

Effective Innovation Leadership

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Abstract

In this article, we develop a conceptual framework that we call ‘innovation leadership framework’. We identify innovation leaders as entrepreneurial shapers open to change and ready to question established rules to ensure the renewal of a system. Innovation leaders are self-controlled pro-actors who follow one purpose, implementing an innovation. The starting point of our framework is the primary data gathered in conversations and group discussions with 24 leaders and an open questionnaire with 25 innovators active in the field of innovation. The ‘innovation leadership framework’ is based on the data and compared with scientific knowledge. A final comparison of the ‘innovation leadership framework’ with three field experiences and common-sense anecdotal perceptions helped us to test the consistency of the framework and to identify sweet spots of effective innovation leadership.

Keywords

Innovation. Management. Human Development. Self-Management. Performance. Entrepreneurial Leadership.

1 Introduction and definition of terms

“Innovation is work rather than genius.” (Drucker, 1985: 10). From the beginning innovation is aiming for leadership and simplicity. Innovation requires knowledge and focus. Innovation is the foundation of entrepreneurship (Drucker, 1985).

“Innovation has become critical for nations, organizations and individuals in an increasingly complex and challenging world.” (Vlok, 2012: 209). It is one of the core success factors in developed countries. Germany, for example, is considered to be one of the 25 innovation-driven economies (Amorós/Bosma, 2013). In 2014, enterprises active in Germany invested 144,64 bn € for innovation activities, while their overall turnover was 5.182,5 bn € (Rammer et al., 2015).

Nevertheless, enterprises of all sizes still struggle to convert new ideas into revenue, profits and shareholder value (Ahmend, 1998). That is especially the case when it comes to radical innovations. In 2014, only 8% of German enterprises introduced new products and services to the market (Rammer et al., 2015). Practitioners and researchers raise the question what leaders could do to improve the success of their innovation activities (Dutta et al., 2014).

One of the authors (Sabrina Schork) adopted the Grounded Theory methodology to systematically collect and analyze data to derive a theoretical model of innovation leadership.

Overall, the researcher executed fourteen semi-structured interviews and an explorative group discussion with ten experts having more than ten-years of professional experience in the field of innovation. She compared this data to the answers of 25 innovators. The result of the research was the ‘innovation leadership framework’. In this paper, the term »framework« stands for a treatment continuum, not to be confused with a nostrum on “how to become a perfect innovation leader”. The ‘innovation leadership framework’ describes a spectrum of possible pattern of thinking and acting. To be mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive, the researcher compared the ‘innovation leadership framework’ with existing scientific knowledge, documents and videos about pioneering leaders and three primary industry case studies. Especially the interaction with successful practitioners helped her to identify the sweet spots of effectiveness.

The notion »innovation leader« stands for entrepreneurial and visionary shapers, who see themselves as a supporter of self-dependent and talented innovators. Innovators are the ones who develop innovations. They ‘manage the present, destroy the past, and build the future’ (Govindarajan, 2016). Innovators are satisfied when the market adopts their outputs. In this context, we tie in with the Kirton thoughts:

[...] In brief, adaptors tend to operate cognitively within the confines of the appropriate consensually accepted paradigm (Kuhn, 1970) within which a problem (novel stimulus) is generally initially perceived. Innovators, by contrast, are more liable to treat (formally or intuitively) the enveloping paradigm as part of the problem. Not surprisingly, different styles of solutions may emerge. Adaptors, for example, are liable to produce solutions which reinforce the paradigm, although it may be modified by refinement or extension; innovators are more likely to produce solutions which threaten the paradigm and in some cases, again in Kuhnian terms, help bring about a paradigm switch. One difference in outcome is that adaptor solutions tend to lead to “doing things better”, and those of innovators to “doing things differently” (Drucker, 1969) [...] (Kirton, 1980: 213-214)

An innovation leader can be compared to a film director who is setting the stage and enables talented actors to perform at their best, jointly shaping a movie. The innovation leader has a clear purpose which she delivers in a focused and strategic manner, not knowing how the result will look like and if the movie will be a success or a failure. Leadership from our perspective is nothing mysterious. It can be developed and trained and requires stamina. The perceptions of study participants were in line with Kotter (2008), who differentiates between ‘controlling’ managers responsible for efficiency and ‘visionary’ leaders responsible for innovation, both working hand in hand within a successful company.

2 Structure of the full paper

In section 3, we will present and motivate the method we used to establish our theoretical framework (Grounded Theory).

In section 4, we report on the data collection steps and describe the coding procedure, also called conceptualization. We explain how we clustered theoretical concepts into analytical categories derived from our primary data and how we lifted them into a higher level of abstraction. Our data set is taken from three studies which comprised a group discussion with ten leaders, 14 narrative interviews with innovation leaders, coaches and innovation consultants, and an open questionnaire with 25 innovators.

In section 5 we compare our network of concepts with scientific literature as well as the biographies, interviews and public speeches of six pioneering leaders. In addition, we report on three one-week 360-degree observations of innovation professionals in Germany's information and communication technology industry.

Section 6 is a compilation and discussion of the key results. In section 7 we reflect on limitations and future research opportunities.

3 Methodology

Our primary methodology of investigation was Grounded Theory (GT). GT is a well-known approach in social science that can be used to analyze qualitative data systematically to generate a theoretical model. Theories and hypotheses are developed (not examined) based on empiricism. The researcher is curiously looking at the data, exploring what kind of story they tell her. Theory emerges from the exploration and analysis of the data and must fit the domain it intends to describe (Corbin/Strauss, 2014). Qualitative research can be compared with a 'critical mess theory'. Knowledge emerges from an extensive information overload, in which the researcher distinguishes between crap and fabulous stuff (Singer 2001, cited by Gartner 2010: 7).

The Grounded Theory methodology comprises several techniques (i.e. coding, theoretical sampling or comparing) and was developed in 1967 by the two American sociologists Strauss[†] and Glaser. In the Seventies both took a different research direction. While Glaser is oriented towards a positivistic and inductive procedure following the idea that a researcher should enter the field without preconceptions, Strauss rather follows the social interactionist theory. This relates to a systematically applied GT style following the belief that a human being takes decisions based on interpreted realities affected by the environment. Truth is considered to be temporary, and thoughts, therefore, are in a current flow (Boehm, 1994). We rather follow the Strauss (1994) approach. One of Strauss' students, Juliet Corbin, published an influential text on Grounded Theory which we chose to take as the basis of this paper (Corbin/Strauss, 2014).

Robustness within GTM can be reached with an organized approach. Hammersley, Winter or Silverman associate validity with a kind of ‘truth’ in a pluralistic sense. Validity can be increased by (1) refusing assumptions against data during the research process, (2) comparing one case against another (constant comparative method), (3) incorporating all cases into the analysis, (4) incorporating cases that do not fit the data, (5) using quantitative data - when these make sense as in mixed-method research designs. In the current paper, we will apply the first four validity increasing techniques. We also gathered quantitative data (related to the fifth method), but its presentation and discussion is beyond the scope of this paper. Reliability in GT can be achieved by tabulating categories and by being careful and precise when transcribing interviews to avoid any loss of relevant information (from Silverman 2005, cited by Corbin/Strauss, 2014: 342).

We took Grounded Theory as a research method because we wanted to:

- › develop a holistic framework from statements and behaviors of German innovator professionals (not from existing theories),
- › build a practice-oriented framework for leadership,
- › focus our framework on the specific field of innovation.

Conger (1998), as well as Kempster and Parry (2011) argue that Grounded Theory is the methodology of choice for contextually rich topics such as leadership.

4 Inductive studies

Developed countries are currently facing increasing complexity and power shifts towards customers and employees, both requiring new leadership approaches (Vielmetter/Sell, 2014: 10-11). Our research started with a focus on the changing nature of leadership in the context of an innovative enterprise and shifted to the question “what do successful innovation leaders think, what they capable of are and what do they do?” In this paper, we describe our exciting learning path driven by empirical insights (see Figure 1).

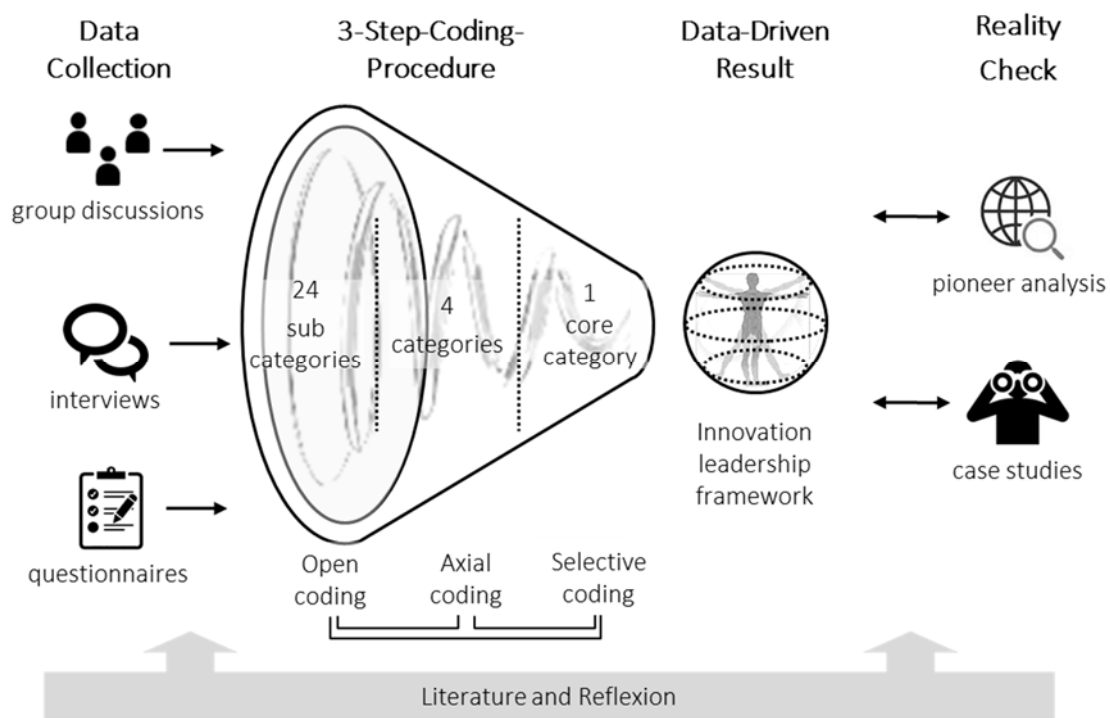


Figure 1: Grounded Theory approach in the context of innovation leadership

Our research started with a primary data collection and analysis: (1) group discussions, (2) open interviews, and (3) open questionnaires. Following the idea of theoretical sampling in which the selection of the next study unit is based on analysis of previous data. In parallel, we collected supporting material (scientific articles, statistics etc.) and tested the plausibility of our framework with ten experts (reflection). By adopting the three-step-GTM-coding paradigm consisting of a continuous comparison (variation) and iteration of the different data sources and hypothesis (theoretical sampling), we gained a feeling for how to think about theoretical concepts (theoretical sensitivity). As a result, we developed a first model which we called the ‘innovation leadership framework’. To further proof its validity we compared the framework and its categories with pioneering practice gathered from an anecdotal analysis, existing scientific literature and primary case studies to get an understanding of its completeness. After two years of detailed dispute with the data, we realized that no additional analysis generated anything new (saturation).

In the following, we take you step-by-step through our GTM journey. Therefore, it is essential to understand GTM’s centerpiece ‘the coding procedure’. In GTM, there are three main coding techniques: (1) *open coding* stands for unrestricted, detailed and frequent encoding to develop concepts that fit the data. Open coding verifies and saturates individual codes, (2) *axial coding* focuses on a particular category, its dimensions and concise properties, (3) *selective coding* is a concentrated and systematic coding around a core category. In GTM, a theory is built around a core category which integrates and saturates the related categories and their properties. The techniques are applied successively and are repeated iteratively if new knowledge requires a revision of the coding. The coding itself may be executed by the person who collects the data, or may be done

by another researcher who also engages in theoretical sampling (Strauss, 1994). In this paper, one of the authors (Sabrina Schork) collected and coded all data herself. She discussed the coding procedure with researchers from other institutes and with two direct colleagues. She also reflected the coding process and its outcome with her Ph.D. research group. Also, the researcher presented her insights to business people and researchers as part of three conferences (Schork/Terzidis, 2015, Schork/Terzidis, 2014, Schork 2014).

4.1 Study 1: unstructured group discussion with innovation leaders

To get a first understanding of the research context and identify personal prejudices, the researcher organized a half-day working session with ten scientists, entrepreneurs and innovation managers. At this stage she wanted to get a broad understanding of innovation leadership from different points of view. That is why she invited practitioners, researchers and consultants having diverse professional and industry knowledge. Such a workshop approach produces a quick start for GTM research, as it effectively gathers data from a broad diversity of people. The case selections were based on theoretical and practical network.

During the workshop the researcher presented her sensitizing concepts (i.e. the adaptive enterprise, the complex world) and its dimensions as stimulus for the discussion and the experts challenged the input or reported on their diverse related experiences.

The researcher documented the insights on flip charts, in a protocol and an audio recording of the full session. Directly after the group event the researcher transcribed the 288 minutes audio record within the software tool ATLAS.ti which resulted in approx. 42.000 words. In ATLAS.ti she stored the generated open codes. The software is based on a network-like data structure. The researcher aggregated all workshop results in a single report including graphs and additional information from related studies which she handed back to the workshop participants asking for feedback. Thereby she checked her assumptions on the data and started to generate the first hypotheses from the data. The hypothesis in terms of GTM is a preliminary answer to a question.

After that, the researcher split up the data into 1.073 initial codes executing line-per-line coding. Coding means “delineating concepts to stand for the interpreted meaning of data” (Corbin/Strauss, 2014: 220). During the process of constant comparison, the researcher was asking herself the five questions: “Who is doing what, why, when, and how?” She held her hypothesis against the data and compared contradicting cases. Documentation happened within a memo consisting of generic questions and graphics on the data relations. All interpretations at this stage were attempts.

After her first coding steps, the researcher decided to reflect her coding approach with independent researchers at the ‘Berliner Methodentreffen’ in 2014. In two days working sessions, other researchers coded her data with emotional distance. Furthermore, she coded the data of other researchers to get a better understanding of the coding techniques.

This experience helped her to gain a fresh look with which she recoded her data set. Finally, the researcher contrasted contradicting scientific knowledge against her data. The comparison of primary data with existing knowledge stimulated her thinking.

4.2 Study 2: fourteen deep-dive interviews with innovation leaders

In a second step, the researcher decided to dig into unstructured interviews which provide the richest source of data for theory building (Corbin/Strauss, 2014). Therefore, she started a narrative interview series with coaches, innovation managers, innovation consultants and scientists who had more than five years of professional experience in the field of innovation. The researcher started the interview series with four scientists, two experts for leadership and team management, and two scientists proficient in leadership and technology management. Both team and technology management had been highlighted as relevant in the expert workshop. As a next step, the researcher identified two coaches who helped her to understand how an innovation leader can be stable and adaptive at the same time within a highly complex and fast-changing surrounding. Several experts raised this topic without having a clear answer to it. As a third step, the researcher spoke with two innovation managers comparing the coaching and scientific perspective with in-field-expertise. Both participants explained to the researcher the success and failure factors of innovation activities and the role of leadership. Finally, the researcher interviewed four consultants from different companies, working with innovation leaders for years. All of them have worked in the field of innovation within various industries and country markets. Two consultants explained their approach for innovation leadership development, and two explained to her how innovation can be managed. The narrative interviews were structured into four theme blocks focusing on the field of innovation (1. Personal leadership experience, 2. Challenges resulting from current market changes, 3. Successful leadership practices, 4. Performance tracking approaches). The interviewer set the main topic and asked the participants to tell her the most important aspects from their point of view. Each interview was audio recorded, transcribed, openly coded and memoed, leading to 734 minutes speaking time and approx. 80.000 words of the transcript. Only if participants stalled or asked for advice, the interviewer intervened. Based on the idea of theoretical sampling, the researcher documented after each interview questions or themes that remained open to her. The recorded questions guided the researchers' decision on whom to interview and what kind of questions to ask as a next step.

When half of the interviews were done and structured through open coding, the researcher started with axial coding. Axial coding focused on those concepts that had been identified as relevant during the open coding procedure. The researcher broke up the specified concepts into their dimensions aiming to make distinctions between the concepts. The researcher at this stage was coding for context (Corbin/Strauss, 2014). She put one system in the center of attention and screened her data gathered from group discussions, interviews, open questionnaires, and literature reviews. During the axial coding process, the researcher merged the sensitizing concepts into the three categories 'values, strengths,

and practices'. These concepts of course have a rich semantic background, so let us briefly comment on what we refer to.

Kant postulated that values come from a 'law within me'. For him, this 'within me' is a reflection of cosmic reality, not a mere subjective thing (Kant, 1998). Moreover, values are inextricably linked with emotions. They influence the goals of a person and motivate her actions. Values serve as standards and decision criteria in daily decision routines (Cieciuch et al., 2015; Schwartz, 2012; Schwartz, 1992). Values differ in their importance and serve as a guiding principle for a person in life (Cieciuch et al., 2015).

Strengths, on the other hand, are based on the biological condition and refer to ways of thinking, feeling and behaving of a person. Strengths also depend on active development and can be enriched with skills and knowledge gained from training and exercise (Clifton/Harter, 2003).

Practices stand for a specific type of professional habits and actions. They can be supported with everyday tools or methods (Malik, 2014; Scharmer, 2013).

According to our conceptual approach, values, strengths, and practices together constitute the pillars of innovation leadership. Innovation leaders are conditioned by their self-concept (who they have been, who they are, and who they want to be) and influenced by their environment including their direct colleagues, network partners and mentors (Wilber, 2005).

In the perception of innovation professionals (whose statements ultimately are the primary data), values, strengths, and good practices play a systematic role for effective innovation leadership. Here, effectiveness means that their efforts lead to success. Success has many facets, but in this paper we refer mainly to the adoption of the innovation, usually resulting in turnover, profits and market share (Lumpkin/Dess, 1996) and the introduction of new products, services, practices and business models (Oslo, 2005).

After finishing the first part of the primary data collection and theory formulation, the researcher incorporated all cases into the analysis and scanned generated codes by asking herself this time "what story does the data tell me about effective innovation leaders?" To answer the questions she wrote down each code and created a 3x3 meter post-its wall. During a five-day sorting process, she abstracted 24 subcategories and their dimensions, aggregated into four categories. The following figure indicates the data network developed within ATLAS.ti which helped us to organize the theory ingredients. The lines represent the relationships between core category, categories, and subcategories and illustrate the complexity of the concept network.

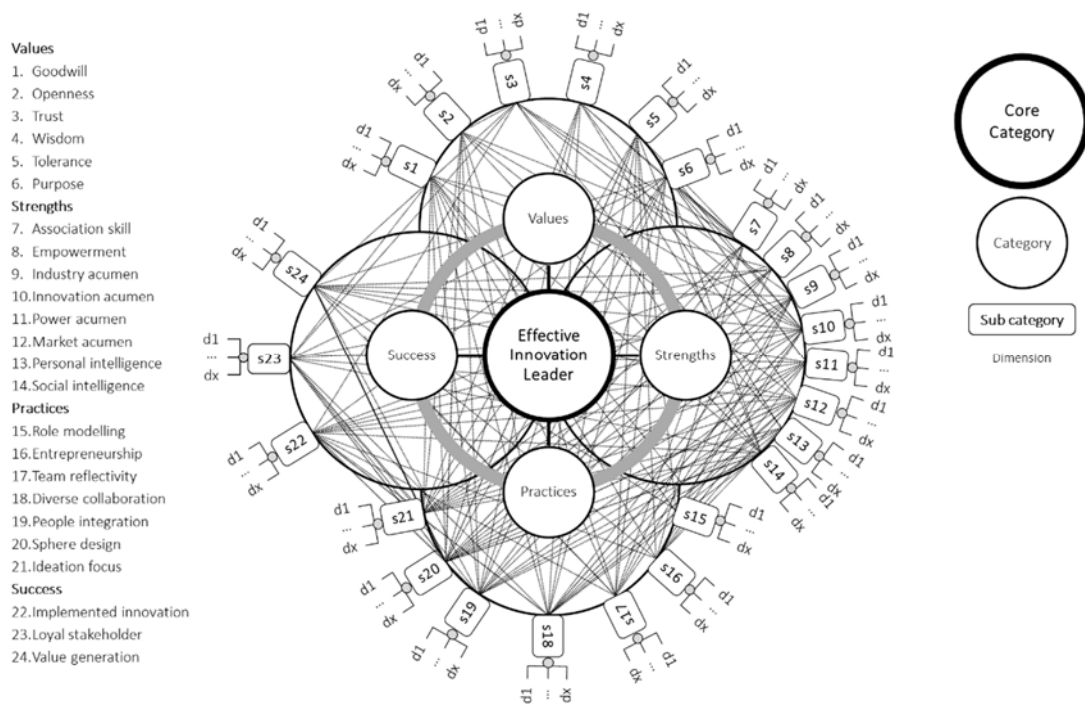


Figure 2: Our data network – the innovation leadership framework

Let us give a short overview of the twenty-four subcategories and their properties (outstanding feature) derived from our empirical data:

- s1. Goodwill is a natural way of treating every individual as having a good intention, trying to give the best of their potential despite fallibility.
- s2. Openness stands for the attentive and conscious interaction of an innovation leader with her environment (emotional and cognitive).
- s3. Trust in the work context is the belief in specialists, resulting in complexity reduction.
- s4. Wisdom supports versatile viewing of events and the continuous extension of understanding through action and adaptation.
- s5. Tolerance in the team context means respecting each other for its uniqueness.
- s6. Purpose relates to the identification with something. It helps to reduce complexity and resembles a driving inner force for change.
- s7. Association means connecting information in a new way, leading to a smart and simple solution.
- s8. Empowerment involves the creation of clarity about goals and the persuasion of others to support those goals.
- s9. Industry acumen is about understanding the dynamics as well as practices of different industries which increasingly grow together.

- s10. Innovation acumen deals with being a pragmatic entrepreneur with heart and soul, knowing that innovation is a spontaneous, non-controllable affair which demands muse and hard work.
- s11. Power structures change through innovation. Leadership needs to be aware of power games, determining each relationship.
- s12. Market acumen is the ability to see opportunities and set a marketable pricing for created solutions.
- s13. Personal intelligence is the knowledge about the self.
- s14. Emotional intelligence is the ability to build trustful long term relationships.
- s15. Ethical leaders act as a role model in everything they do.
- s16. Entrepreneurship is the pro-active engagement for a personal initiative which arises from a vision.
- s17. Reflexivity is being aware of, reflect on and adapt goals as well as actions based on self- and group confrontation.
- s18. Collaboration is about incorporating diverse knowledge, minimize complexity, and giving constructive feedback.
- s19. The integration of different people increases collective intelligence.
- s20. An innovation-supportive sphere is a safe environment providing tools, financials, and methods to perform intrinsically motivated initiatives.
- s21. The focus of ideation lies on the production of useful, affordable, manageable and actionable ideas.
- s22. Implemented innovations can be products, services, processes or business models that are new to the company, new to the market, or new to the world.
- s23. Loyal stakeholders comprise employees, customers, and partners that stay in a long term relationship with an enterprise.
- s24. Innovation efforts secure the survivability of an enterprise. Therefore, new products, services or business model need to generate midterm value such as turnover.

To illustrate the reliability of our coding outcome, we guide you through the 3-step-coding-procedure based on one example. In the context of GTM, theory begins with concepts and concepts are the interpreted meaning of participants' words. They stand for the smallest denominator of the iteration between several data sources. We generated hundreds of concepts from our iteration of group discussions, interviews, and questionnaires. Those concepts we aggregated into 24 subcategories and their dimensions. One sub category we named openness (See Figure 2, s2). Openness stands for the attentive turning off an innovation leader to her environment with her body, mind, heart and spirit. Openness has six dimensions: courage, curiosity, stability, non-judgment, non-cynism, non-attachment. Openness together with the five sub categories goodwill, trust, wisdom, tolerance, and

purpose form the category »values«. Value is one of four categories of an effective innovation leader. Values serve as a guiding principle for a person in life. Values-oriented behavior paired with strength focus, and supportive practices can lead to success.

4.3 Study 3: open questionnaire with innovators

As a third study, the researcher asked 25 innovators about the essential characteristics an effective innovation leader should have. As a result, the researcher condensed 154 words documented within the software tool SPSS. Interestingly she could identify visible clusters regarding the three categories values, strengths, and practices. She contrasted the innovator’s perspective against the innovation leader’s perspective (See study 1 and 2). The researcher communicated the results to all participants who had the possibility to provide feedback.

4.4 Aggregation of scientific knowledge

After deriving a theory from the empiricism, we compare the building blocks of the ‘innovation leadership framework’ with existing literature by using a code book. A code book in our context is a document in which the categories and concepts of the framework are defined based on the smallest amount of primary data section, facing a scientific definition (See Tab. 1).




Sub Category	Empirical definition	Theoretical definition
Openness 	Openness stands for the attentive and conscious interaction of an innovation leader with her environment (emotional and cognitive).	Openness is one concept within Big Five theory and consists of six dimensions: original, open to integrating new ideas, vivid imagination, appreciates artistic, aesthetic experience (Goldberg, 1990: 1220).
Reflexivity 	Reflexivity is being aware of, reflect on and adapt goals as well as actions based on self- and group confrontation.	Reflexivity, or the extent to which a person reflects upon her methods and functioning (Schippers/West, 2010: 3). Mindfulness is the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment (Kabat-Zinn, 2003: 145-146).
Entrepreneurship 	Entrepreneurship is the pro-active engagement for a personal initiative which arises from a vision.	Entrepreneurial orientation describes how new ways are undertaken. An entrepreneurial leader engages in product market innovation, makes somewhat risky ventures and is first to come up with ‘proactive’ changes, beating competitors to the punch (Lumpkin/Dess, 2001: 432).

Table. 1: Code book excerpt

A code book is our way to document our involvement with existing literature. Suddaby (2006: 634), a well-known reviewer of GTM journal contributions, formulates it as follows: “A common misassumption is that grounded theory requires a researcher to enter the field without any knowledge of prior research.” Glaser and Strauss (1967: 79) believe that “it is more desirable to start the formal theory from a substantive one.”

As Tab.1 reveals, our empirical definitions can but do not necessarily match the existing scientific knowledge. This is not surprising because our empirical definitions resemble the thinking of innovation leaders and innovators active in Germany in the period 2014 to 2015.

5 Reality check

“A postmodern approach that denies reality cannot, by definition, generate the theory that resonates with reality.” (Kempster/Perry, 2011: 110). Glaser and Strauss argue that “it is the intimate connection with empirical reality that permits the development of a testable, relevant, and valid theory” (Eisenhardt, 1989: 532). Therefore, we compare our framework with two real data sources. First, we examine three industry case studies, followed by an analysis of biographies, interviews and public speeches of six pioneering leaders.

5.1 Study 4: three industry case studies

To stabilize the framework, the researcher compared her insights with 360-degree-observations of three leaders in the information and communication technology industry. Over one-week, she observed and interviewed one leader, his 6-to-8 member team, and partners as part of an industry case study. The organization and analysis are following Yin (2013) and Eisenhardt (1989). A detailed case study report is beyond the scope of this paper.

5.2 Study 5: Analysis of the anecdotal data taken from six pioneers

Next to that the researcher examined an anecdotal analysis of biographies, interviews and public speeches of six pioneering innovation leaders (Steve Jobs[†], Larry Page, Elon Musk, Oprah Winfrey, Hasso Plattner and Dame Stephanie Shirley). Interestingly the comparison of the framework with the in-field-practice did not reveal any new categories within the framework. That could be a saturation indicator which means that an additional analysis would not bring any new findings to a category. On the contrary, we have found that each respected innovation leader has an individual profile mixture.

The comparison with real data helped us to get a better understanding of our frameworks' core category 'effectiveness'. “The core category captures in a few words the principal theme or the essence of the study and enables all the other categories and concepts to be

integrated with it to form the theoretical explanation of why and how something happens.” (Corbin/Strauss, 2016: 13). Let us explain our insights with a short story: An effective innovation leader strategically follows useful ideas for which she is willing to engage several years and fight against opponents. The innovation leader has high self-control. She is pro-active, focused and good to herself and others. She invests her time and effort in her individual talents and goodwilled people, enabling them to grow. Effectiveness means not following useless actions (Drucker, 1963). Effectiveness is about the “reduction of crap and the focus on good stuff”, an advice Steve Jobs once gave to Mike Parker, the President, and CEO at Nike (Fast Company 2010).

6 Main Results

The main results of our studies are:

(1) The ‘innovation leadership framework‘

Based on the aggregated data from three studies (group discussion, interviews, and questionnaire) we developed the ‘innovation leadership framework‘. The framework consists of the four categories values, strengths, practices, and success. For each category, we proposed a definition grounded in the data and related to prior scientific knowledge. We defined twenty-four categories based on a bottom-up-data-procedure. From our today’s perspective, the ‘innovation leadership framework’ can be compared with an ongoing evolution of the innovation professionals involved, a ‘cycle of growth’. The framework aims for the description of the innovation leadership and, based on such knowledge, the enablement of innovation leaders to become the best version of themselves, building on existing strengths, practices and values. Like Simondon, we believe that „an individual is a process that never stops to become what she or he is.“ (Stiegler 2004: 4).

(2) Specification of an ‘effective innovation leader’

Our comparison with real in-field data led us to highly relevant aspects driving an effective innovation leader. In brief, effective innovation leaders are self-confident, non-conform, and serve the common good. They are talented in associating unrelated things, engage individualists to help the group, and focus the essential. Effective innovation leader’s work hard, expect high standards and invest in highly committed ethical talents. The breeding ground for effective innovation leaders is a supportive, benevolent and challenging surrounding.

7 Recommendations

Our results are limited in various ways. First, our GTM approach is based on a pragmatic selection of interview partners. A priori, it is unclear whether the innovation professionals represent the industry and national culture, nor to what extent differences appear in other countries or industries. It could also be that the same people make other statements at a

later point in time and that the data is the mirror of their state of mind at a given point in time. Our research does not claim validity beyond the GTM approach, but it suggests an empirically grounded theory.

Second the coding procedure and choice of concepts is the expression of our interpretation of the data. The process has been thorough and diligent, following all GTM criteria, but all limitations of GT hold true in our context.

Third, the anecdotal data taken from biographies stand for societally accepted myths. They do not resemble the truth. The value of this data is mainly to compare our results with the perceived reality of broadly accepted role models, relating the scientific approach to common opinions in the field.

The validation presented in this paper is solely based on qualitative data. We propose a complementary quantitative assessment which focuses on the category structure and its dimensions.

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