

INNOVATIVENESS OF TRAINING COMPANIES IN THE WEST POMERANIAN VOIVODESHIP

INNOWACYJNOŚĆ PRZEDSIĘBIORSTW SZKOLENIOWYCH WOJEWÓDZTWA ZACHODNIOPOMORSKIEGO

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Abstract: The aim of the article is to analyse and evaluate the innovativeness of training companies operating in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship. In the theoretical part of the article: the basic concepts related to the innovativeness of training companies are defined and the indicators for measuring the innovativeness of these enterprises are summarised. The practical part of the article analyses the innovativeness of training companies in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship. The following research methods were used in the article: literature analysis, analysis of source data from the Central Statistical Office, analysis of primary data obtained as a result of quantitative research.

Keywords: innovativeness, training company, measurement of innovation, innovation indicators, innovativeness analysis, West Pomeranian Voivodeship

Abstrakt: Celem artykułu jest analiza i ocena innowacyjności przedsiębiorstw szkoleniowych województwa zachodniopomorskiego. W części teoretycznej artykułu zdefiniowano podstawowe pojęcia związane z innowacyjnością przedsiębiorstw szkoleniowych oraz zestawiono wskaźniki pomiaru ich innowacyjności. W części praktycznej artykułu dokonano analizy innowacyjności przedsiębiorstw szkoleniowych w województwie zachodniopomorskim. Wykorzystano następujące metody badawcze: analizę literatury, analizę danych źródłowych Głównego Urzędu Statystycznego, analizę danych pierwotnych uzyskanych w wyniku przeprowadzonych badań ilościowych.

Keywords: innowacyjność, przedsiębiorstwo szkoleniowe, pomiar innowacyjności, wskaźniki innowacyjności, analiza innowacyjności, województwo zachodniopomorskie

Introduction

Innovation is a key factor of growth and development, as well as enhancing the competitiveness of enterprises. Many times it also becomes an important determinant of the survival of market players.

Companies providing training services are seen as the fastest growing in the service sector, supported by the general positive trend toward continuous learning among Poles. According to the Human Capital Balance, as many as 83% of our compatriots aged 25-64 upgrade their competencies. Despite a slight institutional decline in interest in external training, caused first by the COVID-19 pandemic and now by the war in Ukraine, we observe an increase in the popularity of e-learning. Initially, employers were sceptical about e-learning forms of training, but now 37% of companies have already used them. At the same time, a steadily

growing demand for training services is observed, averaging 6.5% per year among 2015 and 2023. The above figures undoubtedly provide an optimistic forecast for the development of training services. Currently valued at around 10 billion PLN and numbered more than 78,000 business entities, the training and development sector in Poland offers a wide range of services provided in traditional, remote and hybrid forms, including not only the most popular training in the areas of personal development and general competences, marketing, commerce, management, information technology, but also traditional thematic training in automotive, construction, industry, occupational health and safety, accounting and finance, and legal topics. Developmental forms such as coaching and mentoring are particularly popular.

Enterprises providing training services play a considerable role in socio-economic development, shaping a variety of personnel competencies of modern organisations, so it is important for them to be innovative in the area of product design, marketing activities and organizational performance. The purpose of the article is an attempt to define the basic concepts related to the innovativeness of training enterprises, the selection of indicators for measuring the innovativeness of these enterprises, and finally, in the practical part of the article, to show the state of innovativeness of training enterprises in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship. The paper is based on the following research methods: analysis of the literature, analysis of data from the Central Statistical Office, analysis of primary data obtained by quantitative surveys.

Literature review.

Innovativeness of training companies

Innovation of a company is considered by many researchers as the main determinant of the company's performance and the basic factor ensuring its market success (Janasz, Kozioł-Nadolna, 2011, p. 52; Likar, et al., 2023). The development of a training enterprise through innovation makes it capable of offering its products/services to a wide range of customers. By introducing innovative solutions, a training company can adapt its training programs to an individual recipient. Innovations in the area of training ensure that the organisation keeps pace with changing industry trends and adapts its offer to dynamic educational needs. The scalable nature of innovative approaches allows a company to transcend geographic boundaries and offer products and services globally. Importantly, adopting innovation positions the training enterprise as a leader in the digital education landscape (Tidd, Bessant, 2011).

As J.-P. Deschamps points out, innovation requires a special kind of leadership (Gadomska-Lila, 2018) and is only sustainable if the company is able to create a favourable environment for innovation (Deschamps, 2011; Karlik, 2014; Fazlagić, 2014). It is confirmed by P. Trott, concluding that human individuals, their competencies, choices and relationships, are crucial in the innovation process, therefore first of all it is necessary to identify those employees who can contribute to company's innovativeness (Trott, 2005, p.12). Therefore it is a good idea to look for inspiration in the field of innovation among a wide range of stakeholders, starting primarily from expanding external contacts, placing particular emphasis on building strong relationships with important participants of

economic life (Tidd, Bessant, 2011; Bal-Woźniak, 2019).

The Central Statistical Office defines innovation as the implementation of a new or significantly improved product (product, service) or process, a new organisational method or a new marketing method in business practice, workplace organisation or in relations with the environment. A new or significantly improved product is implemented when it is introduced to the market. New processes, organisational methods or marketing methods are implemented when their actual use in the company's operations begins (GUS, 2022). According to the definition cited by Schumpeter, innovations are 'new combinations of factors' that throw the branches in which these combinations appear out of balance. Broadly understood by the author, innovations are production and trade combinations, and any change that modifies the relative scarcity of production factors or increases the utility of existing goods creates new utility (Schumpeter, 1960, p. 102-104). P.F. Drucker claims that innovation permeates all spheres of an organisation's activity (Drucker, 1992, pp. 41-43). Ph.D. Kotler emphasizes that the essence of innovation is its newness from the point of view of the user (Kotler, 1994, p. 322). S. Marciniak defines innovations as creative changes in the social system, economic structure and nature (Marciniak 2000, pp. 11-18). A. Pomykalski considers all research and development processes aimed at the application and use of improved solutions to technique, technology and organisation as innovations (Pomykalski, 2001, pp. 17-20). Eurostat and OECD publications define innovation broadly as the implementation of a new or significantly improved product, process, new marketing method or new organisational method in business practice, in the workplace and in external relations (*Oslo Manual*, 2018).

The innovativeness of the training enterprise was assessed based on the guidelines of the Oslo Manual, an international methodological manual in the field of statistical research on innovation, developed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD. The Oslo Manual, recommended by many scientists, contains a comprehensive set of proposals and recommendations for defining and measuring the innovative activity of enterprises. The set of innovation components of the training enterprise was also adapted to its specificity, ultimately taking into account the following measures (table 1): the number of innovative training products/services; the number of innovative organisational activities, the number of innovative marketing ventures; number of patents/utility

models; share of new products/services in the company's offer; percentage of sales of new training products/services; assessment of the level of innovation of products/services; assessment of innovation potential; the fact of rewarding innovative ideas and the frequency of innovation measurement (*Oslo Manual*, 2018; Nappi, Kelly, 2022; Sinclair-Desgagné, 2022; Rocha, Almeida, Calili, 2023; Szklarz, 2023; Svensson, 2023; Ippolito, 2023).

Table 1. Selection of innovation measures of a training company

Innovativeness of the training company
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ number of innovative training products/services ▪ number of innovative organisational activities ▪ number of innovative marketing ventures ▪ number of patents/utility models ▪ share of new products/services in the company's offer ▪ percentage of sales of new training products/services ▪ assessment of the level of innovation of products/services ▪ assessment of innovation potential ▪ the fact of rewarding innovative ideas ▪ frequency of innovation measurements

Source: Oslo Manual: Guidelines for Collecting and Interpreting Innovation Data. OECD/European Communities 2018.

Research methodology

The sector of training and development services of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship is represented by various training institutions, including: private Polish enterprises, private Polish enterprises with know-how from abroad, foreign network enterprises, individual trainers, academic centres, public training institutions and associations and foundations. The vast majority of the above-mentioned entities are enterprises providing training services, classified in the REGON database under number 85.59 (subclasses 85.59A and 85.59B).

The research area covering enterprises providing training services of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship has been narrowed down to PKD section 85.59B (enterprises with training departments providing business services). The study was conducted using the CAWI and PAPI survey method in the period from 06/2017 to 06/2018. The survey questionnaire was addressed to people representing a given enterprise: owners – entrepreneurs or representatives of the managerial staff, i.e. people responsible for managing the training enterprises, assuming that they are the best and most reliable

source of information about the companies, also in the context of its innovativeness.

According to data collected by the Central Statistical Office, the West Pomeranian Voivodeship had 1217 enterprises providing training services, classified in section 85.59B. The size of the minimum research sample for the actual study, with the assumed significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$, natural for research in management and quality sciences, and the permissible maximum estimation error of $d = 0.03$ (3%), amounted to 569 respondents. As a result of the study, responses were obtained from 199 respondents representing training companies from the West Pomeranian Voivodeship (return rate 29.26%).

Taking into account the structure of the surveyed enterprises in terms of size, the vast majority of the surveyed enterprises were micro-enterprises (181 surveyed enterprises, which is 91%); the rest of the surveyed entities were small enterprises (9%). The structure of enterprises obtained in the quantitative study was compatible with the Central Statistical Office statistics illustrating the West Pomeranian training market, the vast majority of which was created by micro and small enterprises.

Analysing the scope of the training topics offered, the most popular among the surveyed enterprises were: interpersonal training (35.7% of respondents' responses) and management training (33.7% of respondents' responses) – each of these types of training topics was conducted by approximately 1/3 of the surveyed enterprises. In terms of the scope of topics, the following training courses dominate: IT and computer training (21.6% of responses), financial training (20.1% of responses) and marketing/advertising training (19.1%); each of them is run by approximately 1/5 of the surveyed respondents. Legal training was also very popular (17.6% of respondents' responses).

The vast majority of the surveyed enterprises have been operating on the market for more than 3 years (82%), of which almost half of the surveyed enterprises (47%) have been operating for more than 5 years, and 15% of the surveyed enterprises have been operating for more than 10 years; 18% of enterprises had a history of operation not exceeding 3 years, of which 3% were enterprises with a period of operation not exceeding one year. The above statistics allow us to draw conclusions that the group of surveyed training enterprises in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship was largely composed of business units with more than 3 years of experience on the market, but not more than 10 years. To conclude, most of the surveyed

companies had medium or even significant business experience.

Results and discussion

Analysing the innovative activities of training enterprises in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship over the last three years:

- in the area of product/service innovations: 61% of respondents declared that new training products/services were introduced in their training company; the most common were 1-2 training products/services (indicated by 26% of representatives of training enterprises);
- in the area of organisational innovation: 76% of respondents declared that innovative organisational activities were introduced in their training company; the most common were 1-2 activities of this type (indicated by 28% of representatives of training enterprises);
- in the area of marketing innovations: 73% of respondents declared that innovative marketing initiatives had been introduced in their

training company; most often 1-2 projects of this type (indicated by 23% of representatives of training enterprises);

- in the area of patents/utility models: only 3% of respondents confirmed that a patent/utility model had been filed in their training company.

Detailed information on innovations of companies providing training services in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship is presented in table 2.

According to 38% of survey respondents, the share of the number of new products/services in the training company's offerings over the last three years ranged from 11 to 20%; 23% of respondents declared that this share was higher than 30%; and 20% of respondents indicated that it was between 21 and 30%. Only one in five respondents indicated that the share of new products/services in the company's offerings was less than 10%. The revenues generated from the sale of new products/services in total revenues were similar, as shown in table 3.

Table 2. Innovations of companies providing training services in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship

Numerical interval	Types of innovation							
	Product/Service		Organisational		Marketing		Patents/Utility models	
	P	N	P	N	P	N	P	N
0	39%	77	24%	47	27%	54	97%	193
1-2	26%	52	28%	56	23%	46	1,5%	3
3-5	16%	32	23%	45	20%	40	1,5%	3
6-10	7%	13	11%	21	13%	25	0%	0
>10	13%	25	15%	30	17%	34	0%	0

Source: own research; P – Percentage of companies in the range, N – Number of companies in the range N=199.

Table 3. Innovation results of training companies of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship

Percentage range	Categories			
	Share of the number of new products/services in the company's offerings		Share of revenues from the sale of new products/services in total revenues	
	P	N	P	N
0%-1%	8%	16	12%	24
2%-10%	12%	23	11%	21
11%-20%	38%	75	36%	72
21%-30%	20%	39	16%	32
>30%	23%	46	25%	50

Source: own research ; P – Percentage of companies in the range, N – Number of companies in the range N=199.

When assessing the level of innovativeness of products/services and the future potential of innovation, the respondents were asked to rate them on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 means a very high and 1 means a very low rating. Nearly 38% of respondents were satisfied with their current level of innovation, rating it high or very high, while slightly

less, 31%, gave the current level of innovation a low or very low rating. The surveyed respondents assessed the potential of innovation much better – as many as 56% of surveyed representatives of training enterprises in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship expressed the belief that it was at a high or

very high level in the period under study; and only 18% of respondents gave it a low or very low rating.

In the surveyed training companies, innovative ideas are rewarded, which was confirmed by 74% of respondents from the relevant research group: the answer 'definitely yes' was given by 38% of respondents, and 'rather yes' by 36% of respondents. Rewarding innovative ideas in training companies provides a catalyst for creativity, encouraging employees to think beyond conventional boundaries and fostering a culture of continuous improvement of training process. Incentives act as powerful motivators, enhancing trainers' sense of purpose and achievement, contributing to a positive work environment. This practice also enhances talent retention and attraction, as training companies that actively value and encourage creativity become sought-after workplaces for top trainers. What is more, the recognition of innovative ideas cultivates a collaborative and inclusive organisational culture, fostering knowledge-sharing and collaborative problem-solving among team trainers (Omerovic, et al., 2024).

Respondents declared about the measurement of innovation carried out in their enterprises (figure 1). As many as 72% of respondents answered that innovation was not measured at all in their training companies. Thus, the survey shows that: less than one in three training companies in West Pomeranian Voivodeship measured innovation; among the most common indications from respondents were the following: 'less often than once a year' (13% of responses) and 'once a year' (12% of responses); more frequent measurement of innovation applied to only 4% of the surveyed companies (responses 'once every six months' were given by 3%, and 'once a quarter' by 1% of respondents). The lack of systematic evaluation mechanisms highlights a potential deficiency in recognising and quantifying innovative endeavours. In the absence of structured measurement, training companies may find themselves without a comprehensive understanding of the impact of innovation on their operations, hindering strategic decision-making and the identification of areas for enhancement. To address this, there is a clear imperative for training companies to establish robust measurement frameworks that align with industry benchmarks and organisational objectives. Implementing quantifiable metrics to assess the success and efficacy of innovative initiatives is pivotal for gauging return on investment, identifying areas for refinement, and aligning innovation efforts with overarching business goals. Moreover, the incorporation of regular assessments can serve as a catalyst for cultivating a

culture of innovation within these companies. By instilling a commitment to measurement, training entities not only gain valuable insights into their innovative endeavours but also create an environment conducive to experimentation, learning, and the continual evolution of training methodologies.

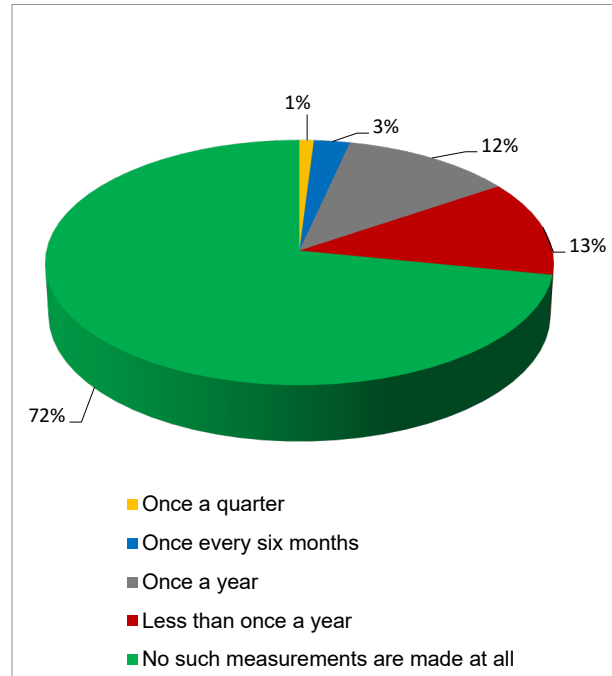


Figure 1. Frequency of innovation measurement

Source: own research.

Conclusions

In the evolving landscape of education and professional development, cutting-edge training products and services are reshaping the way individuals acquire skills. Nowadays technologies like Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality offer realistic, hands-on experiences, redefining the concept of experiential learning (Kuna, et al., 2023). E-learning platforms, driven by artificial intelligence, provide personalised and adaptive experiences tailored to individual profiles (Ortega-Gras, et al., 2023; Asghar, et al., 2023; Zhanga, et al., 2023). Gamification and microlearning strategies enhance engagement by invoking intrinsic motivation and breaking down information into digestible units. Simulations and serious games, grounded in experiential learning theory, immerse learners in dynamic environments, fostering decision-making and problem-solving skills. Integrating artificial intelligence with learning analytics provides data-driven knowledge for training improvement by analysing the performance and preferences of training companies' customers (Kumar, et al., 2023). The convergence of rigorous scientific research and technological innovation promises a more

informed and transformative landscape for the training market (Li, et al., 2023).

Innovative organisational activities epitomise a deliberate pursuit of adaptive and effective operational paradigms in contemporary business strategies. The assimilation of agile methodologies underscores a shift towards collaborative and iterative project management frameworks, fostering heightened responsiveness to dynamic environmental contingencies. Concurrently, the establishment of cross-functional teams manifests a strategic commitment to diversifying expertise and fostering an interdisciplinary environment conducive to innovative problem-solving. Digital transformation initiatives represent a purposeful leveraging of cutting-edge technologies to recalibrate operational structures and perpetuate competitive salience within the rapidly evolving digital landscape (Bahadur, et al., 2021; Liu, et al., 2024).

Innovative marketing ventures encompass pioneering strategies and initiatives employed by organisations to promote their products or services in a distinctive and forward-thinking manner. These ventures often leverage cutting-edge technologies, creative communication channels, and novel approaches to engage target audiences and differentiate brands in competitive markets (Molina-Castillo, et al., 2020). Examples of innovative marketing ventures include immersive experiential campaigns, augmented reality advertisements, personalised and data-driven content strategies, influencer collaborations and interactive social media campaigns. The essence of such ventures lies in their ability to captivate consumer attention, create memorable brand experiences, and adapt to the ever-evolving landscape of consumer preferences and technological advancements (Chijioke, Vu, 2022; Chumme, 2022).

Due to the fact each training company is an individual market entity, it is so difficult to interpret specific values regarding the number of product, marketing or organisational innovations introduced in the context of the added value they create and, consequently, the translation of this added value into the financial results achieved.

Based solely on numerical data, the overall innovativeness of training enterprises in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship is estimated as moderate.

Over 1/3 of the surveyed training enterprises in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship declared that they had not introduced any product innovation in the last three years, nearly 1/4 – marketing innovation, and over 1/4 – organisational innovation; 72%

of the surveyed enterprises declared that they did not measure innovation.

At the same time, approximately 1/5 of the surveyed enterprises were characterised by relatively high innovativeness – they declared not only the highest numerical ranges in terms of the innovations introduced, but also a significant percentage of the share of new products in the company's offer, which had a direct impact on the financial results achieved: 25% of companies declared that revenues from the sale of innovative training products exceeded 30% of their total revenues.

The West Pomeranian training companies' innovation results, while notable, can be further enhanced through a strategic focus on cultivating a creative atmosphere during the innovation process. A comparison with the superior innovation outcomes of medium-sized and large enterprises, as reported by the Central Statistical Office (GUS, 2022), highlights an opportunity for training companies to draw insights from successful practices in larger organisational structures.

Recognising that flexibility is a distinct advantage for training companies, they should leverage this characteristic to foster an environment that encourages creativity and experimentation. The adaptability inherent in smaller entities allows for more agile responses to market demands and changes in the educational landscape.

Furthermore, it is imperative for each training company to conduct an individualised assessment of its innovation landscape. This entails a comprehensive examination of current practices, identifying areas for improvement, and pinpointing specific strengths that can be harnessed to drive innovation. Tailoring pro-innovation activities to the unique context of each training enterprise ensures a targeted and effective approach.

In this context, collaboration and knowledge-sharing within the training industry can also play an important role. Establishing networks or partnerships with other training companies and institutions can facilitate the exchange of innovative ideas, best practices, and insights, contributing to a collective elevation of the industry's innovative capacities.

As the educational landscape continues to evolve, a proactive stance towards innovation becomes not only a strategic imperative but also a key factor in ensuring the sustained relevance and competitiveness of West Pomeranian training companies. By fostering a creative atmosphere, embracing flexibility, and undertaking individualised pro-innovation initiatives, these entities can position themselves as dynamic contributors to the evolving educational ecosystem.

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