4. Question 4 from a survey on the management innovations used by managers in Bulgarian business organizations

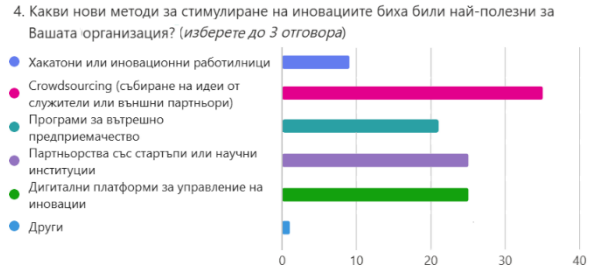


Figure 5 shows that the most frequently cited barrier is lack of time or low team capacity (63%). This result highlights one of the most common barriers to innovation initiatives – operational workload, which prevents employees from participating in innovation. This problem creates conditions for short-term operational tasks to be prioritized over long-term strategic outcomes.

The problem that respondents have identified as the second main one is the lack of a clear innovation strategy (51%) (Fig.5). This signals a vacuum in strategic planning, despite the fact that organizations are willing to introduce innovations. Of course, they do not have structured goals and a vision with the support of which to focus their efforts in this direction. This discrepancy leads to inefficiency, fragmentation and lack of coordination between activities. At the same time, employee resistance to change (44%) is also a serious factor that introduces imbalance into the system. It indicates the need for a change in the organization‘s culture, improved communication and the need to include people in the organization in innovation initiatives. For the successful implementation of innovations, the crucial component is change management. In this regard, it is interesting to note that financial resources rank fourth with 35% of the respondents‘ votes, which is a sign that the problems are not so much related to strategic and organizational challenges as to the problems. It is noticeable from the lower percentage (14%) that managers attach relatively little importance to limited access to technology. This may mean that in terms of technology, most organizations are already prepared and this is not the problem why they fail to stimulate innovation processes, but rather they lack the capacity and willingness to fully utilize this resource.

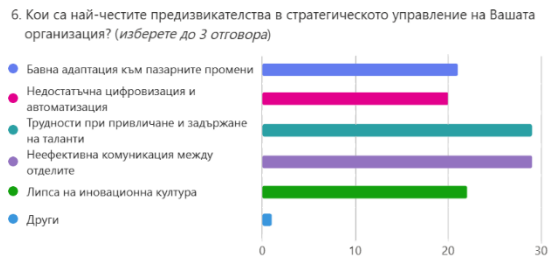
In the business of organizations, the most frequently mentioned challenges according to respondents are ineffective communication between departments and attracting and retaining talent, both of which reached 51% of all responses (Fig.6). It is known that these two factors are also key to

achieving innovation goals in management, because talents are an indispensable generator of ideas, new experiments and initiatives for the implementation of innovative technologies. If organizations are not able to retain them, they would have difficulty sustainably creating competitive innovations. Separately, good communication from the right people, as a connecting element between the individual work units within the company, is critically important for the successful coordination of efforts to preserve innovative potential.

In many organizations, innovation is not integrated into the behavior and thinking of teams. It is not routine, but rather implemented as separate, distinct projects. This is reflected in the third most frequently cited challenge by respondents, namely the lack of an innovation culture (39%). This culture, which is a necessary foundation for innovation, adaptability and sustainability.

Figure 5. Question 5 from a survey on the management innovations used by managers in Bulgarian business organizations

Figure 6. Question 6 from a survey on the management innovations used by managers in Bulgarian business organizations



Insufficient digitalization (35%) and slow adaptation to market changes (37%) also hinder the technological maturity and flexibility of organizations, which indicate the need for bolder investment in digital management solutions and faster strategic planning in response to market dynamics.

The results of Fig. 7 clearly show that the managers of the organizations see the greatest potential for the introduction and development of MI to optimize operational processes (65%), which includes lean practices, digitalization, automation and others that save time and resources. This also confirms that efficiency remains a top priority in Bulgarian organizations. Followed by the importance of employee engagement and motivation with 58%, which is a sign that the human factor is recognized as a key resource source of innovation. From this we judge that probably many managers of organizations in our country realize that the success of innovation efforts is not possible without engaged and motivated teams.

Significant weight is also given to flexible strategic planning with 39% of managers‘ votes, indicating the need for a more adaptive approach in today‘s changing environment, especially in risky or unexpected shocks related to market instability or technological changes.

Also important, but with lower support, are the results related to innovations in management, such as: data analysis (33%), innovation culture (32%) and sustainable development and corporate responsibility (25%). These percentages show that there are still organizations in the stage of fully implementing traditional data-driven approaches (analysis and interpretation of real data), that not everyone sees cultural transformation as a problem of paramount importance and that corporate responsibility and sustainable development remain in the background, which indicates their low immediate prioritization in Bulgarian organizations, despite global ESG trends (Environmental Social Governance).

The results of question 8 (Fig. 8) regarding the use of digital tools and innovative technologies that managers are considering introducing into their organizations for better management show that artificial intelligence (AI) is the most preferred choice. 37% of respondents indicate it as a technology that is applicable in their business. This result demonstrates strong confidence in artificial intelligence, which they perceive as a tool for optimizing management activities and for better business decisions. AI‘s capabilities for forecasting, analyzing large volumes of data and automating various processes are probably the reason for this. Here, the second position is occupied by Cloud systems for collaboration (32%), which indicates the need for remote management of teams with the possi-

bility of more flexible operational processes. The desire to increase operational efficiency and digitize these processes is the reason for the increased interest in them. And survey participants focused on freeing up time for more strategic management activities and eliminating routine tasks preferred the automation of their work processes through RPA (Robotic Process Automation) (26%). Analytical platforms and Big Data were mentioned by 18% of respondents, which shows a small share, given the potential they have to support informed management decisions. This may be an indicator of a lack of readiness or skills to work with this type of technology. The same may be the reason for VR/AR technologies for training and simulations, which have the lowest share – 12%, due to their limited use in a management context, as well as the higher costs of their implementation.

Figure 7. Question 7 from a survey on the management innovations used by managers in Bulgarian business organizations

Figure 8. Question 8 from a survey on the management innovations used by managers in Bulgarian business organizations

From the qualitative analysis of the ninth question (Fig. 9) it is understood that 30% of the participants conduct internal audits and analyses once a year in order to improve their management practices. Although it is relatively rare, this shows that most organizations have an established process for self-analysis and review of their management activities. From the point of view of innovation, this is moderate systematicity, but also potential for better adaptability. The respondents who conduct these internal analyses every month are 22%. This indicates the presence of a high organizational culture oriented towards continuous improvement, which is a good basis for integrating MI, since frequent audits allow for timely and more flexible solutions early, due to the timely detection of problems. This is an indicator of truly proactive and innovative management. Audits of internal activities with analysis are conducted quarterly by 20% of the surveyed managers. This is a balanced approach that shows regular cyclicity without feeling administrative burden or pressure. Business organizations with a similar rhythm are assumed to combine periodic renewal of management processes with standard regular control. Only when a serious problem arises do 20% of the organizations surveyed conduct internal inspections. This can be interpreted as worrying when the discussion is within the framework of innovation management. To some extent, it can be assumed that this is reactive behavior, which indicates the lack of strategic control and places the organizations in a vulnerable position to external changes and risks. The lack of management mechanisms for regulatory improvements and the likely lag in implementing innovations is noticeable in 8% of the responses that managers do not conduct internal inspections at all and analysis for subsequent measures to improve management practices. This shows that MI is largely perceived not as a culture, but as a reaction.

The latter statement is supported by the results of the qualitative analysis of the tenth question (Fig. 10), related to the managers‘ readiness to experiment with new and non-standard management approaches. The following conclusions were established for each of the questions:

- „Yes, we are actively looking for new solutions“ - 46% of respondents. A very positive result in the context of MI, which indicates an extremely good environment for introducing innovative technologies and practices, as almost half of the organizations demonstrate a proactive attitude towards innovations.
- “Only if there is a proven positive effect in other organizations” – 40%. This share is also high and shows a cautious, but still accepting approach to new ideas, as there is interest in innovative methods, albeit after waiting to verify their effectiveness. This provides a safer and

less risky transformation, but limits the possibility of innovations having a leadership position in management.

- „Rather not, we prefer proven methods" – 10%. This reveals a certain conservatism and inertia in organizations, where they probably do not want to part with established business processes, but do not realize to what extent this limits their adaptability in a rapidly changing market environment.
- „No, our organization is conservative towards change" – 5%. This share is small, but important because it is an indicator of the existence of environments in which innovations are perceived not as an opportunity, but as a risk.

Figure 9. Question 9 from a survey on the management innovations used by managers in Bulgarian business organizations

Figure 10. Question 10 from a survey on the management innovations used by managers in Bulgarian business organizations

In summary, as many as 86% of managers, respondents in this empirical study, are open to innovations, regardless of whether they apply them conditionally or actively seek them themselves. This is a solid basis for deploying innovative management in Bulgarian business organizations and an unambiguous request for the creation of a framework for MI, adapted to our market reality and business environment, as well as to the specifics of Bulgarian management. The results show that the majority of organizations have the potential to adopt innovative approaches, if they are well argued and proven. The formed group of 15% is not small, which shows a tendency towards traditionalism in management and which should be taken into account in future planning of innovative steps.

4. CONCLUSIONS FOR PRACTICE

As a result of the empirical study conducted and the data collected, some trends have been identified that are of interest for the formulation of a conceptual framework for the creation of an MI. They are the following:

- A clearly expressed trend towards automation and digitalization of business processes as a necessary tool for improving management.
- Focusing on people as capital for innovation and a decisive factor – the need for talent retention, motivation and an innovative organizational culture.
- There has been a growing acceptance of experimentation with new ideas, but with a moderate approach to implementing previously untested innovations.

Some contradictions were also identified, as follows:

- A large majority of organizations do not have a clearly formulated strategy or separate resource for innovation, despite the expressed desire to do so.
- A discrepancy was found between the problems identified by respondents (e.g. need for flexibility) and the systems for regular evaluation and monitoring actually implemented.
- Digital solutions are perceived positively, but at this time there is a lack of organizational readiness for their full integration (lack of capacity and time cited).

Table 1 shows the relationships that emerged between the individual questions and the answers to them. In a comment, it can be said that:

- 86% of organizations are willing to experiment with new approaches, but the main obstacles are lack of time and strategy, and only 22% perform monthly internal controls (questions 5,

10 and 9), which is necessary for active implementation of new ideas. There is **a discrepancy** between the innovation that is declared and what is done in practice for real self-assessment and adaptation, that is, there is high readiness, but there is a lack of systemic support.

- The most worrying challenges are ineffective communication and employee engagement (question 6) and the most desirable is the implementation of innovations in employee motivation - 33% and operational processes - 37% (question 7). There is a coherence between innovation priorities and existing problems, which indicates a high level of awareness of management needs

Table 1. Relationships between the individual questions in the survey (Koleva, G., here)

Element	Related to	What it shows?
Readiness for innovation (v.10)	Resource and cultural barriers (v.5, v.9)	Desire without stable support
Management issues (v.6)	Innovative goals (v.7)	Agreed vision for change
Technology selection (v.8)	Strategic priorities (v.7)	Practical innovation focus
Resistance to change (v.5, v.6)	Lack of checks (v.9)	Management inertia
Challenges (v.6)	Barriers to innovation (v.5)	Self-perpetuating cycle

- The technologies with the highest interest are AI (36%), cloud (31%) and RPA (25%) with a clear focus on automation and optimization (question 8) and this coincides with a focus on data analytics, agile planning and operational efficiency (question 7). There is a direct link between specific goals and technologies for improvement, indicating that innovations are functionally grounded, not abstract.
- From questions 5 and 6, obstacles to innovation in organizations are resistance to change (25%) and the lack of an innovation culture (22%), where more often they do not conduct regular internal audits, but only when a problem arises – 20%, or not at all – 8% (question 9). This shows **t**he direct dependence that a conservative culture leads to a lack of mechanisms for learning and improvement, which limits opportunities for innovation.
- There is a closed cycle of management difficulties (bureaucracy, slow implementation of changes – question 6) leading to a lack of resources for innovation (lack of time and capacity, unclear strategy, resistance from employees – question 5), which in turn exacerbates existing problems. An innovative breakthrough in management approach is needed to break this cycle.

The findings made on the basis of an empirical study have the potential to contribute to progress in the study of innovations in general and specifically to the knowledge related to innovations in management. As a starting point, the generated new data on managerial behavior towards them, especially in the Bulgarian market validity, can serve to structure a conceptual framework for the creation and integration of managed innovations in our country. All presented results lead the study to specific practical-applied conclusions and recommend valuable utility for management practice.

4.1. A RESEARCH FRAMEWORK FOR STIMULATING AND INTRODUCING INNOVATIONS IN THE MANAGEMENT OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF BUSINESS ORGANIZATIONS

The data and conclusions obtained in this study provide a basis for building an author‘s research framework for stimulating and introducing innovations in management according to criteria specified by the surveyed managers, with the help of which it would be possible to initiate and implement MI in organizations in our country.

The most important management approaches for implementing the innovation prerequisites from the elements in the current framework, inspired by the empirical results and suitable for it, are three, namely: dynamic management - flexible and rapid reorganization of teams according to changing business priorities, instead of permanently fixed departments; decentralized structure, distributed roles in a flat structure, instead of the traditional hierarchical system; the ability of the organization to combine and optimize current processes and at the same time experiment with new approaches, as well as to combine activities that are opposite in nature, but are equally important for its stability.

The research framework for stimulating and implementing innovations in management (Fig.11) can be adapted to different types of business organizations, regardless of their size, structure or indus-

try. It covers the full cycle of innovation in management - from determining the need to implementing the innovation and sustainable development of the created new management practices. Created as a result of this research, it is structured with eight key elements, interconnected into a necessary whole, interdependence and logical sequence. The absence of any of these building blocks is a prerequisite for the failure of innovative initiatives in management:

1. ***Leadership and vision*** – building a clear organizational strategy and proactive leadership that supports change, new ideas and experiments. Formulating a long-term vision for creating, stimulating and implementing innovations, integrated into the company's management mission and goals. Creating flexible and adaptive planning of activities. Appointing an "innovation leader" to lead the innovation processes and culture in the organization.

2. ***Organizational culture and people*** – stimulating commitment, initiative, motivation in people and tolerance for change. Building a company culture that tolerates risks and changes, learning from failures and encouraging entrepreneurship within the organization. Creating an innovation culture and attitudes towards experiments. Attracting and retaining talents using innovative approaches in their work. Investing in training, developing an innovation culture and creating internal company programs for commitment and motivation.

3. ***Processes and structures*** – optimization and coordination of management practices and operational processes through innovation. Regulation of coordination between departments and clear structuring of innovation teams. Planning and management of change with a focus on people – training, active communication, and support in adapting to new management models and creating the opportunity to correct them in real time. Implementation and management of change in three steps: drawing up a plan for introducing the change: a phased approach to reduce risk by dividing the process into successive phases; training and communication: conducting training for employees and managers related to the new management practices being introduced and developing a communication strategy; adaptation to change and support, creating crowdsourcing open idea platforms within the organization for consultations and group decision-making.

4. ***Evaluation and adaptation*** – systematization of internal processes for conducting regular internal audits, analyses, monitoring the effect of innovations and feedback to track innovation efforts. Evaluation and prioritization of management innovative ideas with preliminary determination of criteria for selecting the most appropriate innovations and use of so-called „innovation portfolios", in order to balance long-term and short-term management experiments. Creation of a cycle for continuous improvement by collecting feedback and adapting innovations to changing market conditions. Diagnosing challenges: analysis of strengths and weaknesses, and collecting feedback through interviews, surveys or focus groups with employees and managers.

Figure 11. Infographic of an author's framework for stimulating and introducing innovations in the management of Bulgarian business organizations (Koleva, G., here).

5. ***Technologies and tools*** – process automation and technological support for innovation, with the implementation of AI, cloud and analytical systems for decision-making. Experiment-

ing with new management models and pilot testing. Promoting digital change and access to new technologies through partnerships and training.

6. ***Partnerships*** – flexible collaboration with startups and scientific institutions. Generating and collecting business ideas from internal and external sources. Using innovative techniques to discover new management models through partnerships and information exchange. Expanding internal capacity with external knowledge through collaboration on successful methods with external experts or startups to generate innovative ideas.

7. ***Training and development*** – building internal capacity for innovation, skills and innovative thinking by introducing training in innovative methodologies (Agile, Design Thinking, Lean, etc.). Developing digital and analytical skills in employees to help them in innovation activities. Providing support for internal entrepreneurship and creativity to achieve the necessary competence and confidence in teams. Defining key indicators for the success of the introduced management innovations in organizations (team engagement and satisfaction, continuous improvement of feedback collection mechanisms, decision-making time, regular reviews of the effect of innovations, etc.).

8. Resources and funding – budget, time, people and access to external support, without which innovations remain declarative. Use of supporting innovation processes and tools, such as digital platforms for collaboration and data transparency. Providing with these resources and the necessary organizational capacity to develop innovation activity in companies. Ensuring targeted budgeting for innovation projects using external sources (e.g. programs, funds, partnerships). Maintaining time and human resources for designing, testing and implementing business innovations (Alexandrova, M, 2015). Showing flexibility in reallocating these resources to innovations with proven innovation value.

T*he proposed flexible and adaptable innovation framework is designed to be applicable to organizations of different sizes and industries. It combines strategic planning with practical tools for creating, testing, and implementing MI. Through a culture of continuous learning and a systematic approach, organizations can maintain their competitiveness, easily adapt to changes in the business environment, and manage to attract and retain talent with the help of modern and up-to-date management practices.*

In compiling the research framework for stimulating and implementing innovations in the management of business organizations in our country, the generally accepted practices and methods in the field of MI used by Bulgarian managers, established in the empirical study, served as the basis. Although no specific sources were used for its creation, many of its elements correspond to known approaches described in specialized studies and publications. For example, in "Integrated Innovation Management in the Business Organization" (Yordanova, Z., 2020) basic methods and business processes for introducing innovations are considered. These practices are in line with the proposed steps in the author's framework, such as strategic vision, assessment of the current state, implementation and measurement of results. Also, initiatives such as the procedure "Implementation of Innovations in Enterprises" (Procedure BG16RFPR001-1.003, 2025) and the Operational Program "Innovation and Competitiveness" (Operational Program, 2014-2020), which support enterprises in the process of introducing innovations, also offer steps to achieve them, which are also in line with the research framework proposed here.

4.2. STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS TO ORGANIZATIONS

The presented author's framework for stimulating and introducing innovations in management is applied in combination with the following specific recommendations to managers, aimed at Bulgarian business organizations and based entirely on the results and conclusions of the conducted empirical study:

- Start with small experiments with a positive return on investment to convince skeptical teams and managers to adopt them (*40% of survey participants stated that „We will only implement innovations if there is a proven positive effect"*);

- Следва разширяване използването на crowdsourcing отворени идейни платформи (*най-предпочитания метод, избран от респондентите с 35% е за „Генериране на идеи от служители и партньори“*);
- Next is the expansion of the use of crowdsourcing open idea platforms (*the most preferred method chosen by respondents with 35% is for „Generating ideas from employees and partners“*);
- Creating internal innovation centers or idea incubators with the right people to maintain a constant flow of innovations
- Building and maintaining sustainable beneficial partnerships with startups and external experts from scientific institutions that will contribute know-how and fresh creative solutions to the organization.

The specific recommendations for managers are of a practical nature for introducing innovations in management, combining proven steps with the active participation of employees and partners. They focus on the areas with the greatest impact when implementing MI - strategic planning, operational efficiency and motivation, while offering a solid foundation for them with internal innovation structures and external partnerships.

5. CONCLUSION

Innovations in management are an interesting and attractive topic not only for researchers and practitioners in real business conditions, due to their positive impact on work efficiency and organizational renewal. They refer to new management practices, organizational structures and administrative systems, which are a key indicator of competitive advantage for many organizations. In reality, research on innovations in management significantly lags behind that of technological and product innovations. This study has largely identified the challenges that contributed to this and shows the reasons for the conceptual ambiguity, methodological shortcomings and obstacles that have hindered research on innovations in management. On this basis, the author‘s conceptual framework has been developed, which offers a systematic approach to stimulating and introducing innovations in management, consistent with the specific needs identified by the managers themselves in our empirical study. This framework combines strategic vision, technological support, resource provision, organizational culture and human capital as interrelated elements for achieving sustainable innovative development in business organizations. Complemented with recommendations for gradual implementation of innovations, encouraging ideation and building partnerships, the framework is a practical tool for rapid adaptation to modern business reality. It can help any organization not only improve the engagement and effectiveness of its teams, but also build an internal culture of flexibility, systematic learning and entrepreneurship - the basis for long-term competitiveness and innovation maturity.

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