Summary

Nowadays, innovation has become a dominant paradigm in management and research. It has been described as a "religion of the twenty-first century industry" that offers a new vision of economic change and restructuring, of competition, competitiveness and survival in a turbulent and uncertain business environment. Innovative enterprises can create new products and differentiate themselves in the market. The need for companies to constantly innovate is strongly emphasized throughout the management literature on innovation.

But innovation does not fall like "manna from the sky," as economist Robert Solow said. Innovation is the product of complex national systems and strategies designed to coordinate a number of disparate policies that influence the capacity and ability of private and public actors to innovate effectively. These include policies related to scientific research, commercialisation of technologies, investment in information and communication technologies (ICTs), education and skills development, taxation, trade, intellectual property (IP), public acquisitions and competition and regulatory policies.

We also note that many of the activities mentioned in this study, especially those related to the environment, involve changes within the enterprise that can be classified as innovation activities. Another element of analysis is the motivation for CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) and innovation. Surprisingly, the responses we obtained from managers showed that the determining factors for the implementation of the two principles are the same, namely: financial benefits (tax exemptions, obtaining subsidies, access to funds), image improvement and competitiveness. For example, customer engagement in the design of new products strengthens customer relationships, improves business relationships in general, and contributes to innovation by identifying previously unmet needs. Managers unanimously felt that the two concepts were essential for a consistent performance and long-term success.

In recent years, a new concept in innovation management has emerged in specialized literature, namely open innovation. However, the concept of open innovation has been little investigated in our country and quite controversial in the international literature. This new paradigm is based on the consideration that firms cannot carry out all

their research and development activities alone and therefore they must harness external knowledge. At the same time, internal ideas and knowledge will be taken over by the market and can generate additional value. Thereby we understand that companies need to systematically use external knowledge to increase their innovative performance. Over the past decade, research on open innovation has brought attention to the ways in which companies can gain from interactions with external sources of knowledge and innovation.

Then, regarding open innovation, we mention that the absorption capacity and the innovation capacity are interconnected, in a relationship of interdependence rather than substitution. Absorption capacity is essential in explaining the success of some companies in relation to others, in terms of creating and attracting value from external sources, such as adopting new technologies or working with partners for innovation. An open innovation project does not end with the launch of a new product, this is only the beginning. The companies involved acquire new skills and thus become more competent, more profitable. Such initiatives always generate new opportunities, and this ultimately translates into improved absorption capacity. On the other hand, the market is very dynamic and a new product can be picked up by the competition in a relatively short time, so new strategies must always be taken into consideration.

A common aspect of the responses received from the interviewed managers is the focus of the firm's efforts on creating value for a certain category of clients. They start with a more or less coherent idea of a customer need, of that something to which the customer attributes value. And this way, innovation starts in the existing business model. Sometimes the new business model is simple, other times it is shaped by a complex process that can take months and is followed by decisions on the technologies to be used and potential partners. Although an open innovation project is emerging, it changes along the way, discoveries and adjustments are made, and a comprehensive business plan must be in place. When businesses innovate, they increase the functionality of a product, making it more accessible to the customer (in terms of usage) and adding services to an existing product, or offering new customer experiences. This last aspect is difficult to fulfil, but it always proves profitable in the long term and greatly improves the market position of the firm.

In terms of creativity methods and techniques, we also focused on Benchmarking and the TRIZ method. Unfortunately, the TRIZ method is little known and even less applied in Romania, a country ranked last in the European Union's Innovation Scoreboard.

Innovation is particularly important for economies as they approach the frontiers of knowledge, and the possibility of generating more value simply by integrating and adapting exogenous technologies tends to disappear. In these economies, companies need to design and develop top-level products and processes in order to maintain a competitive edge and move towards more valuable activities. This development requires an environment conducive to innovative activity, supported by both the public and private sectors, in particular through sufficient investment in research and development (R&D), the presence of high-quality scientific research institutions that can generate the basic knowledge needed to build new technologies, extensive collaboration in the field of research and technological development between universities and the industry, and the protection of intellectual property (Klaus Schwab, 2017).

One explanation of the economic gap between Western and Eastern European countries, including Romania, is the late commitment of Eastern countries to modernizing their economies. On the other hand, a number of medium or small sized countries, such as South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong in Asia and Ireland in Europe, that engaged later than Romania in this process, have achieved in a period of about a quarter of a century, results that have been qualified as true economic miracles. Specific to the Eastern European countries is the fact that the modernization process of their economies was marked, after the Second World War, by the change imposed from the outside, of the capitalist paradigm of development, with results that turned out to be disastrous, so after half a century they returned to the original paradigm. A quarter of a century after this comeback, the exact period necessary for the mentioned countries to achieve true miracles, Romania's economy remains underperforming, with the exception of isolated cases.

Although national institutions and dynamics vary, small countries can generally obtain resources to develop innovation by joining regional organizations, or they can develop potential industries through effective local industrial policies.

The habilitation thesis summarizes the research activity and the results obtained by the candidate after earning the title of Doctor of the Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, confirmed by the Doctor's Degree no. 203 of January 16, 2013. The habilitation thesis presents, succinctly, the main results obtained by the author following the continuation of the research undertaken within the doctoral thesis in the field of the manager's role in small and medium enterprises.

The habilitation thesis was structured in four chapters. The first chapter presents the strategy and dimensions of innovation, the need for innovation, the types of innovation, corporate social responsibility (CSR), social responsibility within SMEs, the causes of low innovation in Romania. The second chapter deals with ways to stimulate innovation- open innovation projects, the role of the manager in open innovation, the specifics of open innovation in SMEs and collaborative innovation. The third chapter presents modern methods of creativity as contributions to the innovation process.