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Trust and innovation in Hungarian SMEs

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Hungary is not favourably ranked in the various competitiveness and innovation lists. If enterprises want to develop, they do not only need financial capital (among other factors), but also a high level of innovative activity and cooperative social capital. The basis of cooperation is trust; at the same time, Hungary is an individualistic society with a closed mindset where people follow their own aims and goals. Owing to the "knowledge is power" and "zero-sum game" way of thinking, even if enterprises develop, they do it on their own and trust usually stays within the organizational framework.

The aim of this paper is to look into the relation of trust and innovation. I endeavor to explore the way trust influences innovative activities, the cooperation of business actors as well as economic performance along the way. In the first part of the paper, after a short overview of the relevant literature, an attempt will be made at exploring the influence of trust on innovation in the working practices of Hungarian SMEs. In the second part of the study, preliminary research data are presented in order to verify the hypotheses that arose on the basis of the literature as well as to identify further factors contributing to the understanding of the phenomenon of innovation and its relation with trust.

Based on my researches, I found a medium-strength positive correlation between trust and innovative pursuits. The reason for the relation's strength is that innovation is not only affected by trust but by other factors as well, like customer and supplier relations or network-type cooperation within the cluster, corporate tax, the problem of risk capital etc.

Keywords: cooperation, innovation, social capital, SMEs, trust.
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Introduction

In line with international researches and literature data trust has a strong influence on the economic actors' innovative tendencies and their

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willingness thereof. Based on the Global Innovation Index scores for 2012, Hungary was placed 31st in the world rankings, which is a quite good rank. However, turning our attention to the most up-to-date figures we can discover that, e.g., on innovation linkages, Hungary ranked only 53rd (Cornell University et al. 2013). Its 88th position on the state of cluster development is yet another indicator to show that the Hungarian economy is in urgent need of change in its economic and social practices, namely its reluctance to facilitate collaboration.

Accordingly, two of the major drivers of the competitiveness of companies and industries are trust and innovation (Kiss 2013). Since Hungary does not rank among the top-performing countries, it is of utmost importance that innovation, especially among SMEs, is fostered and developed.

The aim of this paper is to look into the relation of trust and innovation. I endeavor to explore the way trust influences innovative activities, the cooperation of business actors, as well as economic performance along the way.

In the first part of the paper after a short overview of the relevant literature, an attempt will be made at exploring the influence of trust on innovation in the working practices of Hungarian SMEs.

In the second part of the study, preliminary data of a research on the very topic is presented in order to verify the hypotheses that arose on the basis of the literature on the topic, as well as to identify further factors contributing to the understanding of the phenomenon of innovation and its relation with trust.

Literature review

Innovation

According to the Frascati manual, innovation is "turning an idea into an either freshly marketed or updated product, into a new or updated process to be used in the industry or commerce or into a new viewpoint for a social service" (OECD 1993). Out of the various innovation types found in the professional literature, we wish to emphasize open innovation. The point of the open innovation business model is that either occasionally or regularly, the company uses outside knowledge in

the initial or perhaps in all phases of the innovation. (Csath 2010). Owing to open innovation, the enterprise is able to enter a new market quicker and it is easier for it to find new technology and get access to new ideas (Mortara et al. 2009). Open innovation builds on social capital and requires the enterprise to remain open towards its own environment.

Trust as Social Capital Facilitator

The literature dealing with social capital – with its numerous definitions – has a history of approximately 100 years, beginning with the 1916 definition of Hanifan. *Social capital* appears in knowledge transfer and the ability of the economy to form adaptation techniques (Kun 2008). Social capital is mostly measured with *general trust*. Fukuyama (1997) also traces a country's prosperity and competitiveness to a single prevailing cultural factor, namely the level of trust in the given society. Fukuyama (1995) argues that in lack of trust, partnership at any level can come about only when partners make, enforce and apply precise rules and regulations covering all details. If all else fails, then by legal means or other coercive measures. Evidence of insisting on rules, at times even overregulation resulting, e.g., in a huge body of written and audio-records is common at both micro- and macro-levels, for the sharing of information as well as cooperation call for trust.

The relationships based on trust and cooperation represents a significant social resource (Kopp and Martos 2011). No matter whether social capital is examined from an anthropological, sociological or economic perspective, trust will appear as an important factor in all those approaches. According to Putnam (2000) and Szabó (2011), social capital has both direct and indirect influences on economic performance. Directly, e.g., due to trust, transaction costs as well as the cost of monitoring or that of enforcing contracts go down in just the same way as the costs of deception or crime. Its indirect influence can be felt by means of the interaction between human and social resources, through political channels and the link between social capital and investment. As a result, actors take more risks and make more investments in physical and human capital. The researches of Takács et al. (2012) among agricultural enterprises verified that cooperation does reduce transaction costs owing to better agricultural machinery

capacity utilization. As a result, farmers are beginning to realize the necessity of cooperation.

Based on the way social capital is linked to economic performance, the factors of social capital can be divided into two large groups, namely the factors of social coexistence and those of trust and reciprocity (Kovács 2009) and they are all determined by cultural embeddedness. A lack of bonds of trust and reciprocity between actors of the economy will lead to low-quality relationships or no relationship at all, and as a consequence, social capital will be wasted. In fact, we are not living in the age of lone wolves. No matter whether financial, technological or human capital is considered, cooperation and interaction are essential. Rather than readiness for partnership, however, distrust will feed a negative and inward-looking attitude.

Research at organizational level as well as macro studies reviewed by Simon and Tóth (2010), reveal three measures used for trust indexes. First, it is predictability, i.e., a need for rule-driven behaviour. The second one is expectations implying uncertainty.

Finally, the third one is identified as goodwill, an intention or effort to make progress towards positive goals. A fall in trust may affect micro-level businesses as well. In order to set up and operate a business it is crucial to cooperate and exhibit an intention to meet the others' needs, and it is trust that lays the foundations of this attitude (Tóth-Bordásné and Bencsik 2012). In the Lövey and Nadkarni (2007) model, a successful organization is the same as an effective and healthy organization. A lack of trust means failing to fulfill customer or co-worker demand for harmony, which will lead to unsound, inefficient and unsuccessful operation; nor can innovation be promoted in an atmosphere of distrust and, as a result, in over-controlled and rigidly hierarchical organizations where the motivation for creating and communicating new ideas will be set back (Tóth 2009).

National culture contributes a great deal to economic performance in measurable ways (Moon and Choi 2001). In their survey Tóth and his co-workers (2009) examine the system of values in Hungary, taking Inglehart's (1997) findings based on a large body of research into values, as a point of reference. They have found that:

• Hungary is near the closed-mindedness pole, which is not connected to the state of economic development or the structure of society.

• in the traditional – religious vs. secular – rational scale, preference is given to the secular – rational way of thinking.

• in terms of the value system, self-actualization turns out to be less characteristic, while distrust is prevalent in large measure in the population.

In addition, according to the typical Hungarian mindset, success in business transactions equals to being on the receiving end of zero-sum games. This mindset cannot promote the idea of achieving economic surplus through mutual benefits or that of succeeding through fair play and cooperation, without either party losing the game at the same time (Tóth 2009). In individualistic societies, such as Hungary, the bases of individual labour are individual needs and motivations, actors strive to achieve their individually best position (Lazányi 2012). Accordingly, trust is not a relevant economical phenomenon. Undoubtedly, this attitude continues to negatively affect the country's position through an inability to articulate shared interests and wasted opportunities to collaborate resulting in failed attempts to be in competition or gain a competitive advantage.

When analyzing OECD reports on Hungary, innovation seems to be the other main hurdle in the way of the economy's prosperity. The main weaknesses of the Hungarian innovation system are, first of all, a low-level innovative activity combined with a similarly low-level patent activity. In addition, R&D&I is not regionally balanced, there are not enough innovative SMEs, mobility and collaboration are scarce and human resources for R&D&I are insufficient, mainly as far as science and engineering graduates are concerned. The INNOTARS survey (conducted from May 2009 to January 2011 by a team led by professor Magdolna Csath) that was aimed at exploring and evaluating all those factors which influence small- and medium-sized enterprises, their innovative activity also verified the OECD findings (Csath 2011).

Trust and reciprocity are crucial for innovation. Varga (2012. 19) defines the higher synergy produced by higher social capital as the

re-vitality of the effect of social capital, which makes change, development and modernization simple. In addition, he sets up "very close direct proportion" between economic revitalization and innovation.

All in all, actors in a relationship of trust are interdependent. Trust forms the basis not only for building exchange relationships but also for working around uncertainty and risks. The key to organizational trust is that leaders are capable of building trust in a certain organization, irrespective of the field of operation, workforce or form of business, which brings organizational trust dividends, i.e. an increased value, faster growth, more innovation, more effective cooperation, stable partnerships and stronger loyalty.

According to my previous research of 2008-2009 called "Tertiary Knowledge Management, Internal and External Cooperation Features," conducted among 486 enterprises, there is remarkably little cooperation or even willingness to cooperate between enterprises and tertiary institutions; this is true regardless of the size of the organization. Where there was established relationship, it was mostly dominated by short-term entrepreneurial interests, although the knowledge effect of the universities should be an important factor (Tóth-Bordásné 2011).

Borbás (2007) conducted another research in the North-Hungarian region, finding that half of the sample from that local region had no turnover, which meant they had no effective economic connections either. The companies in question mostly cooperated with companies from the capital in product development (34.8%), while 27% of them cooperated with others in putting their products on the market.

Vadasi (2009) also conducted a research in one of the local regions in North-Hungary and found that most business relations are kept together by business savvy and tactics. Entrepreneurs are more willing to slow down the development of their own companies than to take a risk and share knowledge or cooperate with a partner who is not worthy of their trust.

Vadasi (2009) claims that enterprises keep their information and cooperation within the frames of micro-networks. Relationship between development institutions, incubator houses, chambers, clusters and local enterprises is scarce, and entrepreneurs clearly mistrust the public sector and official regulations (Borbás 2007, Vadasi 2009).

Interpreting cooperation at organizational level, I used my above research to examine company expectations towards employees. Employers primarily expect their workforce to be frank and fair, while the ability to work in a group ranked fifth, ethical norms ranked sixth and helping colleagues ranked eighth. I revealed that employers receive more obedience and flexibility from new entrants, but they expect more creativity than what they get. Participation in team-work is an everyday practice within companies.

Borbás (2007) and Vadasi (2008) pointed out in their researches that the enterprises they interviewed would like to find loyal workforce which is able to bear heavier workload, while they are reluctant to spend on further training or R&D.

In the research described in this paper, the two main influencing factors, namely trust and innovation are addressed together. I was aiming at not only verifying the research results of many others on the topic, but broaden the state of understanding factors influencing economic growth by searching for a connection between trust and innovation. The purpose of the paper is to provide yet another proof for the fact that:

H1: The level of innovation cooperation among SMEs is low.

H2: There are co-worker innovative activities within companies, but firms refuse to spend money on it.

H3: Internal cooperation and trust increase innovative capabilities of companies.

Methodology and participants in the research

Present data are an outcome of a broad explorative questionnaire addressing five main topics: changes after Hungary's joining to the EU, innovation activity of enterprises, R&D activity of enterprises, questions about market competition and background information about enterprises. It has been forwarded to 1800 enterprises altogether, which were asked to use a channel of their choice to return their answers by post, fax, e-mail or in person. The selection of enterprises was carried out using the method of stratified sampling, the stratifying criteria being region, operation field and workforce. Out of the incoming questionnaires, 814 were found suitable for further examination.

The questionnaire consisted of 32 questions, 19 closed-format and 13 open-format questions. Most of the closed-format (multiple-choice) questions were yes/no or dichotomous closed-format questions (nominal scales). The 13 open-format (unstructured) questions served the purpose of providing details of the enterprises as well as the respondents' opinions.

The statistical analysis of the questionnaires was done with the SPSS 17.00 program. After preparing (checking and repairing) for an analysis the data obtained from our quantitative survey a decision had to be made as to how to treat missing data. As we did not consider using the method of replacing the missing data with averages, we opted to omit the units with missing data. Therefore, we indicated the number of answers for each part of the analysis, for the sake of clarity.

We started our analysis using the method of simple descriptive statistics (arithmetic mean, frequency), which also formed the basis of further analyses. Bearing in mind that most of the survey questions included nominal scales, as a rule we calculated frequencies and arithmetic means. To examine a correlation between two qualitative variables, we applied a cross-tabulation analysis to show the combined frequency distribution of variants of the criteria at issue and Pearson's χ^2 statistics was used to measure statistical significance of the correlation of two variables. The analysis was carried out at a 5% empirical significance level (95% of reliability), which is a generally accepted practice in economic analyses. It was most interesting to discover an intensity of connections in the proved correlations. In our research, the intensity of associative connections was measured with Cramer's V coefficient, which is generally applied and which can be in the range [0-1].

Results and discussion

Sample specifications

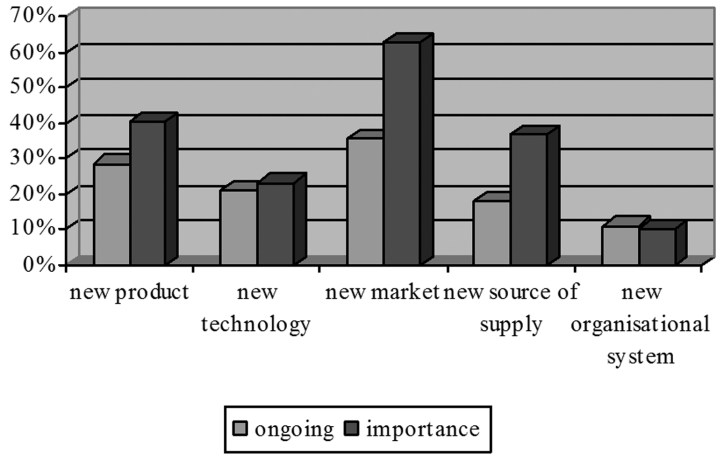
As regards workforce, the details of the 746 enterprises are obtained from the questionnaires. Based on the criteria defined by the EU, a significant number of the enterprises included in the sample (42.6%) qualify as micro-enterprises, one third (32.7%) as small enterprises and

12.8% as mid-sized enterprises. 3.6% of the respondents are large enterprises, and finally, 8.4% did not provide any data concerning workforce, thus they were not categorized on that parameter. The 814 enterprises operate in diverse sectors: 9% operate in agriculture, 14.1% in manufacturing, 8.6% in building industry, 70.6% in service industry, 0.02% in other sectors and 3.6% did not answer.

Analysis of H1

The survey confirmed the findings of the local and international literature concerning the low level of innovative activity among Hungarian SMEs. The first step was to examine whether the innovation effectiveness of the enterprises surveyed showed any correlation with the type of innovation introduced. The types of innovation in this paper are viewed as defined in Schumpeter (1980).

The answers reveal that the most important type of innovation for the enterprises is the opening of a new market (62.8%), the second most important is the introduction of a new product/service (40.6%), and the



Source: own research

Figure 1. Evaluating the importance of Schumpeter's types of innovation and innovative activity in the enterprises surveyed (%)

third is the discovery of a new source of supply (36.8%). Although those are apparently the most required types of innovation, the enterprises face organizational barriers to successful innovation due to limited opportunities and assets. Entering a new market becomes a reality for 35.6% of the enterprises and developing a new product/service is realized by 28.6%. The evaluation of introducing new technology and creating a new organizational system shows nearly the same proportions.

The innovative activity of the examined firms (33%) is mostly present in product and market innovation, and their innovation income (Rammer et al 2008) comes, among other innovative pursuits, mostly from these innovations.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of relation of innovation income and innovation type

Income and	χ^2 Value	df	Pearson Chi-Square significance (2-sided)	Cramer V
new product /services	19.504	3	p<0.000	0.234
new market	37.403	3	p<0.000	0.328
other innovation	21.576	3	p<0.000	0.381

Source: own research

In the next section, I am going to examine whether there is innovative cooperation at the level of the questioned companies. Those firms with a development pursuit (64.6%) tend to do it on their own, which is *independently*. In this regard, only 15.7% cooperate with other enterprises, while 8.7% seek cooperation with universities and research institutes, 11.4% with consultant firms and 9.2% with other partners (suppliers, parent company). It is indicative of distrust that R&D services are offered by a minority of enterprises (23.8%).

For the enterprises surveyed, a medium-strength correlation can be seen between R&D workforce and the rates of returns from developing a new product or new service. This means that the larger the R&D workforce, the more positive results the enterprises report on returns from innovation. The average R&D workforce is of 7 people at enterprises.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of relation of innovation income and R&D workforce

Income	χ^2 Value	df	Pearson Chi-Square significance (2-sided)	Cramer V
new product	145.367	72	p<0.000	0.407
new service	100.806	72	p<0.014	0.356
new market	105.955	69	p<0.003	0.368
other innovation	95.770	45	p<0.000	0.505

Source: own research

It was yet another aim to prove that enterprises surveyed needed more trust and a higher degree of cooperation with market actors, which would make innovation better and easier. Therefore, the enterprises were asked to define the measures that would help their innovative activity. The answers made it clear that innovation could be enhanced as a consequence of a decrease in bureaucracy (82.4%). According to most of the enterprises (71.2%), a higher level of trust would also add to innovation in the world of business. Around two-thirds of the enterprises (65.8%) assumed that a closer connection and cooperation with customers would boost innovation; in addition, it would be necessary for innovators to feel recognized in society (62.2%). Establishing closer connections with suppliers or forming horizontal integration, i.e., cluster initiatives in order to ensure better cooperation are at the bottom in the rankings of innovation-fostering approaches.

After inter-organizational cooperation, I am also examining cooperation within the organization. I presumed that there is a co-worker innovative activity within companies, but firms refuse to spend money on it. For this reason, I am going to analyze whether the interviewed enterprises involve their co-workers in innovation.

Analysis of H2

Creative ideas from employees are welcome in more than half of the enterprises (54.6%; 445) without the employees being rewarded for their ideas. An employee having come up with an innovative idea is singled out for special praise in one out of four enterprises (26.5%; 216).

Employees get even promoted (23%; 187) or rewarded (20.8%; 169) for innovation in one out of five enterprises. New ideas and decisions seem to be management prerogatives, without employee participation in 128 enterprises. Innovation-oriented employees serve as a role model in 9% (74) of the enterprises. Based on the statistics on innovation, employees are not expected to participate in innovation; therefore, ideas are created and decisions are made at management level in an average of 15.8% of the enterprises.

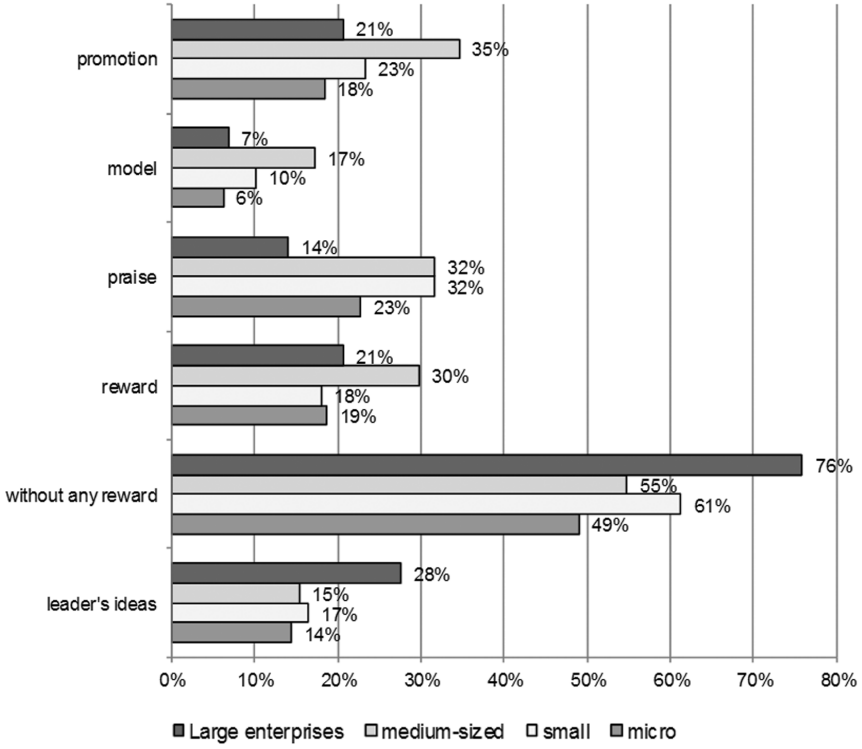
Within the examined companies, *innovative activity* does not correlate with the management, but with the *co-workers included in the innovation*. There is barely any correlation revealed in cases when co-workers are expected to innovate without any material or non-material compensation ($p=0.021$, Cramer's $V=0.081$). Compared to this, when the co-worker's innovative activity is rewarded in some form, the correlation is much stronger ($p<0.000$, Cramer's $V=0.207$).

Analysis of H3

I examined the applied motivational tools regarding the internal organizational factors which the enterprises named as hindering innovation: owner preference, the indifference of the co-workers and financial problems.

As far as internal impedimental factors are concerned, a tight budget turned out to be the most common problem (452), while investment risks were the second most problematic issue of the enterprises (363). Owner's preference and employee dissatisfaction appeared as impeding innovative activity in less significant proportions in enterprises (8%; 65 and 16.7%; 136, respectively).

In those 65 enterprises where respondents held the view that the owner's preference impeded innovation, as many as every five enterprises (21.5% being the highest proportion) have executives doing innovative activity themselves. At these companies, lower than average (7.7%) incentive is found to apply rewards such as "example to follow". Praise is least common in those enterprises (18.5%) where owners' preferences pose a problem.



Source: own research

Figure 2. Share of the motivation and internal innovative capabilities at the different-sized companies, %

These motivational tools are found more often within companies where the main problem is the indifference of the co-workers. In these enterprises, it is made sure that staff is given credit in significantly higher proportion (27.2%) than the average (20.8%). In these firms employees continuously coming up with new ideas have the best opportunity for a promotion (20.6%). Management innovation at these firms approaches the average figures (17.6%). Return of ideas increase innovation activity (Pearson chi-square sign. $p<0{,}000$; Cramer's $V=0.239$).

Conclusions

Trust, one of the pillars of social capital, permeates our everyday life to a degree that its presence or absence has become the focus of my research. The aim of this paper is to prove from a theoretical and practical point of view that trust and cooperation positively correlate with the innovative activity of enterprises.

I conducted a secondary research in the relevant literature and found that Hungary is characterized by low innovative activity and equally low social capital. My primary research confirmed this claim. I could also verify that the few existing innovative enterprises pursuit all such activities on their own: they refuse to open to or cooperate with others. The innovation normally derived from cooperation is also low, and it is characterized and dominated by corruption, bureaucracy, power and decision-making distances etc. – factors which are the subject of another essay (Marosi 2013). Although the results show that co-workers seem to participate in such activities, the enterprise itself mostly fails to give "due" compensation for their effort. The general opinion seems to be that such contribution from the employer is the expected norm, and if this is true, we cannot speak about real trust within the organization.

My researches verified a medium-strength positive correlation between trust and innovative pursuits. The strength of the relation can be explained by the fact that innovation is not only affected by trust, but by other factors as well like customer and supplier relationship, network-type cooperation within the cluster, corporate tax, the problem of risk capital etc.; these factors also mark the continuation and new directions of the research.

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