SYSTEMATIC SEARCH FOR PRODUCT IDEAS

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Introduction
It is vital for every industrial company to be able to renew its products - to get ideas for those products which will subsequently be developed, produced and sold, and which will form the basis of the business which the company will live off in the time to come.

But it is not enough just to get ideas. They must also be the right ideas - ideas which exploit the company's ability in the areas of development, production, sales and service, which are directed toward an attractive market and which match the company's strategy and objectives.

Who is supposed to get these ideas, and how is it to be done?
* The management has the responsibility, but doesn't have the time or contact with the customers.
* The marketing department knows the customers and the market, but doesn't know what is technologically possible.
* The development department knows what is possible, but doesn't know what can be sold.
* The customer knows what he needs, but not what he can get to need
* Research workers know the most up-to-date technological advances, but don't think in terms of strategies and products.

To put it briefly, the conclusion is that nobody is the ideal person to create product ideas. Thus the generation of ideas must take place through teamwork in which each person's individual abilities find expression, and where the possessors of individual pieces of knowledge supplement one another in the best possible manner. Creative methods on their own are inadequate, even if they are important tools. It is important to be aware of what sort of ideas one is looking for, and to what extent it is a question of completely new needs that are to be fulfilled, new technology for existing product types, improvement of existing products, aesthetic "facelifts", copying of the competitor's products or systems for the integration of existing products. In this paper we present a model which describes the individual steps in the search for product ideas, and a series of combinations of methods, sources and types of information which can be used to advantage in various characteristic idea seeking situations. Most consideration has been paid to describing those steps in the idea seeking process which affect the choice of search method and the actual search for ideas.

Structured Innovation Approaches

P. Colemont et al. (eds.), Creativity and Innovation: towards a European Network
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Background
The views and conclusions which are presented in this paper are preliminary results from a Ph.D. project on "Systematic Search for Product Ideas", performed in the Institute for Engineering Design at the Technical University of Denmark. The aim of the project has been to develop tools and methods for searching for product ideas in small and middle-sized industrial companies. In parallel with this, a development project has been performed at the Institute for Product Development, IPU, with the aim of:
* Carrying out searches for product ideas in ten Danish companies.
* Giving the employees of these companies experience in searching for ideas.
* Passing on experience and tools to industry in general.

IPU has many years of experience with product development in Danish industry, and has been responsible for projects such as "Integrated Product Development" and "UNIC - Development of Product Development Activity".

A model for new product ideas
We shall now present a model which has been developed for dealing with the search for product ideas in small and medium-sized engineering companies. The model is divided up into five phases, each of which contains different activities. A series of tools, which are to help to optimise and direct the search for product ideas, is associated with each phase, as shown in Figure 1.

![Structured Innovation Approaches](image.png)