

## SOCIAL INNOVATION TIES: A DILEMMA OF PRODUCT AND EMPLOYEE ORIENTATION

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**Abstract:** The main goal of the paper is to evaluate the existing situation in the area of innovative activity in social enterprises. A secondary research data-based analysis has been made to open up discussions for future research in the area of the level of innovative activity, development of social enterprises and social innovation, which are presented as five mini case studies. As was confirmed by the qualitative description and comparison, social innovations in the mentioned companies are mostly determined by employees (80%) and products (40%). When the level of care about employee-oriented innovations is so high, other areas could be lower (Employee>Product >Enterprise). The added value of this paper is the identification of “Employee-oriented” social innovation, which could solve predominantly social issues in a company, not societal problems as the main point of social enterprises.

**Key words:** Social Innovations, Support, Innovative Activities, Social Enterprises

DOI: 10.17512/pjms.2018.17.2.11

*Article's history:*

*Received February 7, 2018; Revised March 24, 2018; Accepted May 2, 2018*

### Introduction

Innovation is a very widely discussed concept regarding business activity (Ivanová and Čepel, 2018; Povolná and Švarcová, 2017), which can be defined as a result of human activities in general. Many of them positively increase the quality of life and innovation activity can do this more effectively (Baregheh et al., 2009; Bessant and Tidd, 2007; Zygmunt, 2017; Wierzbicka, 2018). On the other hand, innovations can be seen as enhancing the set of production possibilities when they present a new or improved product in the market in the form of product innovation (Pfeiffer, 1997). It is possible that innovations have a positive effect on company climate and help to maintain a strong organizational culture. A strong organizational culture supports good relationships in a company and is beneficial for creative and innovative thinking (Mitrović et al., 2014; Naranjo-Valencia et al., 2011; Wolf et al., 2012; Sachpazidu-Wójcicka, 2017), but socio-cultural aspects are also important (Andrijauskiene and Dumciuviene, 2018).

On Contrary to this, the definition of “social” innovation is not uniform. Mulgan (2006) offers a useful distinction that may enhance the understanding of those for whom social innovation is a novel concept, “Social innovation refers to innovative activities and services that are motivated by the goal of meeting a social need and

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that are predominantly developed and diffused through organizations whose primary purposes are social. Business innovation is generally motivated by profit maximization". They may exist across markets, governments, politics, and movements as well as in social enterprises, where good examples of these activities are fair trade, new models of public healthcare and microcredit or pedagogical models of childcare. Social innovations must be connected with innovative activities and are created to meet a social need. They are diffused through primary organizational goals, where they meet such a social need. Mulgan (2006) has stated, "a good example of socially innovative new organizations is the Big Issue, which publishes the Big Issue Magazine and its international successor network of magazines sold by homeless people". The social dimension of innovation is seen as a very important idea, which has become widely accepted (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014; Hellström, 2004). Social innovations are crucial for economic and social development, and thus social welfare. One even claims that the emphasis on the social component in the general mainstream of innovation activity is one of the strongest grounds for the successful functioning and development of enterprises (Shpak et al., 2017). In other words, they are innovations that are both good for society and enhance society's capacity to act. In the private sector the essence of innovations comes from social or public need and it brings a new organization in providing social services for society (Mulgan, 2006; Lee et al., 2012; Bekkers et al., 2013). A special phenomenon of social innovations may be seen in their insignificant relationship with technology driven innovations (Howaldt and Schwarz, 2010).

Since a variety of definitions of the term social innovation have been suggested and this paper is focused on the Czech Republic, this paper uses the definition suggested by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (2015) who define it as "A new and better alternative to solutions (i.e. more efficient, more effective, sustainable, fairer) that meets urgent social (or societal) needs while creating new social relationships or cooperation". Social innovation could include new products, processes, services, organizational arrangements, technology, ideas, regulations, institutional forms, functions and roles (Grabara et al., 2016), social movements, interventions and new solutions to social needs. Such approaches, however, have failed to address the relationship between innovation in general and social innovation, where each company related to the corporate social responsibility concept (CSR) could belong to it, if they met the criteria of a social pillar in the CSR concept 3.0. There are also some definitions, which have been put forward due to their explanatory value. It may perhaps be useful at this stage to also separate social innovation from traditional conceptions of innovation in the wider economy. Following on from that definition, social innovations may be found mostly in social enterprises.

When social innovations are closely connected with social enterprises, they exist for a social and/or environmental purpose. They must combine financial and

commercial goals within social and/or environmental goals. Social enterprises must also behave in a business-like manner. (Spearet al., 2009).

This paper is focused on social innovation and innovative activity in social enterprises in the Czech Republic, where very little is currently known about innovation diversification (Wildmanová 2017; Dohnalová et al., 2015; Spearet al., 2009). Therefore a research question arises: *Do all the social innovations in these social enterprises have a direct impact only on disadvantaged employees?* The aim of this paper is to evaluate the existing situation in the area of innovative activity in social enterprises in order to evaluate their employee and societal impact. Qualitative research is focused on innovative activity evaluation in social enterprises in the Czech Republic.

### **Research Methods**

To acquire relevant information in the field of social enterprises and their innovative activity a combination of primary and secondary research is needed (Mulgan, 2006; Tucker, 2014). The main focus of these research methods in that area is to investigate uncharted waters about social entrepreneurship definition, innovations and its support. (Weerawardena and Mort, 2006). This research methodology had three phases. In the first phase, literature review and secondary data were collected and described with a basic qualitative description in the form of mini-case studies. As an output, the authors obtained a useful set of indicators for the second phase of the study. In the second phase an evaluation of innovative potential was made according to literature review results. In the last phase, the authors worked with a deductive logic (Yin, 1994) to set up a study-proposition of a matrix of problems. The study aimed to fit a preselected theoretical framework (social innovation evaluation).

The literature review was conducted to provide a bibliographical analysis in order to obtain deeper information about social entrepreneurship in the Czech Republic. The method of bibliographical analysis had some limitations, where publicly accessed databases could not include all papers published in the area of social entrepreneurship. Unfortunately there are few resources in the Czech Republic to review regarding the subject of social enterprises and their innovation activities. (Šebestová and Palová, 2016) A critical comparison of studies in the field of social enterprises and innovation activities will be carried out to find the research gap in the field. Companies mentioned in these mini-case studies include every form of organization - profit, non-profit and public-sector organizations.

### **Data Sources Description**

Today there are more than 200 social enterprises in the Czech Republic, which are registered on the platform of social businesses (MPSV, 2018). These social enterprises are classified by industry, their main focus, business location or target group. All social enterprises are not in evidence because being in the registry is not

required by law, where legal documents are underdeveloped at present. The number of social enterprises in the Czech Republic has increased quite quickly in last seven years (2010- 68, 2018-211 entities).

Social enterprises as legal entities are not legislatively defined in the Czech Republic at present. Put simply, in the Czech Republic every organization can be a form of social enterprise, if it meets the criteria of economic, environmental and social principles and if 50% of its profit is re-invested into the organization. (TESSEA, 2018). Social enterprises in the Czech Republic often use public funds for filling job positions, which are connected with their social work i.e. giving employment to people who have social problems, which are disadvantageous in the labour market. Social enterprises can use public support because they fulfil the criteria for integrated forms of employment and this is the only recognized form of social business in the Czech Republic, (Wildmannová, 2017). Socially integrative enterprises do not offer socially oriented products nor provide social services. They merely employ people who have some type of social problems. For this reason we need to use a specific definition for social enterprises in the Czech Republic: “*They are business entities that operate in the open labour market and offer employment to disadvantaged people*” (Boukal, 2013). A work integration social enterprise (WISE) must meet several requirements: (a) supporting social inclusions i.e. at least 40% of all employees are from target groups; (b) supporting the inclusion of workers in management; (c) the enterprise must be locally or regionally and environmentally oriented; (d) at least 51% of its profit must be reinvested in the social enterprise and part of the possible profit must be used for the development or operation of services aimed at its beneficiary target group (Dohnalová et al., 2015; Wronka, 2013). However, due to their specific focus, they cannot reach the full portfolio of innovation mentioned in the literature. Simply saying they cannot have any motivation for social innovation associated with social products or social services. They must have social innovations connected with management of human resources.

### Mini Case Study Setting

In order to answer research question a qualitative comparison has been made so as to enable transferring it into a quantitative type of research within the whole sample, which is not the main focus of this paper. A sample of five randomly selected social enterprises, which met the above defined definition, was compared in order to understand their true motivation to be innovative in the social economy. Qualitative criteria were based on studies of several Czech Authors (Wildmannová, 2017; Vaceková et al., 2016; Dohnalová et al., 2015) and they were the following: (a) Organization description (size, specialization, focus group); (b) Source of financing; (c) dependence on public support and (d) Type of innovations – connection to society or simply to a focus group (to meet the criteria of integration)? A McDonough and McDonough (1997) and Zainal (2007) approach was used to ensure descriptive mini-case studies in a narrative form. The

presented case studies are authentic and based on information about social enterprises and personal experience with the described organization.

### **Main Findings**

As has been stated, five companies are qualitatively analyzed as case studies to acquire a starting point for deeper analysis. These existing companies were coded as E1 to E5. Basic information was ascertained in cooperation with customers of the companies and other information was acquired from company websites.

*E1: Without Barriers, Without Borders.* This company was founded in 2003. The target group is based on persons with disabilities, graduates, from secondary schools and universities and seniors. A total of 17 persons currently work in sheltered workshops. In total E1 have 27 employees, where 24 of them are disabled. E1 offers services such as document digitization and shredding (for example digitizing large-format documents and books or shredding rejected documents), waste separation for recycling (particularly electrical equipment) and other services (barrier free access monitoring of municipalities and towns, assembling and packaging of products, processing of data for studies and analysis or lectures for schools). Some projects are co-financed from the European Regional Development Fund under the Integrated Regional Operational Program. Otherwise the enterprise does not ask for any public support, sources of financing come from its own resources.

*E2: Hand Made Wooden Toys.* This company was founded in 1999 and the main mission of it is to offer jobs to people with disabilities. Its main products are wooden toys and traditional board games, the social impact can be seen in saving traditional craft traditions from a mountain region. The toys produced are made of natural wood and have a non-toxic surface treatment. As their own innovation, they offer unique board games for visually impaired people such as five in a Row, Logic and Ludo. Their other well-known products are puppet theatres, furniture and pet toys. To support environmentally friendly behaviour they offer waste bins for waste sorting on railway stations. The company employs 35 people, where 75% of them have some sort of disability. At present, the owners have 2 different companies, where they have 50 employees with disabilities, some of whom have been working there since 2000. These employees have mostly physical disabilities, they work in full-time positions as operational staff – they finish off toys and carry out gluing. They are paid on a piecework basis. The company is not dependent on public subsidies (such as donations, grants...).

*E3: Cardboard Packages.* This company was founded in 2010 with the aim of starting up as a social enterprise with EU support as cooperative. Its main mission is to build a new social enterprise, a sustainable small-scale paper production plant with a low-cost design. The company employs 4 people with disabilities (part-time jobs) and 2 people without disabilities. The company is engaged in the production of cardboard and corrugated board packaging. The Social Enterprise is co-financed by the European Union, the European Social Fund and the Human Resources and

Employment Operational Program. The objective of the project is to create and secure sustainable employment for persons with a health or social disadvantage in a normal business environment, including their individual development through new entrepreneurial activities fulfilling the principles of social entrepreneurship, described as the business organization that solves problems related to social sustainability (Bajdor, 2017).

*E4: Construction Company.* A company, which aims to achieve new job positions for people with limited opportunities in the job market and who belong to socially excluded ethnic groups. It has been in business since 2009 and is still growing and creating new job positions. The E4 enterprise specializes in the repair and reconstruction of halls for livestock production. The reconstruction work is carried out in two ways: either by removing the construction's outer layer and replacing it with a new layer (usually using own panels) including the roof or by demolishing the whole hall, laying foundations and erecting a new hall designed by the investor. The company has been certified as an Ethically Friendly employer since 2011. They have 18 permanent staff, mostly Roma. The social enterprise project was supported from EU funds, after being completed in 2012; the company has a self-financing business model.

*E5: Counselling and Training Centre for Disabled People.* It was founded in 2003 by a natural person and this fact is reflected in his/her involvement in the running of the company. That is why it implements business and social projects, which are not only for the creation of new jobs but also, above all, the possibility of the professional and personal advancement of the employee. It supports a positive relationship with the environment and environmental protection in all of its work and social activities. E5 employs almost 300 employees, of which 84% are people with disabilities. E5 has developed its own innovative philosophy of accessing to products with the name "Ergoprogress Integration Social Entrepreneurship". This product of social enterprise management has been established and further developed by the Neratov and Otradov, Ltd, Association and offers training and counselling at the Counselling Centre for Social Entrepreneurship in Prague and the Ergoeduka Training Centre. According to available data, the company does not use public support. The company is financed by its own activities.

The table below was specially created for the evaluation of the qualitative description of E1 to E5, in meeting criteria, which were set in the methodology section. These criteria include organization description, source of financing and type of innovations. To ensure that the evaluation was clear the main criteria were defined as follows: (a) *Organization description* includes size, specialization and focus group, where size describes the number of health-disadvantaged employees in the company, specialization describes the knowledge of products the company sells and the focus group describes whether a company has a select group of disadvantaged people it focuses on, (b) *Source of financing* evaluates dependence on public support and own financing. Dependence on public support indicates whether an enterprise uses, for example, subsidies from the state or the European



Union for its social activity. Own financing indicates whether an enterprise uses the finance it derives from its own activities. (c) The last section of innovation includes employee-focused innovation, product-oriented innovation and enterprises-wide innovation.

Based on previous bibliographical and qualitative analysis, three levels of innovation activities are identified. The concept of “employee-oriented innovation” has been introduced and does not appear in the literature and it is value added for qualitative results.

- Employee focused innovation expresses whether an enterprise is creating innovation concerning its disadvantaged employees, for example, with the help of innovation that will make it easier for employees to work.
- Product-oriented innovation expresses whether an enterprise is generating innovations in the production and sales of its products.
- Enterprise-wide innovation expresses whether an enterprise is creating innovation for the benefit of its own enterprise, for example, by modernizing the business space.

Table 1 evaluates whether an enterprise does fulfil the criteria, does not fulfil the criteria or there is no certainty as to whether or not the enterprise fulfils the criteria. After evaluating the criteria from E1 to E5, it is clear how enterprises operate on the basis of selected criteria. This measurement is based on qualitative and subjective evaluation, where a tick (√) means that the enterprise fulfils the criteria. A cross (X) indicates that the enterprise does not fulfil the criteria and a hyphen (-) means that there is uncertainty as to whether an enterprise fulfils or fails to fulfil the criteria.

**Table 1. Qualitative Evaluation of Mini-cases**

Criteria		E1	E2	E3	E4	E5
Organization description	Size	√	√	√	-	√
	Specialization	√	√	√	√	√
	Focus group	√	√	√	√	√
Source of financing	Dependence on public support	√	√	√	√	-
	Own financing	√	√	√	√	√
Type of innovations	Employee-focused innovation	√	X	√	-	-
	Product-oriented innovation	√	√	-	√	√
	Enterprise-wide innovation	√	-	X	√	X

All enterprises except E1 have some uncertainty about innovation and thanks to this there is uncertainty about the importance of individual innovations for enterprises. Further research will focus on the importance and difficulty while creating the above innovations. Following the previous description, the main focus on innovations is kept to be able solve a strategic dilemma of the innovation impact (Table 2). In this case, a Likert scale (1 to 5) is used to evaluate the current situation in presented enterprises. The total score represents the final innovative position of an enterprise (importance x difficulty) in three innovation areas

(employee, product, enterprise), where position is determined by the following scale: (i) High importance of that area(25-13 points);(ii) Medium importance (10.5-12.5 points); (iii) Low importance (less than 10.5 points).

**Table 2.Strategic Dilemma of Innovation Impact**

	Employee-focused innovation (EFI)			Product-oriented innovation (POI)			Enterprise-wide innovation (EWI)			Σ 1-3	Position
	I	D	TS 1	I	D	TS 2	I	D	TS3		
E1	3	5	<b>15</b>	4.5	3	<b>13.5</b>	5	2	10	<b>38.5</b>	2.
E2	2	3.5	<b>7</b>	5	1	<b>5</b>	2	2	4	<b>16</b>	5.
<b>E3</b>	5	5	<b>25</b>	3	4.5	<b>13.5</b>	1.5	4	6	<b>44.5</b>	<b>1.</b>
E4	3	5	<b>15</b>	1	5	<b>5</b>	2	5	10	<b>30</b>	4.
E5	3	5	<b>15</b>	5	2.5	<b>12.5</b>	1	4	4	<b>31.5</b>	3.

Importance, I (1- low importance, 5 high importance), Difficulty, D (1 low difficulty, 5 high difficulty), TS – Total Score

These evaluations confirm that 80% of social innovations in the examined cases are employee oriented. In the first two cases (E1 and E2) this approach is closely connected with the charisma, personality and entrepreneurial spirit of the company owner. Contrarily the last three companies (E3 to E5) are mostly oriented on employees but this innovative approach brings about a limitation regarding product and enterprise innovation because of the employee structure and caring about them. In comparison to the final position, it could be seen as different behaviour in these three areas. When the level of care about employee-oriented innovations is so high, other areas could be lower (EFI>POI >EWI).

As it is confirmed by the qualitative description and comparison, social innovations in the mentioned companies are mostly determined by employees (80%) and products (40%) so we are able to work with the behavioural optimisation of Weerawardena and Mort (2006), who relate to social value creation as follows:

$$SVC = f(I, P, RM) \text{ subject to } S; SM; E \quad (1)$$

Where SVC: social value creation; I: innovativeness; P: proactiveness; RM: risk management; S: sustainability; SM: social mission; E: environment

According to the findings proactiveness must be replaced or extended as openness to the community (O) and one internal factor must be added to the socially innovative ecosystem: relationship with people inside the company (R). This is related to the definition of a new term “employee-oriented innovation”.It seems than innovativeness increases when people are involved in the innovation process and are not just passive users, when

$$SVC = f(I, R, Openness, RM) \text{ within } S, SM, E \quad (2).$$



## Conclusion

The presented study has discussed a wide area of social innovation and its use in the profit and non-profit sector. It is appropriate to clarify the extent to which social enterprises create social innovation, i.e. innovation for health-disadvantaged workers. Further research must focus on the distribution of innovation processes in social enterprises. This is clearly visible in the above-described enterprises, where information is available, but there is a degree of uncertainty here, in fact owing to the previous analysis more questions than answers in the area of social innovations have occurred, which sadly reflects the current state of social enterprises in the Czech Republic and results of previous studies (Šebestová and Palová, 2016, Dohnalová, 2015; Wildmannová, 2017). The analysis provided in this paper is fully transferable within all social enterprises in the Czech Republic when the same system of data collection and methodology of the survey will be maintained. Limitation of the study can be seen in validation of results –when the results are valid only on a company level, where they describe the subjective opinion of each respondent. At this time, it is not possible to clearly determine at what proportion innovations have been created in relation to employee-focused innovation, product-oriented innovation and enterprise-wide innovation. Managers could use results as a basis for a comparative study within other socially oriented enterprises to give a transparent picture of their active supporters.

## Acknowledgement

*This work was supported by the Silesian University in Opava, by the Student Grant System SGS/06/2018 “Economic Literacy of Business Entities”.*

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### INNOWACYJNE WIĘZI SPOŁECZNE: DYLEMAT ORIENTACJI PRODUKTU I PRACOWNIKÓW

**Streszczenie:** Głównym celem artykułu jest ocena obecnej sytuacji w zakresie działalności innowacyjnej w przedsiębiorstwach społecznych. Przeprowadzono wtórną analizę danych w celu otwarcia dyskusji na temat przyszłych badań w zakresie poziomu działalności innowacyjnej, rozwoju przedsiębiorstw społecznych i innowacji społecznych, które przedstawiono w pięciu badaniach przypadku. Opis i porównanie jakościowe potwierdzają, że innowacje społeczne we wspomnianych firmach są w większości zdeterminowane przez pracowników (80%) i produkty (40%). Gdy poziom dbałości o innowacje zorientowane na pracownika jest wysoki, inne obszary mogą być niższe (Pracownik > Produkt > Przedsiębiorstwo). Wartością dodaną tego dokumentu jest identyfikacja innowacji społecznych "zorientowanych na pracownika", które mogłyby rozwiązać głównie problemy społeczne w firmie, a nie problemy społeczne, jako główny punkt przedsiębiorstw społecznych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** innowacje społeczne, wsparcie, innowacyjne działania, przedsiębiorstwa społeczne

#### 社会创新模式：产品困境与员工定位

**摘要：**本文的主要目标是评估社会企业创新活动领域的现状。已经做出了基于二次研究数据的分析，以开展关于创新活动水平，社会企业发展水平和社会创新水平未来研究的讨论，这些研究是以五个小案例研究的形式提出的。正如定性描述和比较所证实的，上述公司的社会创新主要由员工（80%）和产品（40%）决定。当关注以员工为导向的创新水平如此之高时，其他领域可能会更低（员工 > 产品 > 企业）。本文的附加价值在于识别“以员工为本”的社会创新，它可以解决公司中主要的社会问题，而不是作为社会企业主要问题的社会问题。

**关键词：**社会创新，支持，创新活动，社会企业。