

APPLICATION FOR A FACULTY-STUDENT SUMMER
COLLABORATION STIPEND 2007-2008

I. Project Title, Summary, and Abstract

INCREASING ORGANIZATIONAL INNOVATION THROUGH MANAGEMENT
SUPPORT: A LONGITUDINAL STUDY

Abstract We will conduct field research to introduce a system of measuring innovation. Next, we'll administer a survey to determine the perceived level of management support for innovation. After conducting interviews to identify needs for management support, we'll introduce changes in an effort to raise this variable. After a few weeks, we will again measure the perceived level of management support while monitoring the level of innovation.

Summary Our research will be conducted in a department of a local company. An approach for generating and measuring ideas will be introduced. Once the system of generating ideas is in place, we will determine the perceived level of management support for innovation by means of a survey. We'll follow this up with individual interviews to obtain opinions concerning the need for management support. This will identify some improvement opportunities which will be addressed and implemented as far as is practicable. After a period of a few weeks, the perceived level of management support will be measured again using the same survey instrument. Our hypothesis is that change in the independent variable, the perceived level of management support, will be correlated with changes in the level of idea generation. We expect that there will be a number of aspects of management support that will be identified during the research through interviews. Although we are considering perceived management support as one general variable, we anticipate that the research will reveal dimensions of this variable that we have not yet identified and we expect to be able to identify ways that management may increase their support for idea generation and communicate that to the members of the organization. The results of the research should show more detail on the construct we are calling management support of innovation.

II. Narrative

1. Current Situation Marie Curie said, "*Be less curious about people and more curious about ideas.*" This research project is about how management may stimulate the generation of more ideas.

Many organizations are interested in raising their level of innovation. Employees often are not sufficiently encouraged to suggest ideas and participate in developing and implementing them. This is ironic since those closest to the work frequently have the most ideas concerning aspects of their jobs. There is an organizational disconnect between the members of the organization who have the ideas and management which has the authority and resources to carry them through the approval, developmental, and implementation steps toward becoming innovations.

2. The Project Plan This project will build on prior research done in the Center for Professional Excellence and presented at the MBAA International Conference (Fischer and Carroll, 2004). We will introduce an idea generation program in a department of approximately 15 people. Once the idea generation and evaluation system is in place, we will conduct a survey to determine the level of perceived management support that exists in the department. Next, we will introduce changes that respond to suggestions and observations concerning how management may improve the level of support for innovation. After a period of a few weeks, we will conduct the survey again and compare the results to determine the increase in the perception of management support. We will also measure the level of idea generation to determine the correlation between perceived management support and the level of innovation. The level of idea generation is measured using an idea measurement system developed during earlier research (Fischer, 2002). Although ideas do not become innovations until they are implemented, the quantity and quality of ideas suggested is a good leading indicator of innovation. Brian Lindemann and I will work together to introduce the idea generation and measurement systems. The survey of management support will be administered through e-mail and there will be follow-up interviews with the members of the department. The most challenging part of the project will be working with the department manager to help raise the perception of management support for innovation. We will not undertake this field research without a clear understanding that the management of the organization we are working in supports our work, and that it is willing to introduce changes to respond to requests by employees to raise innovation. We will attempt to raise the perception of management support for innovation from what it was initially and this cannot be achieved without the wholehearted and informed support of management. I have a field site for the project that I believe will meet our requirements. The project is the start of what I expect to be an ongoing field research effort. I have identified numerous other independent variables that may influence the suggestion of ideas and their eventual implementation to become successful innovations. Each of these additional independent variables may be measured and altered. With the idea measurement system in place, the resulting effect on idea generation may be measured. I would like to follow this research project with other student-faculty collaborative efforts. Brian and I have been working together on the Elmhurst College Innovation Team for nearly a year. Also, Brian did a major project in BUS 470 so we have a track record of working together. I intend to involve Brian in all of the research effort including survey development and administration, interviews, and data analysis. We will submit a paper to the MBAA International Conference for 2009 and Brian will present the findings of the study at the Student Showcase in 2009. Also, we will share the findings of the study with the Elmhurst College Innovation Team which is interested in this topic. We will discuss the project progress with other members of the team to solicit their advice on aspects of the research.

3. Expertise I have been doing research on the management of innovation since 2000. During my sabbatical leave in Fall 2006, I developed a manuscript that was the basis for a course I offered in Fall 2007 entitled BUS 470 – Seminar on the Management of Innovation. Brian was a student in my BUS 250 – Introduction to Management class in

addition to BUS 470. His background makes him especially qualified to work on this project.

I have presented several papers on various aspects of the management of innovation over the last eight years. Most of the work has been theoretical; this project will attempt to demonstrate the viability of the ideas and theories that I developed in earlier work in order to accomplish two goals: a) generate enthusiasm in the business community for the importance of company-wide initiatives to increase innovation, and b) involve Elmhurst College students in research efforts to learn the principles of research design and how to properly conduct a research project..

I anticipate that this research project will allow students in my BUS 470 class in Fall 2008 to conduct research that could be a capstone project for business majors giving them exposure to research methodology, managing change, project management, and an appreciation of the importance of the management of innovation throughout the organization.

I have had a number of collaborative research efforts with students and have presented papers at conferences with three students over the last three years - Jessica VanDenack (2005), Brian Slackert (2006), and Nick Kreitman (2008).

III. Contact Information

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IV. Current and Previous Grants

Faculty Development Grant, Covering expenses to conduct field research on “The Influence of Employee ESOP Participation on Firm Performance Indicators,” 2007-8, \$500.

Research Grant from the Warehouse Education and Research Council to survey its membership and prepare a report on “Productivity Measurement in the Warehouse,” completed Fall 2003, \$7,500.

Faculty Development Major Projects Initiative Grant to study “The Management of Organizational Innovation,” Summer 2001, \$3,000.

V. Publications

Fischer, Bruce D. and Nick Kreitman, “The Influence of Employee ESOP Participation on Firm Performance Indicators,” MBAA International Conference, Chicago, Illinois, April 2-4, 2008,

Fischer, Bruce D., “The Innovation Supply Chain: Invention through Implementation,” MBAA International Conference, Chicago, Illinois, March 28, 2007.

Fischer, Bruce D. and Brian R. Slackert, “Support of Innovation as a Factor in Increasing Innovative Output,” Midwest Business Administration Association Annual Conference, Chicago, Illinois, March 15, 2006.

Fischer, Bruce D., Lawrence B. Carroll, and Jessica A. VanDenack, “Creating a Culture for Innovation: The Four R’s,” Midwest Business Administration Association Annual Conference, Chicago, Illinois, March 17, 2005.

Fischer, Bruce D. and Lawrence B. Carroll, “Ways to Increase Ideas for Innovations,” Midwest Business Administration Association Annual Conference, Chicago, Illinois, March 15, 2004.

Fischer, Bruce D., “The Measurement of Innovation,” Operations Management & Entrepreneurship Association Conference, Chicago, Illinois, February 28, 2002.

Fischer, Bruce D., “Managing Innovation – An Analysis of the Literature,” Midwest Business Administration Association Conference, Chicago, Illinois, March 8, 2001.