СТОПАНСКА АКАДЕМИЯ „Д. А. ЦЕНОВ“ – СВИЩОВ

СЪЮЗ НА УЧЕНИТЕ В БЪЛГАРИЯ – КЛОН СВИЩОВ

Международна научна конференция

ПРОБЛЕМИ И ПРЕДИЗВИКАТЕЛСТВА ПРЕД ИКОНОМИЧЕСКИТЕ НАУКА И ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ ПРЕЗ XXI ВЕК

Свищов, 22 ноември 2024 г.

Сборник с доклади

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СЪДЪРЖАНИЕ

ИКОНОМИКС, ФИНАНСИ, ЗАСТРАХОВАНЕ, СОЦИАЛНО ДЕЛО

ОБЕКТ, ЦЕЛ И РЕЗУЛТАТИ ОТ НАУЧНИТЕ ИЗСЛЕДВАНИЯ НА СЪВРЕМЕННОТО НАЦИОНАЛНО СТОПАНСТВО
Проф. д.ик.н Росица Чобанова 7

КОНЦЕПТУАЛНА РАМКА НА ЕНЕРГИЙНАТА СИГУРНОСТ
Проф. д-р Андрей Захариев, докт. Илиан Илчев 15

PARALLEL ANALYSIS OF THE INVESTMENT ATTRACTIVENESS OF THE LARGE LISTED COMPANIES FROM THE TOURISM SECTOR
Prof. Stefan Simeonov, PhD, PhD student Alexey Gudev 22

МОДЕЛЪТ ЗА АНАЛИЗ „ДЮ ПОНТ“ КАТО ВЪЗМОЖНОСТ ЗА ОЦЕНКА НА ДЕЙНОСТТА НА ЖИВОТОЗАСТРАХОВАТЕЛНИТЕ ДРУЖЕСТВА В БЪЛГАРИЯ
Доц. д-р Венцислав Василев 32

ЗА ЛИПСВАЩАТА ВРЪЗКА МЕЖДУ ДАНЪЧНАТА АВТОНОМНОСТ НА ОБЩИНИТЕ И МЕСТНАТА СТОПАНСКА АКТИВНОСТ
Доц. д-р Людмил Найденов 41

ВЛИЯНИЕ НА НАРАСТВАЩАТА ПРОДЪЛЖИТЕЛНОСТ НА ЖИВОТ НА ЕВРОПЕЙСКИТЕ ГРАЖДАНИ ВЪРХУ ДЪЛГОСРОЧНИТЕ ГРИЖИ
Доц. д-р Николай Нинов 49

ПАЗАРНИ ОСОБЕНОСТИ НА ПРОМЯНАТА НА УЧАСТИЕТО НА ОСИГУРЕНИТЕ ЛИЦА ВЪВ ФОНДОВЕТЕ ЗА ДОПЪЛНИТЕЛНО ДОБРОВОЛНО ПЕНСИОННО ОСИГУРЯВАНЕ В БЪЛГАРИЯ
Доц. д-р Пламен Йорданов, гл. ас. д-р Маргарита Николова 58

ПРОБЛЕМИ В РАЗВИТИЕТО НА ЗАСТРАХОВАНЕТО „КАСКО НА МПС“ НА БЪЛГАРСКИЯ ЗАСТРАХОВАТЕЛЕН ПАЗАР
Доц. д-р Румен Ерусалимов 66

РОЛЯТА НА ВИСШЕТО ИКОНОМИЧЕСКО ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ ЗА ФОРМИРАНЕТО И ПОВИШАВАНЕТО НА ЗАСТРАХОВАТЕЛНАТА ГРАМОТНОСТ
Гл. ас. д-р Анелия Панева 73

АНАЛИТИЧЕН ПРЕГЛЕД НА ТОП 10 НА HEALTHTECH СТАРТЪПИТЕ В БЪЛГАРИЯ (СПОРЕД КЛАСАЦИИТЕ НА TRACXN)
Гл. ас. д-р Валентина Нинова 80

РАЗВИТИЕ И СЪСТОЯНИЕ НА ОСИГУРЯВАНЕТО В УНИВЕРСАЛЕН ПЕНСИОНЕН ФОНД В БЪЛГАРИЯ
Гл. ас. д-р Йордан Йорданов 91

ПАЗАРЪТ НА ТРУДА И ПРЕДИЗВИКАТЕЛСТВАТА ПРЕД УМЕНИЯТА НА РАБОТНАТА СИЛА
Гл. ас. д-р Таня Илиева 100

СТРЕС ТЕСТ НА ПУБЛИЧНИ ПРЕДПРИЯТИЯ ЧРЕЗ ALTMAN'S Z-SCORE МОДЕЛ
Ас. д-р Силвия Заркова 105

АНАЛИЗ НА СТРУКТУРАТА НА СОБСТВЕНИЯ КАПИТАЛ НА БАНКОВИЯ СЕКТОР В КОНТЕКСТА НА РЕГУЛАТОРНИТЕ ИЗИСКВАНИЯ БАЗЕЛ III
Д-р Беатрис Любенова 111

СОЦИАЛНО-ИКОНОМИЧЕСКИ ПАРАМЕТРИ НА ТРАНСПОРТНИЯ СЕКТОР - СРАВНИТЕЛЕН АНАЛИЗ
Докт. Васил Василев 123

ШОКОВИ ВЪЗДЕЙСТВИЯ НА ПАНДЕМИЯТА ВЪРХУ ОТРАСЛИ НА ИКОНОМИКАТА В БЪЛГАРИЯ И ЕС – ЕМПИРИЧНИ СВИДЕТЕЛСТВА
Докт. Горян Милев 131

ИКОНОМИЧЕСКИ ПОКАЗАТЕЛИ И ЕВОЛЮЦИЯ НА ДАНЪЧНАТА ОСНОВА В АГРАРНИЯ СЕКТОР В БЪЛГАРИЯ – ЕМПИРИЧНИ СВИДЕТЕЛСТВА
Докт. Ивайло Здравков 141

СЪСТОЯНИЕ НА ГЛОБАЛНИЯ ПАЗАР НА НЕДВИЖИМИ ИМОТИ - ТЕНДЕНЦИИ И ПРЕДИЗВИКАТЕЛСТВА
Докт. Пламен Илиев 150

ИКОНОМИЧЕСКИ ОСНОВАНИЯ ЗА ДЪРЖАВНАТА НАМЕСА: МОДЕЛИ ЗА ИНТЕРВЕНЦИЯ И COVID-19
Докт. Станислав Младенов 159

РЕГИОНАЛНА КОНВЕРГЕНЦИЯ И ДИВЕРГЕНЦИЯ НА ЦЕНОВИТЕ РАВНИЩА НА НЕДВИЖИМИТЕ ИМОТИ В БЪЛГАРИЯ: ДИНАМИКА И ТЕНДЕНЦИИ
Докт. Цондю Цондев 169

СЧЕТОВОДСТВО, КОНТРОЛ, АНАЛИЗ, СТАТИСТИКА

ВЪЗМОЖНОСТИ ЗА СЧЕТОВОДНО ОТЧИТАНЕ НА СПЕЦИФИЧНИТЕ ПРИХОДИ В ПЕНСИОННООСИГУРИТЕЛНИТЕ ДРУЖЕСТВА
Проф. д-р Атанас Атанасов 183

NEAR-EXACT DISTRIBUTIONS AND FINITE FORM REPRESENTATIONS: PROBLEMS THEY CAN SOLVE
Full Professor, Ph.D. & Hab., Carlos A. Coelho 190

НОРМАТИВНАТА РЕГЛАМЕНТАЦИЯ ОТНОСНО ОПОВЕСТЯВАНЕТО НА НЕФИНАНСОВА ИНФОРМАЦИЯ КАТО ПРЕДПОСТАВКА ЗА НАДЕЖДНА ОЦЕНКА НА УСТОЙЧИВОТО РАЗВИТИЕ НА БАНКИТЕ
Доц. д-р Венцислав Вечев 198

SUSTAINABILITY REPORTING CHALLENGES IN THE CONTEXT OF CHANGES IN ACCOUNTING LEGISLATION
Assoc. Prof. Galina Chipriyanova, PhD,
Assoc. Prof. Mihail Chipriyanov, PhD 204

ПРОБЛЕМИ И ПЕРСПЕКТИВИ ПРИ ОБУЧЕНИЕТО ПО СЧЕТОВОДСТВО В СЪВРЕМЕННИТЕ УСЛОВИЯ
Доц. д-р Галя Иванова-Кузманова 211

ПРОБЛЕМИ ПРИ ОТЧИТАНЕ НА ПРИХОДИТЕ И РАЗХОДИТЕ ПО ДОГОВОРИ ЗА СТРОИТЕЛСТВО
Доц. д-р Диана Крумова 218

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF FINANCIAL INCLUSION IN ROMANIA, BULGARIA, AND THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA THROUGH THE FINANCIAL INCLUSION INDEX OF TRADITIONAL AND FINTECH SERVICES
Assoc. Prof. Eduard Hîrbu, PhD, Hîrbu Ana 226

ИКОНОМИЧЕСКИ РАЗЛИЧИЯ И НЕРАВЕНСТВА МЕЖДУ СЕВЕРНА И ЮЖНА БЪЛГАРИЯ
Доц. д-р Красимира Славева..... 235

СТАТИСТИЧЕСКИ АНАЛИЗ НА СЕЗОННИТЕ КОЛЕБАНИЯ В ПОСЕЩЕНИЯТА НА БЪЛГАРСКИ ГРАЖДАНИ В ЧУЖБИНА
Доц. д-р Пламен Петков, докт. Пламена Колева 247

ДОКЛАДВАНЕ НА УСТОЙЧИВОСТТА НА БИЗНЕСА – СЪДЪРЖАНИЕ И АКТУАЛНИ НАСОКИ НА ЕВРОПЕЙСКИЯ СЪЮЗ
Доц. д-р Радосвета Кръстева-Христова 257

ПОЗИЦИОНИРАНЕ НА ПРИЕМА НА СТУДЕНТИ ПО АДМИНИСТРАЦИЯ И УПРАВЛЕНИЕ И ИКОНОМИКА ЗА УЧЕБНАТА 2023 – 2024 ГОДИНА В Р БЪЛГАРИЯ
доц. д-р Росица Колева 266

УСТОЙЧИВО РАЗВИТИЕ НА ОДИТОРСКИТЕ УСЛУГИ В УСЛОВИЯТА НА ДИГИТАЛНА ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЯ
Доц. д-р Силвия Костова 272

ОБЕЗЦЕНКА НА ВЗЕМАНИЯТА ОТ ПРОДАЖБИ В ПРЕДПРИЯТИЯТА
Доц. д-р Слави Генов 280

ВЛИЯНИЕ НА ДАНЪЧНИТЕ НЕСЪОТВЕТСТВИЯ ВЪРХУ ФИСКАЛНАТА СТАБИЛНОСТ
Гл. ас. д-р Жельо Желев 288

ПРЕДИЗВИКАТЕЛСТВА И ПОСЛЕДИЦИ ОТ ПРИЛАГАНЕТО НА МЕЖДУНАРОДНИЯ СТАНДАРТ ЗА ФИНАНСОВО ОТЧИТАНЕ 9 В МУЛТИНАЦИОНАЛНИТЕ КОРПОРАЦИИ: СРАВНИТЕЛЕН АНАЛИЗ
Гл. ас. д-р Кирил Димитров 296

ПРЕДИЗВИКАТЕЛСТВАТА ПРЕД ОБРАЗОВАНИЕТО ПО СЧЕТОВОДСТВО В КОНТЕКСТА НА ДИГИТАЛИЗАЦИЯТА
Гл. ас. д-р Ралица Данчева 302

НЕЗАВИСИМОСТТА НА ОДИТНИТЕ КОМИТЕТИ И ВЪТРЕШНИЯ ОДИТ В ПУБЛИЧНИЯ СЕКТОР В БЪЛГАРИЯ
Докт. Румен Гъбов 308

АНАЛИЗ НА КЛЮЧОВИ АСПЕКТИ ОТ ОРГАНИЗАЦИОННАТА СТРУКТУРА НА НАЦИОНАЛНИЯ СТАТИСТИЧЕСКИ ИНСТИТУТ
Докт. Цветозария Гатева 316

МЕНИДЖМЪНТ, МАРКЕТИНГ, МЕЖДУНАРОДНИ ОТНОШЕНИЯ, ПЛАНИРАНЕ, ИНФОРМАЦИОННИ ТЕХНОЛОГИИ

DIGITAL THREAT ANALYSIS
Professor Serghei Ohrimenco DSc, Associate Professor Lucia Gujuman, PhD, Valeriu Cernei 329

ДИГИТАЛИЗАЦИЯ НА ПОДБОРА НА ЧОВЕШКИ РЕСУРСИ В БЪЛГАРСКИТЕ ПРЕДПРИЯТИЯ
Проф. д-р Галина Захариева, докт. Маргарита Николова 336

GENERATION Z IN POLAND AND BULGARIA: CORE VALUES AND LIFE PRIORITIES
Prof. UEP. dr hab. Dariusz Nowak, Assist. Prof. Aleksandar Lichev, PhD, Szymon Nowak..... 344

СЪВРЕМЕННОТО УПРАВЛЕНИЕ НА МАРКЕТИНГОВИЯ ПЕРСОНАЛ – СПЕЦИФИКА И ПРОБЛЕМНИ АСПЕКТИ
Доц. д-р Ваня Григорова 352

ИНТЕЛИГЕНТНА СПЕЦИАЛИЗАЦИЯ И РАБОТА В МРЕЖИ
Доц. д-р Евелина Парашкевова, Доц. д-р Маргарита Шопова..... 360

POSITIVE ASPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE APPLICATIONS
Assoc. Prof. Natalia Marinova, PhD..... 368

УСТОЙЧИВО ВНЕДРЯВАНЕ НА ОБУЧЕНИЕ ПО ПРОЕКТ №: 2022-1-BG01-KA220-VET-000089399 „ПРЕДОСТАВЯНЕ НА ВЪЗМОЖНОСТ НА МСП В СЕКТОРА ХОРЕКА ЗА ЕФЕКТИВНО УСВОЯВАНЕ НА ЗНАНИЯ И ИНСТРУМЕНТИ ЗА ИЗКУСТВЕН ИНТЕЛЕКТ (HORECA 5.0)“
Доц. д-р Христо Сирашки..... 375

ИНТЕРЕСИ И МОТИВАЦИОННИ НАГЛАСИ ПРЕЗ ПОГЛЕДА НА МЕНИДЖЪРА
Гл. ас. д-р Десислава Алексиева..... 382

РОЛЯТА НА СОЦИАЛНИТЕ МЕДИИ В СЪВРЕМЕННАТА ИКОНОМИКА: ПЕРСПЕКТИВИ И ПРЕДИЗВИКАТЕЛСТВА ЗА БИЗНЕСА
Гл. ас. д-р Кремена Маринова-Костова 388

ОСОБЕНОСТИ НА МЕЖДУЛИЧНОСТНИТЕ КОНФЛИКТИ В ОРГАНИЗАЦИИТЕ И ТЯХНОТО РАЗРЕШАВАНЕ
Гл. ас. д-р Милен Динков..... 396

СЪЩНОСТ И ОСНОВНИ ХАРАКТЕРИСТИКИ НА ОТВОРЕНИТЕ ИНОВАЦИИ
Гл. ас. д-р Юлиян Господинов..... 404

ИЗКУСТВЕНИЯТ ИНТЕЛЕКТ В УПРАВЛЕНИЕТО НА ПЪТЯ НА КЛИЕНТА
Ас. д-р Стелиана Василева 412

PROTECTION OF DOCUMENT-CENTRIC SYSTEMS FROM DIGITAL THREATS
Assistant Ghenadie Belinschi 420

ИМПЛЕМЕНТИРАНЕ НА ИЗКУСТВЕН ИНТЕЛЕКТ В ГЪВКАВА МЕТОДОЛОГИЯ (SCRUM) НА УПРАВЛЕНИЕ НА ПРОЕКТИ ЗА УСТОЙЧИВО РАЗВИТИЕ
Д-р Андрей Йорданов 426

ИКОНОМИКА НА ОТРАСЛИТЕ

УСТРОЙСТВО НА ЗЕМЕДЕЛСКИТЕ ТЕРИТОРИИ – ОСОБЕНОСТИ, РЕГЛАМЕНТИ, ПРОБЛЕМИ
Проф. д-р Гена Велковска 437

КОНЦЕПТУАЛЕН МОДЕЛ ЗА УСТОЙЧИВО РАЗВИТИЕ НА СЕЛСКИТЕ ТЕРИТОРИИ В БЪЛГАРИЯ
Проф. д-р Марина Николова..... 446

AN ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT STATE AND DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES OF RETAIL AND WHOLESALE BUSINESSES IN UKRAINE
Prof., Doctor of Economics, Olena Khadzhynova, Assoc. Prof., Candidate of Economic Sciences, Larysa Kapranova, Ph. D., Roman Sharanov 456

НЯКОИ ПРАВНИ И ПРАКТИЧЕСКИ АСПЕКТИ ПРИ МЕНИДЖМЪНТА НА СТОПАНСКИТЕ ДВОРОВЕ
Доц. д-р Валери Велковски..... 462

ПРОБЛЕМИ И ПРЕДИЗВИКАТЕЛСТВА ПРЕД ЕВРОПЕЙСКИЯ АГРАРЕН СЕКТОР
Доц. д-р Виолета Блажева **473**

ЕКО-ЕФЕКТИВНИ СТРАТЕГИИ
Доц. д-р Елена Йорданова **478**

INNOVATION AND INDUSTRY 5.0 – SOME CONNECTIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES
Assoc. Prof., Iskra Panteleeva, PhD **483**

OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDUSTRIAL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT THROUGH TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATIONS
Assoc. Prof. Iskra Panteleeva, PhD, PhD Student Kalin Borisov **491**

ПРОМОТИРАНЕ НА ТУРИСТИЧЕСКАТА ДЕСТИНАЦИЯ ЧРЕЗ ДИГИТАЛНИ ИНОВАЦИИ
Доц. д-р Любка Илиева **499**

ЛОГИСТИЧНОТО ПОВЕДЕНИЕ НА ФИРМАТА, ОРГАНИЗА-ЦИОННАТА ИДЕНТИФИКАЦИЯ И ПРЕДПРИЕМАЧЕСКАТА АКТИВНОСТ НА БЪЛГАРСКИТЕ ПИВОВАРНИ ПРЕДПРИЯТИЯ
Доц. д-р Сергей Найденов **506**

ПРОУЧВАНЕ НА РЕЛАЦИЯТА МЕЖДУ ДИГИТАЛНИТЕ УМЕНИЯ ЗА ПАЗАРУВАНЕ И РАЗПОЛАГАЕМИТЕ ДОХОДИ НА ПОТРЕБИТЕЛИТЕ В БЪЛГАРИЯ
Доц. д-р Симеонка Петрова **516**

ИКОНОМИЧЕСКАТА СОЦИОЛОГИЯ В КОНТЕКСТА НА ПРЕДИЗВИКАТЕЛСТВАТА ПРЕД ИКОНОМИЧЕСКОТО ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ ПРЕЗ 21 ВЕК
Гл. ас. д-р Ваня Ганева **522**

TRANSFORMATION OF CONSUMER ONLINE PURCHASING BEHAVIOUR IN THE EUROPEAN UNION
Head Assist. Prof. Zoya Ivanova, PhD **529**

METHODS FOR GENERATING INNOVATIONS IN BULGARIAN ENTERPRISES
Head Assist. Prof. Ivaylo Kostov, Ph.D. **537**

РОЛЯ НА ПРЕДПРИЕМАЧЕСТВОТО ЗА УСТОЙЧИВО РАЗВИТИЕ НА СЕЛСКИЯ ТУРИЗЪМ
Гл. ас. д-р Павлин Павлов 545

БАРИЕРИ ПРЕД ОТВОРЕНИТЕ ИНОВАЦИИ В МАЛКИТЕ И СРЕДНИТЕ ПРЕДПРИЯТИЯ
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HUMAN RESOURCES IN THE AGE OF DIGITALIZATION
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METHODS FOR GENERATING INNOVATIONS IN BULGARIAN ENTERPRISES

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Abstract: *The current study focuses on the role of innovation in enhancing firm competitiveness and long-term sustainability in the modern global economy, as well as the methods and tactics for creating innovation and inventive thinking. Thinking outside the box is one way that inspires creativity and uncovers new opportunities by employing tactics such as brain dumping, simplifying thinking, exploring different sectors, and so on. The text also emphasizes the importance of effective collaboration to stimulate innovation through complementary skills, common goals, and sharing risks and benefits. At the end of the publication, innovation funnels are presented as a method that facilitates the management of the innovation process, helping in the implementation and selection of the most attractive innovative projects, thereby ensuring their successful implementation.*

Keywords*: innovations, thinking outside the box, effective collaboration, innovation funnels*

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1. Introduction

In today's fast-paced global marketplace, innovation is a driving force behind firm competitiveness and long-term viability. Globalization, digitization, digital transformation, and dynamic economic conditions necessitate Bulgarian enterprises to adopt various strategies and approaches for developing and executing innovative business models. Creating and deploying innovative ideas, products, processes, and services is critical for businesses looking to maintain a competitive advantage and adapt to changing market conditions. Simultaneously, innovation drives growth, efficiency, and long-term success for firms across various industries. In this sense, different methods, tools, and approaches to promoting innovation are highlighted since they can assist organizations in effectively cultivating innovative ideas and transforming them into successful outcomes. Such methods and approaches include thinking outside the box, effective collaboration, and innovation funnels.

2. Thinking outside the box

Although the phrase „thinking outside the box“ has an obscure origin, we can assume that its origin is connected with Lord Harrington's expression[1] about the Liberal Party about „thinking outside the lines“ (The Annual Register: a

[1] „... the Liberal party became a one-man party, which scarcely ventured to think outside the lines prescribed by its dictator“. The Annual Register: a review of public events at home and abroad, for the year 1887. London: Rivingtons, Waterloo Place. 1888. p. 168.

review of public events at home and abroad, for the year 1887, 1888). Later, the „think beyond the boundary“ metaphor emerged about solving the nine dots puzzle[2] (Anderson, 1954).

The short definition given by the Cambridge online dictionary describes this concept as: „to think imaginatively using new ideas instead of traditional or expected ideas“ (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024). In her Harvard Business Review article, Sabrina Meherali notes that: „thinking outside the box requires radically imagining new possibilities (even if they feel unattainable), questioning things, and pushing the boundaries of what could be“ (Meherally, 2022).

Thinking outside the box can be described as breaking free from conventional thought patterns and investigating novel ways and views. This way of thinking is very useful when solving problems that require creative thinking, seeking new opportunities, or eliminating risks. Thinking outside the box stimulates creative thinking and fosters innovation through approaches such as (Cooks-Campbell, 2022), (Reijven, 2024):

- **Brain dumping** – pushes the brain to focus on organizing ideas and removing the most ludicrous ones so that the most appropriate ones can be chosen later.
- **Back to basics** – starting anew can help change perspectives and think outside the box, as habit can hinder innovation.
- **Simplifying thinking –** sometimes simplifying a complex statement of an issue leads to a creative solution.
- **Researching other industries –** entails discovering how the challenges that people in other sectors experience are comparable to those in your industry.
- **Widening the area of relevance** – the idea here is to step outside of one's comfort zone because while solving an issue, people frequently keep to directly relevant information.
- **Working with deadlines –** this strategy reinforces the belief that the brain accelerates creativity when a person has a deadline to accomplish a certain task or project and, along with that, bears some responsibility.
- **Backward planning** – turning things upside down to reveal patterns that might otherwise go undetected, which can lead to novel insights.
- **Advice from someone outside the business area –** asking a relative, or family member unfamiliar with the rules or issues in the field what they would do to address a specific situation.
- **Polling children –** although their ideas may appear ridiculous or farfetched, they believe anything is possible.
- **Solving a problem for someone else** can put the brain in a state that allows for the invention of business ideas, the resolution of one's issues, and the completion of projects and tasks.

[2] The goal of the task is to connect all 9 dots placed in three rows of three using four straight lines or less without lifting the writing tool from the sheet.

- **Brainstorming** aims to generate as many possible ideas as possible, including those that appear unlikely.
- **Mind mapping** – a mental map can assist in organizing what is going on in the brain (Serig, 2011).
- **Metaphorical thinking** – using metaphors and analogies to reframe an issue or topic in a new light, leading to fresh insights (Mind Tools Content Team, 2024).
- **Changing roles** – providing a different point of view, putting yourself in someone else's place.
- **SCAMPER** – a structured method of creating original ideas, which includes substituting, combining, adjusting, modifying, putting to other uses, eliminating, and reversing (Dam & Teo, 2024).
- **Random stimulus** – introducing a random word, image, or object to be associated with the problem can cause unexpected connections.
- **Provocative questions** – asking questions that provoke assumptions or preconceptions about the problem. For example, „What if the opposite were true?"
- **Challenging assumptions** – identifying and questioning the underlying assumptions that shape thinking and how changing these assumptions can lead to new solutions.
- **Creative visualization** – using the imagination to visualize potential solutions or scenarios can bring abstract concepts to life (Marks & Isaac, 1994).
- **Storytelling** – creating a narrative around the problem can help to see it from different angles and present potential solutions (Fryer, 2003).
- **Mindfulness and meditation** – practicing mindfulness and meditation can help clear the mind creating space for new ideas to emerge (Cherry, 2023).
- **Divergent thinking exercises** focus on generating diverse ideas rather than searching for one correct answer.
- **Feedback loops** – seeking input and feedback from different sources to provide fresh perspectives and help refine ideas (MasterClass, 2022).
- **Interdisciplinary learning** – studying subjects or areas that are outside the already acquired experience. This can introduce new concepts and approaches to an already existing business (Seel, 2012).
- **Experimentation and prototyping** – building prototypes or trying different approaches to see what works and what does not. (Foundation, 2019).

3. Effective collaboration

Several elements contribute to effective collaboration that generates innovation (Brouther, Brouthers, & Wilkinson, 1995).

First, partners must have complementary skills, such as one person's capacity to provide something that another can use related to market knowledge, technology, expertise, etc. To ensure the success of the collaboration, each party's talents must complement one another. If only one party benefits, the partnership risks becoming one-sided and ineffective.

Second, fostering a collaborative culture at the organizational level is critical. Mutual trust is an important aspect of the growth of this culture.

Third, individuals and organizations must share aims that complement or are similar to those in the alliance.

Fourth, the risks must be proportionate, and cooperation is frequently used to mitigate or eliminate dangers by sharing responsibility.

Therefore, effective collaboration can be defined as a method for overcoming competition, sharing costs and risks, and creating possibilities for progress in a global context and under quickly changing market conditions. The success of such collaboration stems from the coordination of two or more organizations' activities, which includes mutual complementarity, collaborative teamwork, the establishment of common goals, and proportionate risks and benefits.

Effective collaboration to foster creativity is always the outcome of a complex combination of motivations and conditions that drive people to establish alliances. Among these motivations are the need for training; the acquisition of specific knowledge, skills, and abilities; competence building; lowering and sharing costs and risks; increasing productivity; lowering uncertainty; obtaining new business opportunities; and access to technology; overcoming legal and regulatory barriers; strengthening the enterprise's influence; and better market positions.

A viable option for generating innovative ideas through effective collaboration of the Bulgarian industrial enterprises is the application of approaches such as:

- **Fostering an open climate for conversation**. Providing an environment where ideas can be freely exchanged without fear of criticism or condemnation.
- **Team diversity**. Team members' diverse experiences, knowledge, and points of view might result in a diverse set of ideas.
- **Facilitating brainstorming sessions**. Organizing meetings for the team to brainstorm and create ideas.
- **Employing group thinking techniques** such as SCAMPER or other approaches that promote creative thinking.
- **Supporting concepts with examples and evidence**. Demonstrating how ideas can be effectively implemented.
- **Discussing failures and drawing lessons from them**. Failure is an integral element of the innovation process.
- **Developing practical implementation plans**. Concrete acts and processes can help turn ideas into reality.
- **Using technology and software tools for collaboration**. Whiteboards, online document-sharing systems, and other related technologies can facilitate effective remote collaboration.
- **Sharing credit for accomplishments**. Recognize each team member's work and give credit when an idea or project succeeds.

➢ **Constructive conflict management**. If managed correctly, conflicts can generate new ideas.

➢ **Providing time and space for personal introspection**. Sometimes the best ideas emerge when people have time to ponder for themselves.

➢ **Investigating more sources of inspiration**. Looking for innovative ideas by examining innovations in other industries or cultures.

4. Innovation funnels

The innovation funnels serve as the foundation for the execution, development, and diffusion of innovations. These funnels support expansion and growth, process comprehension, and the allocation of skills to relevant initiatives. They also aid in the management of partnerships and can be used to steer and allocate investments to specific activities, as well as to calculate the project life cycle (Matti, Jokela, & Sarminen, 2023). That is why the innovation funnel can be defined as a creative process that enables feedback, evaluation, and product revisions at various stages as necessary. (Bonazzi & Moises, 2014).

In practice, this is the innovation process, represented schematically as an innovation funnel (Figure 1), which begins with a wide range of ideas and then selects potential development projects that can be completed and implemented quickly (Institute for Manufacturing, 2024).

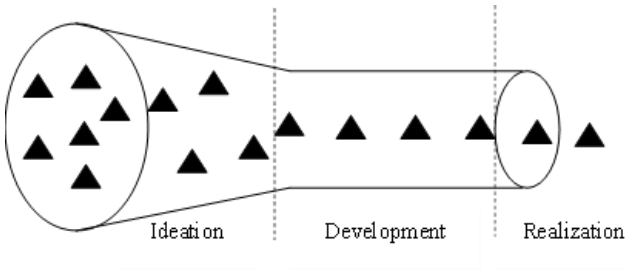

Figure 1. Innovation funnel model

Source: Ünal, C., & Vahap, T. (2017, March 19). Designing Open Innovation Based Product Development Process For Smes Using Mobile Technologies. KnE Social Sciences 1(2), pp. 307-318.

Funnel management entails tackling issues on three fronts. The first path is to widen the funnel's mouth at the „ideation“ level, which assumes that the company should enhance and improve its knowledge and information base to generate more fresh ideas for the development of new initiatives, processes, or products. The second path is to reduce the neck of the innovation funnel at the „development“ level, where the generated ideas are evaluated, and firm resources are directed toward the most appealing of them. The idea is to build a portfolio of projects that best fit the organization's business objectives. The third path is to ensure that, at the implementation level, the selected projects meet the goals.

The innovation funnel can be different for each firm. For example, at larger, technology-intensive firms that rely heavily on their research and development

departments to generate ideas for technologies, products, and processes, it is encouraged to generate far more ideas than will be implemented. These concepts are then tested differently at each level (Figure 2).

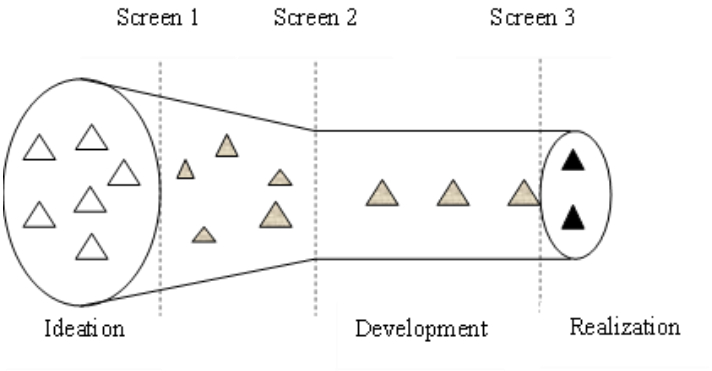

Figure 2. An innovation funnel model in large technology firms
Source: Innovation Funnel. Retrieved from Institute for Manufacturing: https://www.ifm.eng.cam.ac.uk/research/dstools/innovation-funnel/

In smaller organizations or startups, the „innovation funnel“ is associated with the implementation of a single project (figure 3).

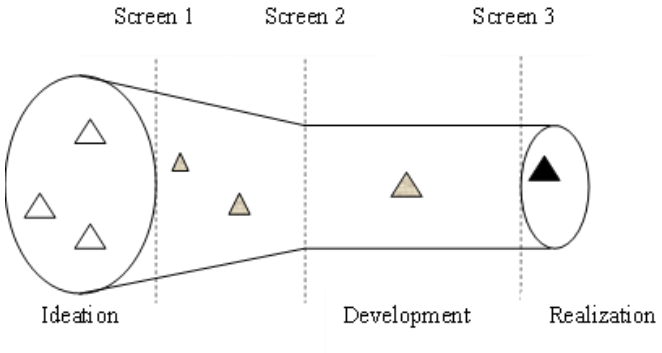

Figure 3. An innovation funnel model in startups
Source: Innovation Funnel. Retrieved from Institute for Manufacturing: https://www.ifm.eng.cam.ac.uk/research/dstools/innovation-funnel/

Bulgarian industrial enterprises can use various tactics to keep the „innovation funnel“ filled with innovative ideas and solutions, increasing the possibility of innovation implementation and use. Such tactics include:

- **Creating a culture of innovation** involves promoting creativity through rewarding ideas, dedicating time to brainstorming, and forming cross-functional teams. Management must encourage risk-taking without fear of failure, building trust and motivating employees to actively contribute to competitive solutions and outcomes. (Moleiro, Abreu, & Calado, 2019).
- **Establishing clear goals for innovation** provides direction and focus, aligning efforts with the organization's strategic priorities. This alignment ensures

innovation directly impacts success and gains stakeholder support. Clear goals inspire teams, helping them see how their efforts contribute to the organization's success, and motivating them to generate innovative ideas.

- **Diversify the inputs**. Collecting feedback from a variety of sources, including employees, customers, suppliers, industry trends, and rivals. Multiple perspectives fuel creativity, offer broader viewpoints for better decision-making and lead to innovative solutions.
- **Encouraging team collaboration** brings together diverse talents and perspectives, generating a wide range of ideas and solutions. Teamwork creates synergy, producing better results than individual efforts. Brainstorming, workshops, and problem-solving exercises promote innovation, enabling teams to tackle complex challenges from multiple angles for better inventive solutions.
- **Resource allocation** ensures businesses have the necessary funding, talent, and time to develop and implement innovative ideas. By dedicating resources specifically to innovation, companies avoid the setbacks of sporadic spending, ensuring smoother innovation processes.

Other ways to fill the „innovation funnel“ with fresh ideas and solutions include developing technologies, artificial intelligence, machine learning, etc.

5. Conclusion

Innovation is becoming a critical component of Bulgarian firms' competitiveness and long-term success, particularly in today's climate of globalization, digitalization, and rapid digital transformation. In a dynamic and highly competitive market, firms' capacity to think creatively and quickly adapt to new technology and consumer needs is critical. Cultivating and integrating innovation into business is crucial for enterprise success in a changing market environment. Methods such as thinking outside the box and effective collaboration not only promote creativity, but also allow for the development of new and distinctive goods, processes, and services that boost businesses' market positions and give them a major competitive edge. The innovation funnels paradigm is a useful tool for organizing innovation processes. It provides a framework for effective management of the many stages, from idea development to selection and implementation, allowing businesses to reduce the risk of failure while increasing the likelihood of successful innovation implementation. Using the approaches outlined above, Bulgarian businesses can more readily uncover new prospects, pick the most promising ideas, and apply them in profitable business ventures.

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