The Impact of Age and Gender on Strategic Innovation in Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises in Egypt

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ABSTRACT

Micro, small and medium sized enterprises are considered to be the engine of growth in any economy, specifically in developing countries. The Egyptian economy is highly dependent on these enterprises in terms of stimulating the economy and providing job opportunities to a vastly growing population of young people. The majority of studies about innovation are concerned mainly with improving product, process and organizational innovation as a whole, and not addressing the people aspect. Human beings are the ones responsible for those activities within organizations, and one way of identifying those individuals is through investigating their age and gender and how it impacts their strategic innovation initiatives. In Egypt there are gender differences in terms of entrepreneurial initiatives, as well as differences in entrepreneurial activity with regards to age. Given the entrepreneurial disparities in age and gender, researchers were intrigued to see whether these age and gender disparities among entrepreneurs, top managers, middle managers and non-managerial levels were mirrored in terms of their impact on strategic innovation in these enterprises. This study aims to examine the impact of age and gender on strategic innovation initiatives in micro, small and medium enterprises. A single cross sectional descriptive design was used; a purposive sample of 110 employees in micro, small and medium enterprises in Egypt was drawn from top managers and middle managers and non-managerial levels. Data was collected through a questionnaire that was adapted from existing scales and was used as a data collection tool in a bigger research project investigating variables that affected strategic innovation in M/SMEs in Egypt. Unstructured interviews were conducted on entrepreneurs as well and the results were illustrated as case examples in the literature. Results showed that gender had no effect on strategic innovation, age affected strategic innovation with younger age groups displaying more strategic innovation than older age groups. The results of the interviews showed that engaging the customer in idea generation yielded the best results with regards to innovation.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Innovation, Knowledge management, M/SMEs, Egypt