

Determinants of organizational innovation in an exporting SME context, what impact on performance ?

Les déterminants de l'innovation organisationnelle en contexte PME exportatrice, quel impact sur la performance ?

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Abstract

Innovation is emerging as a key ingredient for economic growth and business success for any Moroccan company. Over time, the meaning of innovation has itself changed, and is not only about technology, the approach to developing new products to commercialize ideas and inventions, the creation of new markets or customer expectations. But it increasingly encompasses improvements in the organization of the company, its profitability, its competitive capacity, and also the interactions between institutional, technological and human systems.

Indeed, it is for companies to discover something new and to try to be unique, while implementing well-studied projects, to develop, to grow, to escape the pressure on prices, by offering consumers surprising experiences. Therefore, innovation is a catalyst in the development of organizations. It is among the main sources of competitive advantage.

The main objective of this article is to present a theoretical synthesis on the different determinants of organizational innovation and to answer, subsequently, the following question: What is the impact of organizational innovation on the performance of exporting SMEs in the Moroccan agri-food sector ?

Keywords : Organizational innovation ; the characteristics of the manager ; organizational learning ; market orientation ; Moroccan SMEs.

Résumé

L'innovation apparaît aujourd'hui comme un ingrédient clé de la croissance économique et de la réussite commerciale pour toute entreprise marocaine. Au fil du temps, la signification de l'innovation a elle-même changé, elle ne concerne pas uniquement la technologie, l'approche de développement de nouveaux produits pour commercialiser des idées et des inventions, la création des nouveaux marchés ou les attentes des clients. Mais, elle englobe de plus en plus les améliorations apportées à l'organisation de l'entreprise, à sa rentabilité, à sa capacité concurrentielle, et aussi les interactions entre les systèmes institutionnels, technologiques et humains.

En effet, il s'agit pour les entreprises d'aller à la découverte de quelque chose de nouveau, de chercher à se différencier, tout en mettant en place des projets bien étudiés, à se développer, à croître, à échapper à la pression sur les prix, en proposant aux consommateurs des expériences surprenantes. De ce fait, l'innovation est un facteur catalyseur dans le développement des organisations. Elle est parmi les principales sources de l'avantage concurrentiel.

L'objectif principal de cet article est de présenter une synthèse théorique sur les différents déterminants de l'innovation organisationnelle et de répondre à la question suivante : Quel est l'impact de l'innovation organisationnelle sur la performance des PME exportatrices dans le secteur agroalimentaire marocain ?

Mots clés : Innovation organisationnelle ; les caractéristiques du dirigeant ; l'apprentissage organisationnel ; l'orientation marché ; PME marocaine.

Introduction

Today, innovation appears as a key factor of economic growth for any Moroccan company. Over time, the meaning of innovation has itself changed; it is not only about technology, the approach to develop new products to commercialize ideas and inventions, the creation of new markets or customer expectations. However, it increasingly encompasses improvements in the organization of the company, its profitability, its competitive capacity, and the interactions between institutional, technological and human systems.

Certainly, organizational innovation has become a key ingredient in business performance. It is not a choice, but an absolute necessity in the economic development of Moroccan SMEs. It is therefore one of the main sources of competitive advantage.

Our study focuses on this type of organizational innovation while identifying its determinants and its implications on the competitiveness of the firm, also, focusing on the contribution and influence of this innovation on the performance of the firm, especially the Moroccan exporting SMEs.

In order to carry out our research, the objective of this article is to answer our research problematic, we seek to answer the following problematic :

What is the impact of the determinants of organizational innovation on the performance of Moroccan exporting SMEs in the agri-food sector : the case of the Larache region?

Through this contribution, we seek to build a relationship between the characteristics of the leader, market orientation, organizational learning and managerial innovation as a powerful engine for increased competitiveness, and their impact on the performance of Moroccan exporting SMEs: the case of the Larache region.

To do this, we will first review the literature on theoretical and empirical studies related to our problem. In the second part, we will present the research hypotheses derived from the literature review. Finally, the third part will trace the methodological approach adopted and the theoretical model of our research.

1. Conceptual framework of the study

1.1. Definitions of concepts

Addressing the issue of the influence of organizational innovation on the performance of exporting SMEs presupposes stating the definition and source of each concept, while subsequently addressing the links between them.

Through this clarification, we want to come to an understanding of all the notions of this study, which are: organizational innovation, characteristics of the owner-manager, market orientation,

organizational learning and performance, in order to be able to systematize the relationship that links them, and to identify our conceptual research model.

1.1.1 The concept of organizational innovation

According to Birkinshaw et al. (2009), organizational or managerial innovation is considered as "the creation and application of a new management practice, process, structure or technique against the state of the art to achieve new organizational objectives". Furthermore, Mol & Birkinshaw (2009) emphasize that the nature of this innovation is specifically incremental and involves new approaches to structuring the company and new management practices. Also, the ultimate goal of organizational innovation is to improve the performance of the firm.

Likewise, it is worth highlighting that the analysis the majority of writings on innovation shows that organizational innovation has several names that are used in a replaceable way. In this sense, Kimberly (1980) says that the managerial innovation is also called organizational innovation, as well as other authors like Sanidas, (2005); Edquist, Hommen and Mckelvey, (2001) have used the concept of administrative innovation. However, all the concepts used warrant a common meaning (Rowley et al. 2011).

1.1.2 The characteristics of the manager

Generally, the use of innovation as well as the opening to the international market emanate from the leader's resolution to direct his SME, which makes him the key person in the initiation and piloting of these processes (Julien and St-Pierre, 2009 ; Julien and Vaghely, 2008). The manager/owner of the SME plays a leadership role with his or her team and is responsible for initiating strategies, committing the necessary resources to achieve them, and above all. Prospecting for crucial information to adapt to the needs of new markets and organize his or her company as best as possible according to the new opportunities to be seized (Julien and St-Pierre, 2009). Without forgetting, the commitment of each individual in this process implies personal knowledge and qualities (Woodman et al. 1993; Ford 2000; cited by Parzefall et al. 2008).

In our case, we are interested in the human capital of the managers of exporting SMEs to explain their choices in terms of innovation, without forgetting their decision-making profile to justify their propensity to innovate.

The human capital of an SME leader refers to his or her age, training, experience and ability to share challenges, if not enthusiasm (St-Pierre et al. 2004), and can serve as an indicator of his or her propensity to innovate.

Indeed, according to (St-Pierre et al. 2004), "generally speaking, since age is associated with more conservative behavior", older leaders would not be very favorable to innovative behavior or would not easily accept new ideas, given their preference for a certain organizational stability (St-Pierre et al. 2004). Other research also points to a negative effect of the age of the manager on the willingness to engage in breakthrough behavior (Koberg et al. 2003). Thus, it can be assumed that the younger the manager of an exporting SME is, the more likely he or she will resort to new forms of organization.

Thus, according to studies by (Halilem and St-Jean, 2007; Affes and Chouaibi, 2007), the level and nature of the leader's training, experience and psychology can be determinant in the adoption and conduct of innovations. (Affes and Chouaibi, 2007; Halilem and St-Jean, 2007; St-Pierre and Mathieu, 2003) confirmed that the level and nature of the leader's training has a strong influence on innovation.

With regard to experience, St-Pierre and Perrault (2009) observe that the experience of leaders gives them the possibility of obtaining knowledge and cultural skills that make them aware of the various ways of doing things practiced elsewhere, which pushes them to review their operations, through the appropriation and exploitation of the resulting new ideas.

The manager's sectoral experience can also serve as an uncertainty reducer, thanks to a good knowledge of the market, the required technologies and the risk factors likely to have a negative impact on the evolution of his or her company (St-Pierre et al. 2004). Which allows him or her to make more pertinent use of opportunities and to have a more accurate perception of the environment (Beylier et al. 2008). It is then possible to consider that the leaders of exporting SMEs with a good education and solid knowledge and experience in their field will tend to resort more to new organizational practices.

Finally, the management style adopted by the owner in making managerial decisions is considered to be one of the most important elements (Halilem and St-Jean, 2007). The management style is an essential process in the way a company operates. It is defined by the power of attitudes and behaviors applied by the leader whose goal is to achieve all the objectives of the team, to protect the coherence of all the personnel of the organization, etc.

The decision making function is a fundamental function for all the success of the company, it is considered mainly as the most important function of the company management process, it is the one that contributes directly in the efficiency and performance of the company.

According to (Scott and Bruce, 1995), decision style is defined as "the conditioned habit, the habitual mode of response expressed by the individual when faced with a specific decision

situation. It is not a personal trait, but a habit or propensity to respond in a certain way in a specific decision context (...). The situation may influence the individual's choice of decision-making style.

Similarly, (Lin, 2010) notes that an intuitive decision-making style will tend to steer the firm more towards radical entrepreneurial behaviors, while a rational decision-making style will favor progressive and incremental entrepreneurial acts. However, a more flexible style, combined with an aggressive management approach towards competitors, may imply a more innovative production mode (Halilem and St-Jean, 2007).

From the analysis of the works cited above on the role of the leader and its impact on innovation, we can put forward the following hypotheses:

H1: The characteristics of the leader would have a positive impact on organizational innovation

H1.1: The younger the manager of an exporting SME, the more likely he or she is to resort to new forms of organization.

H1.2: The level and nature of the manager's training would considerably influence innovation.

H1.3: The more knowledgeable and experienced exporting SME managers are in their field, the more likely they are to use new organizational practices.

H1.4: the management style advocated by the leader could positively influence the direction of innovation in the organization

1.1.3 Market orientation: a determinant of organizational innovation

The definition of market orientation, applied to innovation, is a management oriented towards the market, in other words, a piloting of innovations as Lambin & al. (2005) call it "market-driven management". When we say a company is market-driven, we mean that it improves tools and mechanisms to translate the information that comes from the environment, and compares it with its objectives and competences in order to adapt to its resources and prepare innovative offers to its customers (Webster, 1994).

Fundamentally, market orientation is a business intelligence system that focuses on the changing needs of customers, competitors, and generally the global environment (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990).

In addition, several authors have found the influence of market orientation on firm innovation (Deshpandé et al., 1993). As (Gupta, A. K., Raj, S. P. & Wilemon, D. 1986) stated that the main function of an innovative firm is market information gathering, this combination of market and firm information gathering succeed in innovation adoption (Slater, S. F. 1997). In this case,

(Lukas, B. A. & Ferrell, O.C., 2000) pointed out that the difference between innovative firms and low-performing firms remains in the importance given to market orientation.

H2 : market orientation would influence organizational innovation.

1.1.4 Organizational learning : a determinant of organizational innovation

Our third variable is considered, thus, an important determinant of organizational innovation. Organizational learning is defined as "a collective phenomenon of skill acquisition and development that (...) changes the management of situations and the situations themselves" (Koenig, 2015), it involves systems of explanation, circulation and storage of information. Organizational learning thus plays an important role in the emerging theories of the competitive advantage paradigm (Hunt and Morgan, 1995). However, firms rarely adopt this development because it carries long-term gains from the short term (Sujan et al., 1994).

H3: organizational learning would influence organizational innovation.

1.1.5 Organizational innovation and performance

Generally, performance reflects the level of achievement of the company's objectives (BESBES, A., ALIOUAT, B. and GHARBI, J. 2013). Several researchers in management science are committed to defining the term learning although its definition is not unanimous. According to (Marmuse, 1997, cited by Boubakary, B. and Moskoläi, D. 2019), the performance of a company is the way it is organized to achieve its objectives. The performance has also been measured by several indicators (stock price, return on capital, profit rate, sales growth, turnover, customer satisfaction, labor productivity, quality, perceived performance, turnover ...) these indicators are listed by (Allouche, Charpentier and Guillot, 2003).

In this perspective, four indicators have been proposed by (Dyer and Reeves, 1995) which are: human resources results such as turnover, satisfaction with the work climate, absenteeism..., organizational results such as the quality of products and services, productivity..., financial results such as returns on investment, return on assets and market efficiency.

Others have put value on three dimensions to assess performance within companies. First, the social dimension which consists of the ability of staff to perform tasks, work performance, working time and absenteeism. Second, the organizational dimension which consists of innovation, productivity and quality. And the third economic dimension which is measured by four items: profitability, sales growth, market share and customer loyalty (Kalika, 1988. Bayad and Liouville, 1998).

Some researchers are interested in the relationship between organizational innovation and company profits, i.e. organizational performance. It should be noted that most authors agree with the result, which is superior performance.

Specifically, Damapour (1991) noted that the adoption of innovation generally contributes to the performance and effectiveness of innovative organizations. He mentioned the use of innovation to improve performance or eliminate performance gaps that may be caused by changes in the internal or external environment (such as fluctuations in demand). It is also mentioned by Hurley and Hult (1998) to obtain know-how through innovation. Indeed, these authors believe that more innovative firms can develop competitive advantages and achieve high levels of performance.

In our study, we choose to measure performance through its three dimensions: economic, social and organizational.

H4 : organizational innovation would have a positive impact on company performance.

2. Research methodology

For our purposes, the positivist paradigm was the most appropriate because it starts with existing knowledge, seeks to answer the question, formulates and tests hypotheses. It is designed to produce a set of "causal relationships" which, once the cause of a problem has been identified, act on it in a predictable way.

From a methodological point of view, we will choose a hypothetical deductive approach based on quantitative investigation. Hypothetical deduction is a scientific method that consists in formulating hypotheses to deduce observable results and thus determine their validity.

Hypothetical deductive reasoning is the learner's ability to deduce conclusions from pure hypotheses rather than just from actual observations (Dépelteau, F., 2011). It is a thinking process that attempts to derive a causal explanation for some phenomenon. The learner who uses this type of reasoning begins by formulating a hypothesis and then tries to confirm or refute his or her hypothesis.

Our research model draws on several works identified in the literature. In what follows, we will describe most of these models:

Suliyanto and Rahab, (2012) propose two related measures in their model that accurately describe the impact of innovation on firm performance. These measures are: market orientation and organizational learning.

Regarding the indicators of (Besbes A., Aliouat B., Gharbi JE, 2013), three related indicators are proposed in their model, which can accurately account for the impact of managerial or

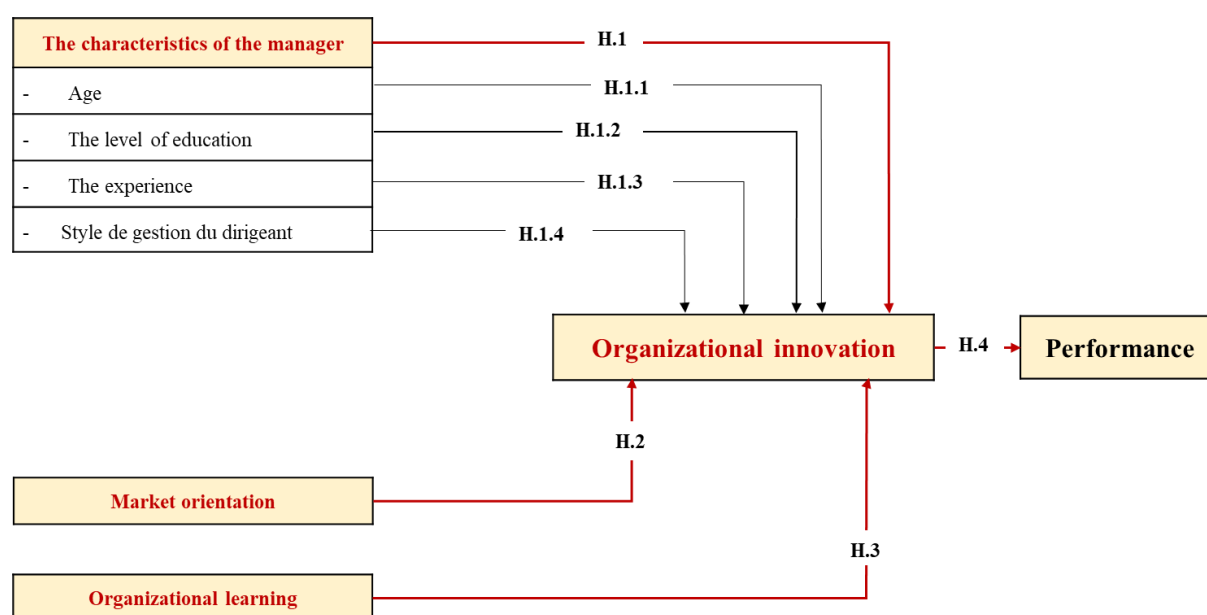
organizational innovation on firm performance. These measures are: market orientation, organizational learning and competitive advantage.

Shurweryimana, F. (2015) also provides a model revealing organizational innovation and its impact on the performance of Moroccan exporting SMEs. The proposed model consists of four related indicators: firm characteristics, manager characteristics, export strategy and environmental impact.

In addition to the above indicators, (Boubakary and Moskolai, 2019) propose in their model relevant determinants of organizational innovation: changes in managerial practices, changes in structure, and characteristics of firms, especially SMEs, (size of managers, age, workforce and gender).

By analyzing the different models proposed in the literature, we have succeeded in identifying three determinants that allow us to characterize organizational innovation and its impact on the performance of Moroccan exporting SMEs. Our research model is the following :

Figure N°1 : Conceptual research model



Source : By our own means

Conclusion

Based on previous research, this paper aims to present the determinants that help the adoption of innovation within the organization. However, the characteristics of the owner-manager occupy a very important place in the innovation process; they are considered as determinants of innovation.

Generally, the innovative capacity of the SME depends on its characteristics and the field in which it operates. Thus, innovation today forces companies to develop their internal systems and management methods in order to achieve performance.

This article serves to demonstrate a theoretical synthesis on the different determinants of organizational innovation and their impact on the performance of Moroccan exporting SMEs. Our sample focuses on exporting firms in the Larache region. Therefore, any research is not free of limitations. Our article identifies gaps that could pave the way for future research and thus deepen our problem.

First, an exploratory qualitative study in Moroccan exporting SMEs can lead to better organizational innovation practices aimed at creating value and, consequently, improving firm performance.

Similarly, the study is limited to the main determinants of organizational innovation found in the literature, so the results may exclude variables that could help better explain the innovative behavior of regional firms. Given the other factors influencing the innovation of Moroccan SME exporting organizations, further research is needed.

The strong message to be emphasized in this article is that the characteristics of the leader, market orientation and organizational learning are among the determinants of organizational innovation.

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