



SCHOOL OF
ECONOMICS AND
MANAGEMENT

The Chameleon Effect: Rethinking Innovation as an Adaptive Resemblance

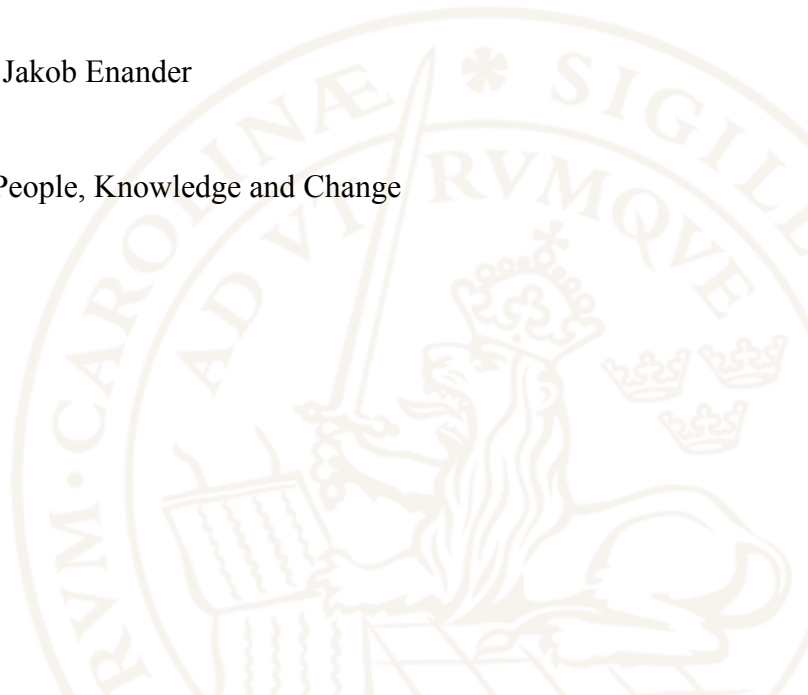
A Study on the Meaning, Dilution, and Emptiness of Innovation

Karl Ekedahl & Jakob Enander

-

Master's Program in Managing People, Knowledge and Change

Word Count: 22134



Abstract

Title	The Chameleon Effect: Rethinking Innovation as an Adaptive Resemblance
Course	BUSN49 - Degree Project in Managing People, Knowledge and Change
Authors	Karl Ekedahl, Jakob Enander
Supervisor	Stephan Schaefer (PhD), Lund University, Sweden
Purpose	The purpose of this study is to extend our knowledge of the elusive concept of innovation by investigating meanings and experiences of it among members in a small med-tech organization. This involves examining how individuals interpret and make sense of innovation and, if or how, they relate to their own organization as an innovative one.
Methodology	A single organization has been studied through an abductive approach. The ontological position of constructionism is assumed, and we draw upon both interpretivist and critical traditions. Data was collected from ten semi-structured interviews with members of the case organization.
Theoretical Perspective	While we turn to mainstream literature to present a common conceptualization of innovation in terms of ‘outcome’ and ‘process’ (Anderson & King, 1993), our main focus is to assume a critical approach to innovation through the ideas presented by Hallonsten (2023). We also present a large portion of literature on how innovation fares from a sensemaking perspective (Salaman & Storey, 2005) to explore common drivers of innovation.
Conclusion	Although consensus about being innovative exists, there seems to be a large amount of ambiguity in how innovation is made sense of in our case study. We have found that inter- and intra-organizational aspects are drawn upon to talk about innovation, and conceptualize innovation as an adaptive procedure that might appear ad hoc.
Key Words	innovation, innovative outcome, innovative process, sensemaking of innovation, empty innovation

Acknowledgments

We would first of all like to thank our supervisor, Stephan Schaefer, for his pragmatic mindset and truthful guidance throughout the whole process of this project. His passion for what he does is prominent, and is appreciated among us and other students. Thank you for all the help of making sense of this project and providing professional guidance forward in this sometimes challenging endeavor.

Furthermore we would like to express our gratitude to the members of MedLabs for their immediate interest and positive attitude in taking part in this study. Thank you for your dedicated enthusiasm in helping out with setting up all of the interviews and welcoming us to your offices. The contributions you have made are the very basis of this thesis.

Thank you also for valuable comments and insights from our proofreader, David.

Lastly, we would like to express our gratitude to one another for hanging on during tough times, and being each other's appreciated company throughout these months. To Jakob & Karl in the past: Look, we made it!

We hope you will enjoy reading this thesis.

Sincerely,

Karl Ekedahl and Jakob Enander

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Problematization	3
1.3 Research Purpose	4
1.4 Outline of the Thesis	4
2. Literature Review	6
2.1 Innovation	6
2.1.1 Defining Innovation - Outcome Perspectives	6
2.1.2 Defining Innovation - Process Perspectives	8
2.2 Understanding Innovation	10
2.2.1 Making Sense and Identifying Key Drivers	10
2.2.2 Critical Perspectives: Has innovation lost its meaning?	13
2.3 Chapter Summary	16
3. Methodology	17
3.1 Research Approach	17
3.2 Case Description	19
3.3 Data Collection	20
3.4 Data Analysis	22
3.5 Credibility and Limitations	24
3.6 Chapter Summary	26
4. Empirical Analysis	27
4.1 The Innovators' Workshop	29
4.1.1 There is Innovation, Then There is the Other Stuff	29
4.1.2 Painting on Blank Canvases	32
4.1.3 The Artists' Toolkit	34
4.2 The Innovator on the World Arena	36
4.2.1 One of a Kind	36
4.2.2 No Credit for Imitation	38
4.2.3 The Grueling Art Teacher	40
4.2.4 Beauty Lies in the Eyes of the Customer	42
4.3 Chapter Summary	44
5. Discussion	45
5.1 Deciding What is Innovative	45
5.1.1 Who is the Judge of Novelty?	45
5.1.2 Innovation Processes or Innovative Processes?	47

5.2 The Many Facets of Innovation	49
5.3 Innovation is Simply Not for Everyone	52
5.4 Innovation as an Adaptive Resemblance	54
6. Conclusion	55
6.1 Empirical Findings	55
6.2 Theoretical Contribution	56
6.3 Limitations	58
6.4 Future Research	58

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

As we started scouring for ideas for our research proposal earlier this year, we were in the midst of the tedious reality of applying for jobs. What initially started out as grumbling over all the grand words organizations use to describe what makes them unique eventually led to the starting point of this thesis. *Agile*, *value-driven*, and *sustainable* are some of the characteristics we came across that recruiters used to describe their organizations. And while we should not be so quick to assume that these organizations do not live up to these attributes (whatever they mean), it is rather intriguing how so many organizations, no matter the market they operate in, seem to have them. One that stood out to us was *innovation*. It is seemingly everywhere; whether it is music, FMCG, fashion, or showers.



- **Innovative**, consistent, and logical mapping

Image 1, (VSTBuzz, 2022)



15 December, 2022

You're invited to the metaverse! How H&M Group uses tech innovation for endless fashion opportunities

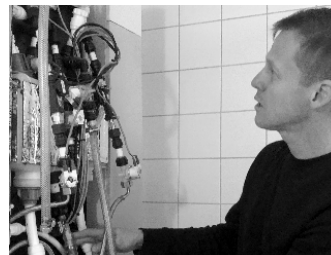
Image 3, (H&M Group, 2022)



Innovation

Innovation is Orkla's primary tool for creating growth, and is therefore pivotal to Orkla's day-to-day operations. Orkla's innovation activities are based on an inter-professional focus that spans from idea to launch. Consumer, customer and market insight is combined with technological expertise and investments to develop products and solutions that delight consumers and meet their needs in an even better way.

Image 2, (Orkla, 2023)



Innovation 11 June 2021

Tobias on innovating showers to make a difference

Image 4, (IKEA, 2021)

Scholars differ in their stance of how to define innovation. Generally, one can say that innovation concerns the creation of new ideas which result in increased performance (Rogers, 1998). Though, as shown above, innovation does not seem to be associated with certain industries, products, or processes, but seems to play a key role in a wide range of various businesses. This is apparent in the illustrations above that point to what seems to portray innovation as something attractive. However, this has not always been the case. In fact, for about 2500 years, innovation was mainly associated with negativity and broadly perceived as something that threatened the stability of society (Godin, 2012). It was considered foreign to the degree that authorities attempted to control and limit the occurrence of innovation. This did not change until the middle of the nineteenth century when opinions generally began to turn to a more positive view (Godin, 2012). Today, few people view innovation as a threat to society. Nevertheless, innovation has perhaps turned into something more than that, becoming so popular that we begin to lose sight of its foundational characteristics (Hallonsten, 2023).

In 2022, Sweden was ranked the most innovative country in the European Union (European Commission, n.d.), and third-best worldwide (WIPO, 2022). "*We are very proud that Sweden again is one of the world's most innovative countries. [...] Innovation drives growth, and companies that capitalize on and develop their intangible assets have good opportunities to grow*" says Peter Strömbäck, director general for the Swedish patent and registration authority (Småföretagarna, 2023). The natural thing to do in our minds is to consider; on what terms are Sweden and other countries deemed innovative or not? Surely, having an independent third-party organ decide that you are innovative would attain some level of credibility as opposed to that of businesses preaching about their own innovativeness. Especially when this organ, as is the case with the European Commission's ranking, uses 80 factors to decide the level of innovativeness of a country (European Commission, n.d.). Whether that is the "correct way" to define innovation is up to debate, but of course, pointing at concrete data serves some purpose in adding to the meaning of the concept. Nonetheless, Peter Strömbäck is proud of the distinction and, which we find more thought-provoking, portrays innovation as an engine for economic growth and development. And it seems as if businesses agree with this sentiment (for instance, see [Image 2](#)). So, rather than pondering on what terms countries or organizations are deemed innovative, it is in our minds even more interesting to consider what these claims truly entails.

1.2 Problematization

The wide attention given to innovation may be significant for an increase in its perceived importance in the conduct of business in today's society. Innovation has become an "emblem of the modern society, a panacea for resolving many problems and a catchword" (Godin, 2012 pp. 3). Innovation is often mentioned in highly positive terms such as; a main driver for economic growth (Hess & Kazanjian, 2006), something that changes the rules of the game (Govindarajan & Trimble 2001), and which creates long-lasting advantage (Hamel, 2006). The growing attention given to innovation can also be proven simply by looking at the increased frequency of the use of the term over time. In fact, only since the 1950s the term has had a threefold increase of usage in literature (Godin, 2016). Seemingly, such is the case simply as a result of innovation's impressive contribution to society over time, along with its somewhat unique ability to give firms a competitive edge in the market (Neely, 1998). Unlike the situation 2500 years ago, few would today argue that innovation is something negative that needs to be controlled and limited. Instead, the increased interest in innovation as both a concept and a term (Godin, 2016) may have led to other types of problems. Rosa et al. (2017) reason about capitalist systems' reliance on acceleration in order to maintain stability. In other words, modern society continuously requires growth, augmentation and innovation in order to preserve the status quo (Schaefer, 2022). Thus, single businesses operating in this modern society risk suffering the consequences of falling behind on these factors, and face the dilemma: "innovate or die" (Hasu et al. 2012 pp. 90).

We may acknowledge that this phenomenon is not unproblematic in the way that businesses and individuals may seek to be perceived as innovative for the sake of survival. After all, everyone cannot be the best at everything (Alvesson, 2013), and simple logic tells us that everyone cannot have a competitive edge over others. Thus, this raises the question of what innovation really is in today's society and how people make sense of it in their work. This is concretely emphasized by Storey and Salaman (2005, pp. 9): "Innovation is something managers in many organizations want to achieve (although how they define innovation and how they value it vary in significant ways)". Also, acknowledging the argument that novelty is an indivisible part of innovation (eg. Greve and Taylor, 2000; Obstfeld, 2005) raises the question of how people in perceived innovative firms relate to their work as novel. As we will see, multiple definitions of innovation

already exist, as well as distinguishments between different types of innovation. However, the seemingly growing trend (and need) to attend to innovation among all sorts of businesses arguably creates a need for understanding what innovation truly means, how it is experienced, and how the people involved make sense of it in a modern context.

1.3 Research Purpose

In line with the problem description above, we acknowledge that ambiguities exist in what the concept of innovation entails in the contemporary business environment. While potentially endless contexts, industries and methods could be considered when approaching this topic, we seek to make a contribution to the literature on innovation by investigating a particular innovative context. Thus, our aim with this thesis is to critically examine how people experience and make sense of innovation in a small organization operating in the medical technology (med-tech) field. We realize that yet additional aspects to take into account when grasping the meaning of innovation may add to the vagueness of an already elusive concept. We rather hope to show that innovation *is* an elusive concept in the different ways organizational members make sense of it. With the purpose of this thesis in mind, we set out to answer the following research question:

- *How do members in a small med-tech organization experience innovation?*

To do this we seek to discover how members interpret, understand and behave in relation to innovation, and through this, to which degree and by what standards they determine their own organization as an innovative one.

1.4 Outline of the Thesis

In order to investigate and answer the purpose of this study, we have structured it into six chapters. The first chapter focuses on presenting the background of the subject as well as introducing the reader to the problem description and purpose of the thesis. This is followed by the second chapter where we give a theoretical background to innovation and present and discuss relevant literature in relation to our research objective. In chapter three, the methodology of the thesis is presented including a description of our research case, research approach, data

collection, data analysis and a concluding reflective section about the credibility and limitations of the study. The fourth chapter treats the analysis of the empirical material and presents our initial interpretations of the findings. In chapter five, we discuss these findings in relation to previous literature. In the sixth and final chapter, we present the conclusions of our main findings and answer the research question highlighted in chapter one. Lastly, we present the study's theoretical contribution, propose potential areas for future research on the topic and discuss limitations.

2. Literature Review

In this chapter, we present a theoretical review of how innovation may be defined and understood in organizations today, a sensemaking perspective of innovation, and an overview of some critical literature on the topic. Through this, we aim to provide a fair idea of what the hefty concept of innovation entails and how we can further make sense of it by addressing it through the theoretical lens of sensemaking and experiences of innovation.

2.1 Innovation

While we have so far reasoned about potential ambiguities involved in the general perception of the notion of being innovative, we have yet to present how mainstream literature views innovation and why it is an important topic to study. One would hope that innovation would have been an easily defined concept on whose meaning there is consensus among scholars and practitioners. Such is not the case, and coming into this thesis, we indeed already have our own initial ideas about what innovation is and what it entails. A fundamental difference in how innovation has been presented in past literature is the distinction between innovation as an ‘outcome’ or as a ‘process’ (Anderson & King, 1993). Let us spend some time contemplating what these different perspectives entail.

2.1.1 Defining Innovation - Outcome Perspectives

Through the outcome perspective we learn of the certain characteristics that make an innovation just that - an innovation. This might best be understood by thinking of innovation as a noun. One could wonder what sets an innovation apart from an invention, and there are numerous attempts by researchers to discern the two terms. For inventions to be granted property right in the form of patents they must be a “novel and useful contribution over and above the previous state of knowledge” (Jaffe, Trajtenberg & Henderson, 1993 pp. 580). Other authors, such as Whittington et al. (2009) as well as Rotharemel and Hess (2007), follow in the footsteps of regarding the number of patents issued for products as a fair measure of innovativeness among firms. In these definitions the conditions for an invention to; (1) be patented, and (2) be considered an innovation, are seemingly inseparable. One might therefore be intrigued by the role of intellectual property agencies in setting the stage for innovation in different geographical

settings. Utterback (1971) sheds some light on the notion of ‘novel’, one of the conditions inventions must meet for being granted property rights, and differentiates innovation from inventions by accounting for the entrepreneurial actions that follow the creation of an invention. Innovations are here assumed to be something more than inventions in that they entail some form of economic significance, however substantial, other than being simply ‘new’. Other authors agree with the notion that novelty is an indivisible part of innovation (eg. Greve & Taylor, 2000; Obstfeld, 2005). Novelty however is not an innate characteristic in ideas, but rather the alleged usefulness of ideas deemed by certain groups or individuals (Damanpour, 1991; Dougherty, 1992). As recently suggested, an intellectual property agency may therefore in some sense be understood as a judge of novelty, and hence of innovation.

One of the conveniences of the outcome perspective is that innovation can be measured. Another set of scholars set their gaze on *adoption* rather than patents to measure innovation. Bell (2005) measures innovation based on to what extent firms act as industry leaders in introducing products and services as well as adopting new technologies. As such, the action of being innovative is a result of innovative outcomes, rather than vice versa. Innovation may through this view be understood as the result of the “development and implementation of new ideas to solve problems” (Bell, 2005, pp. 288). In this definition, innovation is determined and measured based on the ability to generate ideas considered to be new by the individuals involved in the process (Van de Ven, 1986). Firms' ability to innovate will also be determined by the amount of information firms are able to absorb as a result of informal linkages between businesses (Rogers, 1995). Competition also serves its purpose in this respect, in how firms trying to imitate competitors come up with new ideas in that process (March, 1994). As such, the innovativeness of an idea is judged based on how well-received it is within the targeted market, and firms' ability and willingness to compete and share information and experiences of idea processes will determine their success in generating innovative ideas (Bell, 2005). It is paramount to acknowledge that these attempts to define and measure the term ‘innovation’ are done in different contexts and with diverging purposes. For instance, Bell (2005) set out to understand the impact of geographical proximity on firm performance. This case highlights that relying on a singular definition of innovation limits the scope through which we are able to examine it.

2.1.2 Defining Innovation - Process Perspectives

Through the process perspective we can instead dissect the wide array of activities that constitute the eventual creation of innovation (Greve & Taylor, 2000). One of the most prominent authors on innovation, Van de Ven (1986 pp. 591), describes the process of innovation as the “development and implementation of new ideas by people who over time engage in transactions with others within an institutional context”. Further, he states that in order to understand innovation from a managerial perspective, factors that facilitate and obstruct innovation are central. Uncertainties involved here regard the development of innovation over time, the unfolding of problems, and the respective responses to these problems. Van de Ven (1986) distinguishes four key problems in relation to the processes of innovation.

Firstly, he argues that the success of innovations is largely dependent on the degree of it being institutionalized into an organization and the ability to gain recognition aligned with common assumptions within it. The power of internal, social, and political processes are central factors here in how it functions as facilitators of institutionalizing ideas and contributing to their success. Secondly, successful innovation requires people’s attention to ideas which is argued to be difficult to achieve considering human beings’ limitations of paying attention to non-routine tasks. He also states that “the more specialized, insulated, and stable an individual’s job, the less likely the individual will recognize a need for change or pay attention to innovative ideas” (Van de Ven 1986, pp 604). This points straight at the people-related problem of innovation. It is suggested that people will pay attention to new ideas as they are confronted by concrete problems and discover threats and opportunities related to them. Thirdly, the multitude of functions and resources required in the development of innovation may lead people to focus on minor impeccable developments that do not make sense when applied to the “whole”. Fourth, Van de Ven (1986) identifies an additional need for the institutionalization of innovative ideas into a larger organizational context and strategic outset. Essentially, innovations must be allowed to transform the structure and practices of the institutionalized environment within which they exist. This points to the need for leadership that recognizes and facilitates the creation of structures that are conducive to innovation and learning.

Van de Ven's (1986) broadly recognized reviews about the process perspective to innovation provide foundational insights into its key aspects and problems. Garud et al. (2013) support Van de Ven's (1986) remarks on innovation being more than just a finalized product, but rather the process that allows the transformation of an idea to implementation. Considering that a process is involved is strengthened by the fact that innovation many times emerges within and between networks of firms. Innovation processes are rarely linear and straightforward, often influenced by cultural forces within and between firms, and impacted by aspirations, experiences, and memories among the actors involved (Ricoeur, 1984; Garud et al. 2013). With these influences in mind, Garud et al. (2013) suggest an approach designed to utilize complexities involved with innovation rather than trying to minimize it by applying simple frameworks on non-straightforward processes.

While there are varying definitions for the two overarching perspectives on innovation, we have shown that innovation can be thought of either as an *outcome* or as a *process*. More importantly, however, we have proven the elusiveness of the term and shown that whether an outcome or a process is deemed innovative is an interpretive procedure. Through the outcome perspective, we learn that scholars accept that the power to accredit the status of 'novelty' lies either within those issuing patents or among adopters in the market. Selected research on the process perspective is much focused on the complexities involved and the existence of ambiguities in how to respond to such complexities. In simple terms, process innovation can be distinguished from product innovation through its primary focus on cost-efficiency during the journey toward the implementation of great ideas (Kahn, 2018). Also here, a paradox emerges as the increasing demand for innovation forces businesses to engage in extensive cost-reduction efforts, which in turn diminishes their ability to be flexible and stay competitive in the fluctuating innovative business environment (Kahn, 2018). This is relatable to businesses' tendencies to disregard the complexity of organizing innovation in favor of more straightforward frameworks (Van de Ven, 1986; Garud et al. 2013). We will see in the following sections of this chapter how this paradox is present in managers' *willingness* to confront complexity which contributes to the ongoing circle of "*empty innovation*".

2.2 Understanding Innovation

While some time has been spent communicating what innovation is and how it can be facilitated, we seek to gain a deeper understanding of how people relate to it in a practical context. Through this, we seek to discover some of the direct consequences of innovation through an interpretive perspective. Individual sensemaking presumably plays an important role here and can also provide us with implications of what innovation entails for the individual. We also embark on reviewing some of the critical literature on innovation, which we will see provides viewpoints contrasting much of the existing attention given to the bottomless benefits of innovation. We argue that this will also facilitate our understanding on how and why people in the selected literature make sense of innovation the way they do.

2.2.1 Making Sense and Identifying Key Drivers

Should we truly wish to understand why innovation is such an alluring concept, there is a point in considering the wider, societal, and economic context in which we reside and to some extent take for granted. In order to unlock the ambiguities involved here, we need to understand how people make sense of innovation. Salaman and Storey (2002) investigate this by looking into managers' perceptions and understandings of innovation in a telecom firm. Their findings reveal that innovation is considered crucial and necessary for the long-term survival of the organization. Still, they provide no further descriptions of such as what kind of, why, and when innovation is so crucial, which feeds into the reasoning above that innovation after all may not be as easily defined as one might think. Interestingly, while the need for innovation is clearly stated among the managers, they associated the management of innovation primarily with difficulties. Salaman and Storey (2002) specifically discovered that dilemmas, risk, the dominance of common (non-innovative) forms of organizing, and an unwillingness to take responsibility for confronting obstructions of innovation constitute managers' views of innovation in their case study. However, even more interesting is how people make sense of the *relationship* between the positive and negative effects of innovation. Specifically, the case study revealed that while existing reliable and systematized forms of organizing were successful in ordinary business operations, it also functioned as an impediment to innovation. The results identified two opposing drivers of innovation; technology and market. Technology drives innovation as a result

of technological knowledge and inspiration, whereas the market relies on an understanding of customer needs. A paradox emerges when the factors that facilitate the technological driver of innovation do not make sense when applied to the market driver of innovation and vice versa (Salaman & Storey, 2002). The relationship between drivers of innovation made managers reluctant in endeavoring towards alternative, non-paradoxical, versions of innovation in the study. This was caused by cultural forces and discourses of innovation which limited the managers' ability and willingness to discover new, innovation-functional forms of organizing (Salaman & Storey, 2002). Specifically, it is also shown that this lack of willingness is intertwined with power relations in the way that responsibility for the organizational processes obstructing innovation was held by the same managers blaming these processes. This indicates that drivers of innovation indeed may be paradoxical when restrained by cultural forces (Westenholz, 1993) and consist of impediments of a "second-order error" character, meaning it is institutionalized within the forms of organizing (Argyris, 1990). In Salaman and Storey's (2002) case, this paradox proved to be highly related to cultural factors of hierarchy and authority (Sackmann, 1992) which provides an additional layer of explanation to the managers' contradictory behavior towards innovation (Salaman & Storey, 2002).

Building on this knowledge, we may also investigate the conditions involved in evaluating innovation to further understand its common drivers. The incentives of innovation are clear if we set out to acknowledge the developmental potential of successful innovation. It presents the innovator with the possibility to make a significant financial profit as a result (Greve & Taylor, 2000). This has been, and presumably continues to be, the foundational driver of innovation, in personal profitable terms for the individual innovator, and in terms of societal economic growth for the public sector. This being clear is intuitive, however, it introduces the question of the measurability of innovation, which is not a straightforward process. It seems appropriate to mention something about measuring innovation here, as it essentially determines how and what people perceive as successful innovation. We learned previously that the outcome perspective on innovation is associated with a high degree of measurability (Bell, 2005). However, it has proven to be difficult to assess the long-term value of innovation as it is many times developed continuously throughout its life cycle and transforms into additional value alien to the original intention of the idea (Hallonsten, 2023). According to Amara's Law, most innovation is usually

overestimated in the short run and underestimated in the long run (Searls, 2012). This makes accurate valuation and evaluation of innovation complicated and one should be cautious with drawing long-term conclusions about innovation in an early stage (Hallonsten, 2023). This reasoning makes sense from a societal perspective, however, most firms that consider themselves to be engaged with innovation have some sort of way to measure it (Markham & Lee, 2013). The problem with this appears to be that the continuous measurement of innovation tends to lead people towards exploitation rather than exploration which in turn inhibits creativity and long-term success of innovation (Brattström et al. 2018), and with Amara's Law in mind, they are seemingly unable to produce any meaningful level of accuracy when measuring in the short term.

Accurate measurements of the long-term greater value of innovation may be difficult to achieve. Nevertheless, as we just stated, most firms have ways of measuring innovation (Markham & Lee, 2013). Whether it is accurate or not, nor if the object which is measured is in all cases innovation, we cannot determine. Interestingly though, research made on managers' understanding and approach to innovation has shown that clear distinctions are possible to make on what is generally perceived as a successful approach to innovation. Based on "managers' explicit theories of innovation", Salaman and Storey (2005 pp. 148) suggests that managers perceive successful innovating firms as ones that define innovation in more radical and inclusive terms. Among other aspects, managers also link the firm's view of innovation as strategically important, operating in a flat and decentralized organizational structure, allowing questioning and critique of these structures, having a culture of freedom to innovate, and making sure innovation takes place across the entire organization, with successfulness. The more implicit findings of the managers' perceptions revealed that a generally positive, inclusive, and encouraging attitude towards innovation facilitated the success (Salaman & Storey, 2005). The clarity of these results implies that the managers had a fairly established understanding of what innovation is and were able to make distinctive sense of it. Most interestingly, the managers who perceived their organization as successfully innovative operated in a movement between exploitation and exploration. This was facilitated by the challenging of current structures to make use of current momentum to exploit innovation, while preparations were made to enable disruption of the same structures to allow further exploration. These findings go in line with

Salaman and Storey's (2002) conclusion that managers' own resistance to challenge their structures upheld by themselves functioned as the major obstruction to successful innovation.

In summary, we have begun to understand what common perceptions of innovation within organizations include on a more practical level. It is important to understand the way people make sense of innovation in order to examine the greater meaning of it in a contemporary, innovation-obsessive societal context. That there is a general appreciation for innovation in most organizations is rather clear at this point. The remainder of this chapter will thus focus on what specifically these appreciations mean for the engagement in, and actual outcomes of, innovation. As previously hinted, we will see that much ambiguity exists in this field.

2.2.2 Critical Perspectives: Has innovation lost its meaning?

While the reviews on sensemaking are helpful in contributing to a better understanding of innovation, the deeper substance of the concept itself is yet to be examined. Hallonsten (2023) reasons about the growing interest and attention given to innovation, as a process as well as an outcome, and relates it to an increasing degree of emptiness. Essentially, the missing substance behind innovation in many respects is not so difficult to discover even for non-experts on the topic. The arguments here regard the way innovation in itself has become sort of a hygiene factor in multiple fields of society, primarily private businesses, but also the public and academic sectors (Kahn, 2018). This, along with the growing interest in being associated with innovation as a result of ever more people perceiving it as something attractive has led to increasing ambiguity in what innovation really is allowed to mean. When everyone is allowed, and to some degree even expected, to brand themselves as innovative the concept is losing substance. This is what Hallonsten (2023) refers to as “empty” innovation. Today, actors invest huge amounts of money into projects aimed at increasing the innovativeness of various entities with the primary purpose of facilitating economic growth (Hallonsten, 2023). Innovation is described by Ridley (2020) as a “process of constantly discovering ways of rearranging the world into forms that are unlikely to arise by chance”. If we were to consider this to be a general perception of innovation, it is not difficult to understand society's obsession with it. Adding economic incentives to the mix, we can easily grasp why private businesses would consider founding entire corporate strategies on innovation (Kahn, 2018).

We are beginning to discover the vastness of the underlying ambiguities of innovation. While beliefs of innovation as an almighty savior appear to exist broadly in the business society, innovation has also been called the most important and overused word in America (O'bryan, 2013). Overuse, inflation, and the argued emptiness of innovation as a concept (Hallonsten, 2023; Alvesson, 2013), arguably pose a threat to people's ability to make sense of it. In line with the research objective of this thesis, we set out to examine experiences of innovation in order to understand the reality behind Hallonsten's (2023) arguments. The increasing number of startups may hint that modern innovation is taking practical form to a greater extent. Though, it has been discovered that the rate of survival of these startups can be related to a general efficiency and productivity decline (Hallonsten, 2023; Brattström, 2022). In addition, no clear evidence exists that shows an increase in actual innovation since it became the attractive and popular notion it is today (Vinsel & Russel, 2020). If we are to take these words seriously, the understanding of innovation is beginning to look fairly paradoxical in the way that various actors appear to be investing in projects and businesses that are unable to produce any "real" innovation (Hallonsten, 2023).

While Salaman and Storey's (2002) findings prove that innovation sometimes may be unachievable as a result of cultural and power contradictions internally in organizations, the managers in their study do not seem to agree with the arguments of emptiness proposed by Hallonsten (2023). One may wonder if the contradictions involved here have some form of relationship. Does "empty innovation" facilitate the obstruction of "real" innovation, leading up to the 'buzzwordification' of the concept? In fact, this phenomenon is supported by Hallonsten (2023) who claims that there appears to be a negative correlation between the recent increase in "innovationism", meaning the intensified obsession with innovation in recent decades, and the decline of "real" or technical innovation (Valaskivi, 2012). Previous to the rise of the expression as something generally attractive and desirable, innovation was better produced, as a result of a more clear-cut focus of the inherent value of discovering something new. In contrast, as "innovationism" has evolved, more hard work has been diverted away from innovative work towards creating grandiose and attractive images and perceptions among an increasingly larger audience of followers (Hallonsten, 2023). "Innovationism" creates its own destructive circle in the way that it creates a form of pseudo-competition when actors align themselves in fear of

being left behind. Thus, this is driven by empty expressions of grandiose character and leaves an atmosphere with the underlying understanding: “innovate or die” (Hasu et al. 2012).

We have started to examine the risks involved with buzzwordification, emptiness, overuse, inflation etcetera, with innovation. Specifically, the risk of conducting meaningless work as a result of an inability to make sense of the real purpose of innovation is salient in previous reviews. We will be careful in claiming that even “empty” innovation is meaningless, a subject which could be elaborated further upon but which we will leave to future research. Nevertheless, we are not hesitant to make the argument that it is not with emptiness that businesses engaged in innovation want to be associated. Alvesson (2013) dedicates much thought and examination to the meaninglessness of various concepts, rituals, traditions, and hygiene factors organizations engage in. In line with Hallonsten (2023), he specifically embarks on the *emptiness* of such aspects, exercised in triumphant manners. The baseline of these arguments regards the fact that exclusive attributions are exclusive for the reason that they, among other things, are limited and inaccessible to some extent (Alvesson, 2013). The conclusion is straightforward: not everyone can achieve excellence in all categories. The impact of economic growth is salient here. As people increase their living standards they will acquire a desire for more when their surroundings experience increasing wealth. Also, the social and personal impacts involved here regard how satisfaction as a result of consumption is dependent on other people’s standards. Alvesson (2013) refers to this as zero-sum games: the benefit of one is caused by the loss of another. This reasoning should be kept in mind when examining the consequences of assigning innovation to aspects without thinking about what it really means (Hallonsten, 2023).

The impact of economic growth is also relatable to Hallonsten’s (2023) examination of empty innovation. Economic development facilitated by innovation causes competition and in turn, an ongoing need for businesses to keep up the pace in order to stay in the game, consequently left with the inevitable choice of “innovate or die” (Hasu et al. 2012). Two factors can be argued to be involved in this phenomenon. Economic realities include both the survival and growth aspect, and keeping up with trends and standards in the contemporary business environment. The latter can be related to what Alvesson (2013) describes as “grandiosity”, in other words, the urge among individuals and organizations to be associated with attractive terms, titles, and

associations. Alvesson (2013) argues this is present in today's society to a large extent and leads to hyperinflation and depletion of the meaning of titles and associations of various forms. These reviews may be rounded up by once again highlighting the connection of movements like these with the meaning of innovation. We started this sub-chapter by discussing managers' struggles with making sense of innovation. We may conclude it with an enriched perspective of some of the many reasons behind this statement and an interesting basis to continue our investigation of innovation.

2.3 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, we have reviewed the literature on innovation with a focus on the outcome and process perspectives of innovation, sensemaking, and critical perspectives. Through these lenses, we learn that innovation is a multifaceted concept that is not easily determined into one stream of intuitive meaning. The outcome perspective treats innovation as something measurable for example by examining the number of patented products as a way to determine innovativeness in a firm. It regards innovation as a noun, consisting of a set of characteristics distinguishable from non-innovation. Through the process perspective, we understand people's role and the various challenges in the production of innovation. It focuses on cost-efficiency and how various drivers and structures influence people's abilities to be a productive part of creating innovation. We can relate these perspectives to a sensemaking perspective where we discover common perceptions of describing the successful determinants of innovation. Lastly, we bring the critical perspective into the picture, through which we are able to examine the elusiveness of the concept in more concrete terms. We may relate these reviews to each other and establish a strong understanding of the meaning behind this movement of innovation among people, businesses, and society.

3. Methodology

This chapter presents the methodological groundings of the study. We will discuss and account for our research objective in light of epistemological and ontological perspectives, and appropriate research traditions. The process and methods used to collect, code, interpret and analyze the empirical data from the interviews that were made will be presented and discussed. Our continuous work process in light of these methods will be further described to provide understanding and insight into the construction of this thesis. We will conclude the chapter with some critical reflections and a short credibility discussion.

3.1 Research Approach

The aim of this study is to investigate the meaning, effects, and practice of innovation among members in a small-sized med-tech company which we will refer to as MedLabs. We have aimed to investigate broad experiences of innovation in this organization with critical reviews of innovation in mind. To reach this focus, we have conducted qualitative research aimed at unpacking hidden implications embedded in social interactions to distinguish how aspects of meaning, behavior, interpretation, and practice can be understood in a particular context. This goes in line with Rennstam and Wästerfors' (2018) reasoning about qualitative research as a method aimed at investigating social phenomena in a context where quantitative measures will not be able to provide the answer.

In our efforts to make sense of events and experiences among the members of MedLabs, we assume, in line with the ontological position of constructionism, that reality does not exist objectively within social entities, but is something social actors continually create (Bryman & Bell, 2017). Thus, this study aligns with interpretive traditions in how reality is subjectively constructed through social behavior and interpretation, and dependent on context and meaning (Prasad, 2018). In contrast to positivist traditions where objective reality exists in limited form dependent on natural science perspectives (Bryman & Bell, 2017), the epistemological approach of our research concerns examining people's interpretations as efforts to make sense of certain phenomena that construct reality, interpretations of which we used to conclude our findings (Prasad, 2018). This research approach is suitable with our research objective considering our

focus of seeking to make sense of an, according to many, ambiguous buzzword, in a particular organizational context. This requires a situated approach where individuals are encouraged to share intuitive thoughts and feelings about their individual and contextual perception of innovation, a mission that would be unachievable using a positivist approach. We consistently sought to understand the process in which the interviewees made sense of, and assigned meaning to their acts, behaviors and thoughts about innovation. Our interpretation of these actions occasionally revealed symbols standing for additional meaning in their work, which we used to nuance our analysis. In this way, our research approach aligns with the symbolic interactionist tradition, which states that meaning is assigned to all social phenomena by individuals, and contains no inherent value in itself (Prasad, 2018). Interviewees' perceptions in our study were more easily identified using this approach, as individual understandings of an abstract concept may vary both in precisely what it represents for the individual, but also in how it is communicated. Our consecutive interpretive work with understanding the process of how meaning of actions attached to symbols of various forms takes place reflects this approach.

Our interest in understanding broad experiences of innovation also includes adhering to a critical perspective of it. While our objective was to impartially investigate innovation in a specific context and thus stay attentive to any understandings and perceptions of it, we needed to reflect on potential discrepancies involved as a result of the contemporary development of innovation into having the potential of meaning essentially anything. In other words, as a result of the drastically increased interest and attention given to innovation in close to all respects of organizational life, one must cautiously acknowledge that aspects such as power and competition may influence interpretations. Thus, this study also reflects critical traditions of research. In line with interpretive traditions, critical traditions view reality as socially constructed but with an understanding that these realities are impacted by power and conflicting interest in a particular context. The presence of such influences results in an added layer of skepticism in critical traditions (Prasad, 2018).

Furthermore, this study is taking an abductive approach in the way that there was a movement in our work between literature on product and process innovation, innovation sensemaking, and critical perspectives, and our collected data. In a deductive approach, hypotheses are formulated based on existing knowledge in the field of interest to later be tested on the basis of the empirical

findings. In contrast, the inductive approach works the other way around, where observations and results are gathered prior to the formulation of any theoretical contributions (Bryman & Bell, 2017). The abductive approach helped us maintain an openness towards surprising elements of particular interest in our empirical material. The movement between theory and data also enabled us to challenge current assumptions in the corresponding theory. This goes in line with what Alvesson and Sandberg (2011) refers to as a withdrawal from “gap-spotting”. Instead the continuous dialogue between data and the understanding among us as researchers characterized our approach, which is crucial in order to stay attentive to surprising elements (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007).

3.2 Case Description

The case organization of this thesis is a small laboratory testing and analysis company, MedLabs, operating within the med-tech industry based in the south of Sweden. To ensure integrity for involved parties, the company name and all members involved are anonymized in this thesis and have received pseudonyms. MedLabs provides services in a range of testing categories including health screening, infectious disease screening, clinical care, and food safety. The company was founded in 2020 with the primary ambition of exploiting the rapidly growing market for COVID-19 testing as well as a relieving function to the highly strained healthcare system in Sweden. Throughout the pandemic years, and particularly afterwards, MedLab’s business has been under transformation towards a focus that does not primarily rely on COVID-related testing. The company successfully established themselves on the market in 2020 by drawing on international connections and recruitment and was able to create a competitive business structure. During the first years they experienced rapid growth and reached a number of around 40 employees at its peak. Today, MedLabs employs 11 full time workers in three locations in Sweden and one operating from abroad, as well as a number of part-time workers.

The prerequisites involved in the choice of case organization for this thesis included that the organization had some kind of image or perception of themselves as an innovative organization. This prerequisite was fulfilled initially by looking at how the company portrayed themselves in relation to innovation. We also aspired to apply our research to a rather small organization, to be able to encompass a greater extent of its business. This was also achieved as the 10 interviews

conducted represents all but one of the 11 full time employees. The benefits of the ability to cover such a great extent of an organization, as well as focusing on one rather than several, are stated by Bryman and Bell (2017) as something that enables an additional layer of depth in the analysis. The extensive coverage of employees interviewed within the organization also helped us reach theoretical saturation more quickly. In turn, this coverage also benefited the analysis and contributed to the credibility of arguments and conclusions as they were more easily applicable to the entire organization, than if we had just focused on a smaller number of interviews within a larger company.

3.3 Data Collection

As we began to search for suitable organizations that would fit our interests, the research objective, and that was practically available, we quickly made contact with a business representative from a large technical company. We expressed the intended focus and purpose of our study and conducted one initial interview with a manager from the company. In turn, this manager referred us to another manager at the company whom he assured would be a valuable contact for further interviews. As the structure and purpose of our research objective began to take form, we contacted this manager and communicated our interest in proceeding with the data collection by interviewing members at the department. The response only arrived after about two weeks, with the message that the department was not able to take part in our study. This put us in a precarious situation as we had based much of our preparations on this organization. It also impacted our time-schedule which had to be adjusted with more challenging deadlines and a limited flexibility in the topic, scope and aim of the study. The value in much of the initial work was lost as our focus needed to be related to a completely new organizational context. While these events of course impacted our work in the aspects of time and scope, it has not been detrimental to the data collection per se. The search for a new organization began right away, and fairly quickly we made contact with the organization described above.

In line with qualitative research, and the interpretive traditions previously discussed, our data collection process mirrors the objectives of discovering novel and meaningful elements of knowledge through organizational members' interpretations of the social world (Prasad, 2018). To accomplish this, we chose semi-structured interviews as our data collecting method. The

semi-structured interview is to be considered as a structured conversation, where the interviewer possesses some degree of control of the direction and content of the conversation. This form of data collection works particularly well with an interpretivist approach in how it enables interpretation of meaning of a certain phenomenon in the life world of the interviewee (Kvale, 1996). This is beneficial in qualitative research as its interpretive aim is not as easily achievable if the same questions had to be asked to every interviewee. The possibility for semi-structured interviews to provide valuable material for the researchers is also dependent on the skills of the interviewer. Such skills include the ability to attentively evaluate questions and responses in relation to the research objective, but also the phrasing of the questions matter, particularly “how” and “what” questions are preferred in favor of “why”. Aspects like these were considered by both authors prior to the interviews. We believe it facilitated the emergence of spontaneous descriptions of opinions, thoughts and perception of the interviewee, rather than general speculations (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Semi-structured interviews also allow for some flexibility in discovering and elaborating on particularly interesting aspects that may emerge during the interview (Bryman & Bell, 2017). Arguably, such flexibility also facilitates research work in line with an abductive approach. As such, the semi-structured interview seemed to fit our purposes in multiple aspects and our knowledge and research of the method enabled us to create a comprehensive yet accurate interview structure in accordance with best-practice.

The empirical material consists of data from ten semi-structured interviews with members of MedLabs conducted over a two-week time period. Considering the size of the organization, the interviewees represented all parts and hierarchical levels of the organization from lab-assistants to leadership. Six interviews took place at the lab-facilities, while the other four were conducted virtually through video calls. Each interview lasted between 40 to 70 minutes and was introduced by a clarification of data protection and anonymity along with a short description of the research project. In order to encourage open and honest answers that were each related to the specific question, we did not want to reveal too much about the research focus before the interview. Thus, our interpretations were more accurately focused on how interviewees’ perceives and assign meaning to certain phenomena (Kvale, 1996). Then, permission was given from the interviewee to record the interview. The recording, as well as the presence of both authors during the interview, enabled us to carefully focus on surprising elements, body expressions, and suitable

follow-up questions during the interview. In this way, some of the analysis of the material started already during the data collection (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018).

Considering our opportunity to conduct a pilot interview with a manager from the first organization we had contact with, we were also able to review and adjust our interview guide to make it accurately target the aspects of interest of each member. Moreover, the interview guide consisted of questions of an open character with the intention of encouraging free and unbiased responses (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007). These were often followed up by questions aimed at developing the answers of particularly interesting parts of a longer response (Kvale, 2007). In addition, the questions were designed to be easy to answer, while also encouraging openness and spontaneity. This resulted in rather short questions without hidden biases from us as interviewers involved (Robson, 2002).

3.4 Data Analysis

Having collected all the necessary data, we began the work of preparing the data for analysis. Given the character of semi-structured interviews, the material consisted of much open talk that continuously shifted between various topics. Such aspects contribute to some degree of disorder in the empirical material (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). Thus, the material required structuring in order to create a manageable overview and categorization of the findings. We did this in line with Rennstam and Wästerfors' (2018) model of *sorting, reducing, and arguing*, which presents an approach to systematically make sense of, and develop analytical points out of empirical data.

The sorting began right after the interviews by transcribing all the recordings. Following this, we started to familiarize ourselves with the text version of the interviews and initiated the coding process in order to categorize and further sort the material. Here, we made use of Corbin and Strauss' (1998) model of *open coding and axial coding*. Open coding refers to the discovery of key concepts used by interviewees by breaking down the material into smaller parts for closer examination. By reading through the material with our research question in mind, we were able to identify the different descriptions and experiences members had of innovation and compare these to each other. These were summarized and reduced into a chart to create a structured overview. These later functioned as the foundation out of which themes were identified and

conceptualized. The next step was to assemble and structure additional material into sub-categories, a coding process which Corbin and Strauss (1998) calls axial coding. By familiarizing ourselves with, and discussing the key concepts derived from the open coding process, we were able to form sub-categories of members' experiences of innovation that sometimes stood in contrast to other members' expressions. Additional categories were also formed based on responses regarding specifically how innovation took place in the individual's work-life at MedLabs. During the coding process, we were also inspired by Gubrium & Holstein's (1997) method for analytical bracketing which entails bracketing the material by first focusing on *what* is being said, and afterward *how* it is being said to later code the material in line with the discovered categories. This method brings additional depth to the analysis in the way that implicit gestures, expressions and body language is used to extract additional meaning out of the material. For example, by studying *how* something was said, rather than just *what*, we had an additional tool at our disposal which helped us clarify the difference of aspects that in essence meant the same thing but were communicated differently by interviewees. This was especially important in our context as feelings of doubt or uncertainty when talking about innovation were rather salient, but in ways not so obviously communicated through only words. Throughout this process, the full material was constantly revisited and the research question, topics and themes repeatedly revised as we discussed implications behind the material.

So far, we had successfully sorted the empirical material with the help of coding methods, which also significantly reduced the material into a more manageable and concise set of topics and quotes. Although we would argue the analysis had been going on continuously throughout the interviews, and later through interactions with, and structuring of, the data, the main part of the argumentation around it took place after this. The topics and quotes collected were analyzed using the model of excerpt commentary units (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995). This process was systematically carried out under each of the identified themes and includes stating an analytical point, followed by an orientation that presents the empirical excerpt, the empirical excerpts, and lastly an analytical comment. This way of analyzing enabled us to unpack the main points from the material and invariably interpret these. Discussing the excerpts, and assigning meaning to them as they were interpreted, enabled us to theorize the material and develop concise arguments around it (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018).

3.5 Credibility and Limitations

The results of this study present implications derived from members' experiences of innovation in a small organizational context. As such, we have set out to uncover the combined implications of subjective meaning in a particular context, in line with interpretive traditions in the way that we seek not to discover the objective truth about a certain phenomena, but to interpret members' behaviors and the way they assign meaning to aspects of work (Prasad, 2018). The purpose of this study has not been to achieve broad generalizability as it is challenged by being based on a single case study, and referential loops involved both in the subjectivity of respondents and our own interpretation of the material (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2010). Instead, this thesis has set out to make an in-depth examination of a complex concept in a particular organizational context. Arguably, our findings provide valuable context-dependent knowledge (Flyvbjerg, 2006) that, although not capable of being generalized, may be useful when transferred and compared with other findings of similar character.

In line with reflections about the value of our contributions, as well as the nature of qualitative interviews, we view it as crucial to also discuss the value of data, and how we have related to source critique throughout the project. An interviewee's closeness to the topic discussed is important in this regard. Statements from an individual in an interview setting that is considered distant to the real event in terms of time and space, will be of weaker quality than in the opposite situation (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018). We acknowledge that our findings represent both strands in this regard, as experience, tasks, and motives of innovation varied greatly among respondents. However, the most important aspect for us here was that we were dealing with an organization that in itself was considered innovative by almost all respondents. In that sense, a single respondent's distance to the concept of innovation is perhaps as interesting when we consider that our ambition is to discover experiences of innovation where a pre-established definition of it is not provided in this thesis. Also, the provision of flexibility in semi-structured interviews gave interviewees the opportunity to, within certain frames, steer the conversation to personal experiences which is in line with what we sought to examine.

Source critique is also important considering how collected data is interpreted. Too few studies are paying attention to critically evaluating the empirical material (Schaefer & Alvesson, 2020).

In essence, the degree of subjective truth emerged from interviews may be impacted by respondents' relationship to social norms, and personal interests of political character. This requires ongoing reflection and critical considerations from the authors in order to ensure credibility of the empirical material. This process is aided by other sources of similar character which may work as benchmarks for single statements (Schaefer & Alvesson, 2020). Our approach to this involved continuous reflection of the trustworthiness of respondents' claims. Gubrium and Holstein's (1997) *what's* and *how's*, described above, played an important role here, in how vague and general statements were not only a source of data but provided opportunity to reflect on the substance behind them. Furthermore, the fact that we got to interview close to all members the organization facilitated adequate comparisons between statements, although with the limitations in mind that members possessed different positions at different geographical locations.

We also made sure to provide each respondent with a short description of the purpose of the interview, made sure he/she understood his/her, as well as the organization's, right to remain anonymous throughout the project and only asked questions about their work-life experiences in relation to innovative characteristics. We regard these actions to be sufficient enough to avoid what Robson (2002) calls participation biases. In relation to this, it could also be mentioned that none of the interviewees were native English speakers. This may be treated as a weakness in how certain statements potentially could have been expressed differently in the respondent's native language. However, as a result of a diverse background in terms of nationality within the organization, all members were used to English as the working language at MedLabs.

Finally, in line with the somewhat critical aim and topic of this thesis, the work process has undergone continuous critical reflection in all its parts. Therefore, we argue that the overall message communicated by the respondents in this thesis is credible and eligible for scientific purposes. We also want to highlight the potential contribution in the occurrence of abstract, vague, or contradictory answers from interviewees regarding innovation. After all, it is partly the existence of such aspects that make this topic worthwhile critically examining.

3.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter discusses the methodological principles in the undertakings of this study. We have introduced the reader to the qualitative research focus of this study along with interpretive research traditions where we have clarified our intention to interpret socially constructed meaning and symbols discovered in our findings. The thesis also takes an abductive approach in its continuous movement between theory and collected data to facilitate a theoretical dialogue with findings and an openness to surprising elements. Further, we have described our case study, MedLabs, and discussed data collection and analysis methods in line with our research approach. We described the conduct of the ten interviews with members at MedLabs, and presented the structure for how we handled the large amount of empirical material by sorting, reducing, and arguing with the data. We reflected on some limitations and discussed the degree of generalization of the study and emphasized the purpose of the thesis as an in-depth examination of a particular organizational context. Lastly, we discussed credibility aspects of the empirical material. We acknowledged the importance of source critique and presented our approach to analyze the data in an empirically credible manner.

4. Empirical Analysis

In this chapter, we present the empirical findings, consisting of ten interviews with members of MedLabs. As we asked the interviewees whether they thought they were innovative, the answers were in almost every case consistent; *yes, we are*. While conviction levels vary, Astra is for instance confident to the point that they can say that *“MedLabs is innovative, because each and every step that the company is taking is innovative.”* However, as we asked them to further explain why they were of this idea, the responses started to vary in substance. Moreover, there is a certain lack of conviction that the work performed on an individual level necessarily is about innovating at all. The overarching aim of the data presented is to showcase that members have preexisting and varying perceptions of what is or what is not innovative, and furthermore to present what is underneath this ambiguity. We do this by showing the multiple ways members use the term innovation to describe various parts of their work, but also how it is used to describe their organization in relation to its industrial context. The seemingly discrepant relationship between the ease of claiming innovativeness and hardship of explaining what that actually means is thus what will be presented below.

In presenting how the members of MedLabs make sense of innovation we think the best way of conveying our message is to imagine a painting. A painting can be created in many various ways, and artists draw upon many, perhaps intangible and hard-to-pin-point experiences to do so. Below, we present some of the experiences and perceptions the members of MedLabs draw upon to paint their image of innovation. Something that is crucial in the point we are trying to make is that the message of ambiguity in how innovation is perceived at MedLabs is properly conveyed. Although we already stated how almost every individual interviewed (all but two) in one way or another thought of MedLabs as an innovative organization, we will show how innovation is something that people fundamentally think differently about. We also present the hardship of explaining what specific things are innovative in the organization.

As a starting point, we present intuitive descriptions of what innovation is among members, the first step in completing the innovation painting to showcase members' experience of innovation.

This helps to get a structured initial overview of existing understandings of the concept in the organization:

“Innovation is trying to be different from everyone else, trying to get new ideologies and new concepts so that you can stay ahead of the curve.” (Roche)

“To actually do something differently, that is what I would call innovation.” (Glaxo)

“Innovation is to make something which is very good and which helps all of the people in the world. It does not have to be just people, it can be nature, animals and things like that. For me, it is about inventing something that is very helpful.” (Bayer)

“Innovation for me is something that is produced or that is being done in a new way, but still a working way. It is that no one else is not doing it yet in the market or in the industry.” (Merck)

“Innovation is like a challenge, and how you adjust to the challenge. Trying to find a solution.” (Smith)

“Innovation is if you are at the crossroads and there is one path that you have never taken before and you are probably considering the risks in taking that path. It is something challenging, interesting and unknown.” (Kline)

“Innovation is the design of a new product or service and coming up with a product or service that is new and different. It is about making something new for me.” (Zenica)

We can easily start with acknowledging that innovation is generally perceived as a major change, challenge, or improvement to the business and the world. It is generally described as a change, or a new direction by the members at MedLabs. Implicitly, we can also understand that the changes and challenges included in innovation have the potential of carrying major benefits to the organization and world. We will keep these descriptions in mind throughout the chapter and interpret them in line with other, more ambiguous statements of the concept.

4.1 The Innovators' Workshop

While perceptions of what parts of their work are innovative vary, we have found that members seem to have fundamentally different views of what it means to be innovative. The perceptions vary in that some responses attempt to explain internal processes of how work is done, whereas others turn to how the organization relates to its context. The latter part will be presented later. In this chapter, however, we aim to showcase that some respondents turn to intra-organizational procedures to make sense of innovation. What has been found is seemingly clear ideas about what innovation is, and also that members explain two seemingly conflicting ideas about what innovation entails, namely; (1) the ability to do things with **no defined outcome**, and (2) the ability to employ a free-to-choose toolkit to achieve **intended outcomes**.

4.1.1 There is Innovation, Then There is the Other Stuff

Before presenting the conflicting ideas of innovation, we turn our attention to how some respondents perceive their own work as innovative. Many of the interviewees were very quick to announce that MedLabs was an innovative organization, but hesitant when we asked them what that actually meant. As we asked Smith to explain what they meant when they said that MedLabs was an innovative organization, they responded that they were “*not really good at describing what innovation is*”. Elusive as the term is, we should not take for granted that every individual we interviewed was able to properly explain what innovation means to them. That, however, is a point proven in itself. As we present below, some of the respondents gave us clear answers when we asked them questions about how they relate to innovation in certain contexts. For instance, as some of the interviewees told us about what a typical workday looked like, they perceived some parts of it as being innovative and other parts not. The recurring theme in this chapter is that there are certain aspects of work that interviewees in their mind make up as being innovative. For instance, Glaxo and Astra could both very explicitly say how much of their workload is innovative:

“I would say maybe 10 to 20 percent of my work is actually innovative. I would prefer not to [do what I do the rest of the time] if I put it that way. But you see, I'm the one who's had the time to do it, and the ability to do it, and also the stamina to do it.” (Glaxo)

Glaxo explains that they had to do other tasks, perhaps not because they preferred to do it, but because they believed they were the one who had the time to do so. They later added that the reason they wanted to deal with innovative tasks was because that is what they thought was fun.

“More than 80 percent of my work is innovative, and from my position, I can say that it needs more innovation so I can focus on learning.” (Astra)

While we recognize that there are interesting implications in that these respondents have *very* different views of how much of their work is of innovative nature, the notion that they can go so far as to put a numeric value on it is more interesting in this case. This indicates that they have clear pictures in their mind about what innovation is, and more specifically what time of their workday is spent on performing innovative work. One would think that the natural follow-up question to this would be; *then what do those work tasks consist of, and what do the other 80 respectively 20 percent consist of?* So we did. And that is where the ambiguity kicks in and it becomes hard for the respondents to point at specific innovative tasks. We will return to this later in this chapter. Nevertheless, they recognize that there are parts of their work that they consider innovative, and in Astra's case, there is an explicit want for a higher grade of innovation in their work tasks (whatever these entail) so that they can focus on learning. The want to deal with more innovative tasks or innovation in general is a recurring phenomenon. Roche explains the following:

“At the moment I would like to be more innovative. You know, my skill set in diagnostics is quite vast. I apply one aspect of it to MedLabs. [...] If I don't become innovative enough, I can't progress in my field.” (Roche)

Being innovative is crucial for Roche to move forward within their field, and they see innovation as an enabler for them to fully embrace their skill set. While we are not certain at this point what Roche exactly means when they say that they are innovative, we are intrigued by the fact that they know that they need more innovation. Although they do not mention exactly how much of their workload is considered innovative, they do state that they “only apply one aspect” of their skill set in the organization. The indication of this is that there is more that Roche could provide

to the organization, had they only been able to have more room for innovation. While their stance on wanting more innovation differs from earlier respondents, Johnson and Kline are also of the perception that certain tasks are innovative, while others are not:

“Well, the stuff I do is fairly standard. So in my position, maybe there's not much requirement to be innovative. I think that's not a bad thing. It's not something that is lacking in itself, because my kind of work may not require the same kind of innovation as maybe on the technical side of things.” (Johnson)

This quote is interesting in itself as Johnson tells us about their view on work. They say that not being innovative is not a bad thing and nothing that is necessarily lacking. However, they say this in a way that suggests that innovation does not have to do with their own field of work, but is something that is required when working on technical things. We also find that Johnson feels as if innovation is a deviation from “standard work”, seeing as they refer to their work as standard and therefore not having the same need for innovation. The perception of innovation being a contrast to standard work is further shared by Kline:

“I have a good balance of okay; ‘now I need to do things in an innovative way’, and other tasks I need to be doing it in a more, like, standard way.” (Kline)

There appears to be an overarching sentiment that work can be either innovative or not innovative. To Johnson and Kline, being innovative is put in contrast to doing standard work tasks, indicating that innovative work entails doing things that are uncommon. The general point in this chapter is that members of MedLabs freely speak of some aspects of their work tasks being innovative and others not. While some want more of their operative work to be of innovative nature, others seem to show a more neutral stance. Reasons for more innovation vary from simply thinking innovative work is fun, to that it would allow for more learning opportunities, to that it would fully utilize a skill set. Nevertheless, the term innovation is used with some degree of certainty.

4.1.2 Painting on Blank Canvases

A rather interesting finding when asked to describe what makes their work innovative is that some members talk about a non-restricted and open internal workflow. From this point of view, we portray the members of the organization as artists with blank canvases. With the concept of being provided with a blank canvas, we mean that there are perceptions of finding this a distinctive characteristic that makes the organization innovative. For instance, Glaxo explains the following when asked why they thought their organization is innovative:

“We are all-inclusive, and what we try to do is provide opportunity. And when you provide opportunity, you never know where that's going to lead.” (Glaxo)

This quote has several interesting implications. First, tempting as it might be, Glaxo does not refer to a luxurious holiday resort when saying that they are all-inclusive. Rather, they mean that they are a diverse organization that is open to all people and ideas. But there is also a rather humble approach to what the results of this environment might be. In allowing people to freely paint on a blank canvas, the results are unpredictable. The view of innovation seems to be rather neutral, as Zenica further suggests; “*I think that innovation in itself is not positive or negative. It just is.*”. Innovation is not sought after for the sake of innovating. The sentiment here appears to be that innovation just happens, and whatever can be done to facilitate or to some degree make that happen is to have their members be able to paint on blank canvases.

“I mean, just speaking from my own experience; being allowed to do things that are outside my job scope, for example. We are very open to having people who want to learn and we give them ample opportunity.” (Johnson)

Johnson mentions doing things outside of their job scope, indicating that there are certain things they feel assigned to their role while there are other tasks they do out of reasons other than necessity. Again, we want to point out that it is not the actions performed either within or outside the job scope that is perceived as innovative, but rather the provided opportunity and environment to do so. Being open and also providing opportunities to people that want to learn

signifies that there is room for more development than simply whatever the formal job description might entail. It, therefore, seems as if the thing that makes the organization innovative is the ability to commit to tasks that are decoupled from what is perceived as duty bound work tasks.

“The people who work here have the opportunity to do whatever they want to do in the company. So we can have our own viewpoints. The company is open to all, and so we have a lot of opportunities to work on different things.” (Astra)

Again, we seem to find a perception that there is an opportunity to cross the boundaries of official job roles and dip their feet in other areas. This is not necessarily to say that they do not have tasks they must perform under more routine-based conditions. However, when they think of what makes their organization innovative, they talk about the aspects that allow them to personally engage in different projects that might not necessarily be what the “core operations”, whatever they are, are about. Glaxo further suggests that innovation could be regarded as a side project:

“So we need people in the lab who are like train drivers who can follow instructions and who can do what needs to be done. And on the innovation side, at the same time, we do not want people to be totally non-innovative. When we have expired materials or something which does not have any commercial value, we try to encourage people to experiment, to play, and do various things. [...] Innovation usually equates to a degree of failure before it reaches success, if it ever does” (Glaxo)

There is a rather clear view that most of the work performed at MedLabs is of routine character. Innovation is understood as having blank canvases where the members can be playful, experimental, and do things that are not expected of them in terms of what their job role entails. We will be careful not to say that committing to tasks outside the job scope is or is not actually part of their job expectations. But the perception that these members convey is that they have their “normal” work tasks, and apart from this they have the opportunity to develop and learn things outside of this scope. Where this might lead and what it may result in is unpredictable, just

as if you were to stare at a blank canvas and be told by someone to “do whatever you want!”. Regardless, there is some recognition that this does not always result in something innovative.

4.1.3 The Artists’ Toolkit

There are many ways to achieve the same results, nonetheless as we have learned in the lab environment in which this study has taken place. Similarly, an artist may use an expensive measuring tool to draw out a circle as a base for their painting. Or they may use the bottom of a beer can. We have found that some members at MedLabs find the opportunity to use whatever tools they feel best to reach a certain goal is what they explain when asked why their organization is innovative. Some point towards flexibility, and in this respect not only towards each other but to the customers also, while others talk about accessibility. When asked if they could further explain why they thought their organization was innovative, Smith explained the following:

“We could talk about flexibility. It is very flexible here. But we also know what our responsibilities are at the same time. And I mean... You of course have to finish all your tasks, but how we spend our time is up to each on their own. But no one is checking up on you after each task.” (Smith)

It seems as if there are no strict rules as to how exactly work must *be done*, it just has to *get done*. This perception however varies from what the earlier presented data suggests. Smith does not mention how some actions are beyond a certain job scope. Rather, they feel flexible in the sense that they can choose how to best get their work done in whatever way they feel works best for themselves.

“Now, when you drive a car, you have your own car. You might be going from Malmö to Lund, for example. You can choose any route you want and you will probably still be able to find your way there. You can choose the motorway, you can choose the Malmö-Lunda-road. You can choose many, many different routes and they all lead to the same goal.” (Glaxo)

There are many roads that lead to the same destination. This is rather interesting as it contrasts the earlier findings that suggested innovation as providing opportunity that is inevitably unpredictable, and may or may not result in something lucrative. Here, we instead find that the perception of being innovative is also accredited to situations where there is a clear goal. Still, innovation is tied to some degree of freedom and lack of work-related control, in this sense however as to how the specific work tasks are conducted rather than the outcome of these tasks. When we asked another interviewee, Kline, to explain why they thought that MedLabs was an innovative organization, they explained the following:

“If people that work here have something on their mind they are always ready and open to tell us about this. Everyone needs to be happy in their position and be willing to do what is needed. We feel like this does not need to be forced, it happens anyways. People should also be open to expressing their ideas.” (Kline)

Kline expresses that everyone simultaneously should be happy but also be able to commit to certain tasks. There is however no need to force this upon anyone as it gets done anyway. We further find implications that there is a perceived low grade of necessity to control how things get done within the organization. This suggests a certain sense of freedom in choosing how to proceed with work tasks, and that people are happy with that way of working. They further point at the openness of the organization and how they are of the idea that people always tell things that are on their mind.

“Our openness is really like through the roof and we don't keep like an eagle eye on what everyone is doing.” (Johnson)

We are not saying that there are no standard procedures for how to get things done at MedLabs. As hinted earlier, and as will be presented further, many of the interviewees perceive that much of their work is routine-based and does not differ that much from one day to another. However, the perception of autonomy still resides among some of the interviewees. Whether or not this is the result of certain business practices (given that autonomy sounds much nicer than dependency), we are more intrigued by the fact that they consider this sense of autonomy as something that makes them think of innovation.

4.2 The Innovator on the World Arena

As was presented in the chapter ‘The Innovators Workshop’, we found how innovation is thought about as certain processes or aspects of work that are within the organization. There are however also a number of findings where our interviewees turned towards how the organization fares in the context of its industry when deeming whether it is innovative. Similarly to the previous chapter, we find that there are many different perceptions of what exactly it means to be innovative. We will continue drawing upon the previous conceptualization of painting to convey this point.

4.2.1 One of a Kind

In this chapter, we present our findings that suggest that perceptions about how the organization fares in an inter-organizational context are drawn upon when making sense of innovation. Our aim in this section is to further point towards the ambiguities about innovation, as seemingly similar descriptions are used both to accredit *and* discredit MedLabs the innovation stamp by different members. One of the recurring themes in our findings is that of pointing at how the organization has done different from other actors:

“The nature of our work is not like a typical laboratory. If you compare ourselves to, let us say Karolinska (a Swedish hospital), we are more of a mobile lab. That was our concept from the beginning that we will be a mobile lab and if something is needed we can move quickly from one location to another. We were analyzing, for example, the samples of a handball team and that was also kind of on the way.” (Kline)

As is Kline’s perception, a core characteristic of the organization and one that makes it distinct from others, is that they are more mobile than the typical robust hospital where diagnostics otherwise take place. They furthermore mention how they were able to provide services to a handball team that was on the move and in need of having their samples tested. It seems as if mobility is an important aspect in Kline's view of what makes the organization distinct. Furthermore, the overarching feeling presented in this quote is that they are, in their own view, doing something that no one else is doing. It is however heavily suggested that this view is very much dependent on the geographical location in which MedLabs operates. We asked Abbie if

they could further explain what characteristics were specific to MedLabs and received the following response:

“There are no other laboratories that are like this. We are the only lab or medical laboratory here in [this geographical location]. There is none other than a hospital, where you need to wait in a line to get yourself tested.” (Abbie)

We later learned from Abbie that the way they approached their customers both reduced the time that customers had to wait to receive their results, but also that this procedure reduced a heavy workload from hospitals that instead could focus on serving those who really needed it. In this sense, being innovative is thought of as contributing to some form of greater good and providing a service that actually makes a difference, rather than simply innovation being the act of having a different approach than competitors. Again, the geographical location seems to be what distinguishes this uniqueness. We can conclusively interpret Abbie’s view of MedLabs as being a “one of a kind” organization as they explicitly state how there are no other laboratories that are like them in their area. This sentiment is further shared by Roche:

“The whole concept, the conceptualization of the company, comes from a small idea. And from this small idea, many people worked together to form a company out of it. And we have opened in areas where this did not exist before.” (Roche)

We can again see a respondent talking about the uniqueness of the organization. It seems as if distinctiveness, and doing something no one else has, is a trait that is closely intertwined with perceptions about MedLab. In Roche’s mind, however, there is an emphasis on the uniqueness of the group of people that came together and embodied a small idea into becoming something large. Being innovative can thus be understood as not only the work that they are performing today, or that they have performed over time, but also the process in which a small idea is made into reality. The recurring pattern here however are perceptions of uniqueness about the organization with a heavy emphasis on doing something that is new in relation to geographical location. What can be said about innovation in this regard is that it is a relative term, that is dependent not only on what or when others are doing, but also where.

4.2.2 No Credit for Imitation

A significant number of interviewees had a rather humble approach to MedLabs contribution to ‘making the world a better place’, while simultaneously thinking of the organization as innovative in other respects. What is interesting in the findings presented in this chapter is that the respondents deflect the credit for being innovative from the work that the organization does to the outside audience. As we have already suggested, it again seems hard to pinpoint what exactly makes the organization innovative in the eyes of the respondents, especially considering the conflicting findings presented in this and the section before it. We conceptualize this as the interviewees being artists that perceive themselves as simply having followed templates, or even copied other artists, and therefore find it hard to take credit for their accomplishments.

“We are not producing products or something new. [...] Basically, we are using prepared products that are certified and simply following protocols. We are just, even in that procedure of following protocols, trying to find easier ways to do some things. But still, things need to be done in a specific environment and in the way that the manufacturer intended, and that is it.” (Merck)

When describing what their core business idea is about, Merck explains that a lot of what they do is simply following procedures. What they do that could be regarded as innovative, that other organizations in the same industry do not, is to find easier, or as Merck later stated, “more efficient ways to do things”. Moreover, Merck mentions how they are not producing any products or anything new and in that respect projects the feeling as if they do not “deserve” to be called innovative. The sentiment that MedLabs is not doing anything particular is further shared by Bayer:

“My thinking is that we did not do anything that was very impactful for the world. We did not invent something. We are just doing some kind of job that most people did during COVID. And a lot of other people opened the labs. And my thinking is that in this field, there was so much money to be made, and we didn't do anything special in that regard.” - (Bayer)

Bayer thinks that the organization has seized an opportunity because there was money to be made. Also Zenica agrees with this statement. On the question of how innovation is measured, they answer quickly and clearly: *“If it makes money”*. What can be interpreted here is that MedLabs simply responded to a market need. We can again find implications of disregarding the organization as innovative because they “did not invent something” or do something that was different enough.

“The methods and everything are the same as other companies. We use the same machines as in other companies. But we are here and we provide a medical lab, a full medical laboratory. But we are doing it in a smaller laboratory. So I can say that since we did not have these things here in Sweden before, we have in that sense, I guess, been innovative.” (Abbie)

What Abbie refers to here, as they further explained to us, is that MedLabs has been able to do what bigger companies do, but has through their specific equipment been able to bring their operations much closer to where their customer base is. While Abbie agrees that much of the work they do is indistinguishable from what other organizations in the same industry have been doing, there is some recognition of the fact that they are doing at least some things in an unconventional way. Being innovative in this regard means that they are doing something different in a geographically local context where no one else is doing it. The claim of being innovative is however said with a dubious tone of voice, as if these differences alone are not enough to claim innovativeness.

“I would say that our culture is very kind of like an underdog culture. We consider ourselves like the scrappy kind of small player who does things in a little bit of a different way than the others. And so I would say that usually we utilize existing things to do things in a new way.” (Zenica)

There seems to be a recurring pattern of thinking that the organization is not doing anything particularly different than other actors in the industry. Zenica points at how MedLabs is a small player in the industry. What is further interesting is the perception of utilizing existing things.

Simply using these in a new way does not seem significant enough to put a claim on innovation. The shared perception here is that MedLabs has done things in ways that are not very different from others. While they admit that some things are different, that alone is not sufficient for them to accredit themselves as necessarily being innovative. In this regard, it seems as if the lack of any physical product development or groundbreaking ideas is of importance to some respondents' perceptions.

4.2.3 The Grueling Art Teacher

Whether or not you are into artistry, there has probably been some point in time when you wanted to learn something new. If you are one of the lucky few, you might have stumbled upon a teacher who brought out the best of your abilities. Were you not so lucky, you might have ended up with a teacher who only cares about things being made to their liking. This might make you feel forced to adapt and appeal to a seemingly highly regulated context (we send our regards to our primary-school art teachers). Context, of course, matters. And while perceptions of innovation so far have been found to be interrelated to the way members think of MedLab as unique or non-unique, they also seem to talk about innovation in relation to acting within a regulated industry.

“You have to function within certain frameworks. I think that our way of approaching the market and our way of doing business is innovative for our field. [...] But I would say that we spend more time fighting the kind of innovation stamp just because of like all the hoops and things that we have to go through with all the authorities and things. I mean, I would say we spend more time working on trying to look professional than we do trying to... Yeah, there is kind of a bit of a fight between innovation and professionalism in our field. And that's kind of something that we have to navigate.” (Zenica)

The way Zenica puts innovation as an antithesis of professionalism and having to “navigate” this rivalry is interesting. There is a certain conviction that being perceived as innovative is a bad thing in the med-tech industry. This is not to say that innovation itself, whatever it means, is not sought after within the organization. It seems as if MedLabs however is keener on keeping

innovation contained within the organization as opposed to projecting that image to the external audience. Johnson further explains the struggle of being innovative within a regulated context:

“Okay, so the biggest problem that these companies have is that things take a lot of time. And there are a lot of regulatory hoops to jump through. So what they need is basically a partner on the ground who knows all the regulations, what you need to do to meet those regulations, and basically make things as efficient as possible.” (Johnson)

MedLabs’s role in relation to other companies is that they should be a static entity that has a clear understanding of local regulations. As is Johnson’s perception, this is said in contrast to being innovative. This further suggests that being innovative means, as Glaxo put it, “that you are going to go outside the box, you are going to do something different, you are going to be unpredictable”. Unpredictability does not seem to be appealing to portray to other actors in the industry in which MedLabs resides. The weight that being in a regulated field has on the respondents however seems to differ. For instance, Merck explains the following:

“I do not perfectly understand all of the regulations that actors in Sweden have to follow. And that's the first thing. [...] And when I try to explain some things that I think would be an improvement over the way we are currently doing things, and to learn and things like that, I feel that people are not willing or able to accept some advice.” (Merck)

Being in a regulated field, and not having extensive knowledge of what these regulations entail, makes Merck feel as if people within the company are less keen to listen to his ideas. Although earlier responses seem to indicate that acting within a regulated field makes it less attractive to be perceived as innovative, it also affects the way Merck perceives their own capabilities within the intra-organizational setting. As has been presented, working in a field with regulatory standards seems to shape the meaning of innovation to the members of MedLabs. Innovation is the antithesis of what these members think is expected from other actors in its field, and these regulations further seem to leave prints on how processes are perceived within the organization. Similarly, the grueling art teacher wants things to be done in ways that they feel fit. And surely, the students that wish to gain the teacher's respect simply adhere to these standards. That however of course limits the students’ ability to do things the way they potentially would like to.

4.2.4 Beauty Lies in the Eyes of the Customer

While previous respondents talk about doing things differently, the data presented in this section showcases how some members point specifically to the value created for the end customer when explaining why MedLabs is innovative. The theme in the data presented in this section is that our respondents have perceptions about what they do for the customer. These perceptions are rather graceful, and talks about connectedness and relationships with the customer are recurring. Kline explains the following when we asked them whether an outside audience would think MedLabs was innovative:

“I think, for example, in the product category, if you offer services or products to some people, success is generally based on the customer feedback. If, for example, it's a product based medical device or service, for example, let's say MedLabs was offering COVID testing to the wider population in Sweden. So if the community was not that recipient to you and you are not getting return on your investment, that means that your ideology basically was not good enough or you need to go back and refine it.” (Roche)

Roche explains rather explicitly that whether something is innovative or not, and to what extent it is considered successful innovation, is inevitably up to whether customers are recipients and thus whether it yields returns on investment. It is perhaps not a surprising finding that one is under the perception of the market having play in deciding whether a product is successful or not. This perception however fundamentally differs from how other findings we have presented perceive innovation. The fact that the customer is at play in shaping our respondents view of the organization seems to resonate with other respondents:

“So if our customer is asking for help and they really need to do, for example, [access our services] on the weekend, it's easy to get in touch. Because of our small size they are not rolling through a lot of departments, or having to go through multiple people to reach us. So it's like a closer relation with the customer itself.” (Smith)

When asked whether others would think of MedLabs as innovative, Smith explained that they were under the impression that customers can reach them easily when they need their services. The way that MedLabs is structured, in other words that it is a relatively small organization, seems to give Smith the impression that they reduce a lot of steps and allows for the employees to have close relations to the customers. Having close relationships with customers, and perceiving this as innovative, might indicate that Smith believes this is unusual in the industry in which MedLabs resides. Moreover, the idea that providing something useful for the end customer seems to affect the way our respondents think of their own organization, especially in terms of innovation. We are not saying that this necessarily is how the customers themselves understand MedLabs service offering, but rather how the respondents themselves feel about their customers. Creating value for the customer is something that others point at as well:

“We were the only lab that organized everything and, how do I say it, connected with our customers in a way that made us different from our competitors. We are giving results the same day, basically four, five hours after a sample is taken from a person.” (Merck)

Being connected with the customer seems to be a recurring perception. Although they remained skeptical as to whether or not customers would find MedLabs innovative, Merck believes that their services have created value for the customer in terms of reducing the time it takes for them to receive their results. The perception here is that they have solved a market need which no one else at the time did. As Merck further explained, despite not developing any new products, they have been able to effectivize and mobilize processes which otherwise would have been taking up wasteful time from both the customer and hospitals.

“We have good relationships with our customers. So we are talking with them. We are fixing their problems. If they are connected with us... We are always having good connections with everybody, like our customers. The thing is that we are fast” (Bayer)

Bayer is also under the impression that they have good relationships with their customers. We should not underestimate the importance of receiving customer feedback in shaping how we view our own organization. As has been shown, perceptions of the relationship with customers

seem to affect the view on the organization, and furthermore in our case make employees draw upon this to assess whether the organization is innovative or not.

4.3 Chapter Summary

Our findings point at several things in relation to innovation. First, and perhaps not so surprisingly, we have clarified that there are rather clear ideas about what innovation is. Some refer to their tasks as being innovative, thus focusing on intra-organizational aspects that makes them think of innovation. Other findings point at inter-organizational aspects and speak of how the organization is innovative in relation to its context. There are however various aspects that are drawn upon when they are sharing their perceptions with us about these two different views. The first distinction, as is related to intra-organizational processes, are different perceptions about processes within the organization that makes our respondents think of the organization as innovative. Some experience total freedom to do things, although not related to the core operations of the organization, as innovative. Others perceive autonomous work as being an innovative way to perform their work tasks. As for the findings in regards to the inter-organizational context, it has been found that members draw upon the (non)uniqueness of the organization, industry-related regulations, and customer relations to explain their experiences.

5. Discussion

We have set out to understand how employees at MedLabs, an organization within the med-tech industry, experience innovation. While there is what appears to be an unlimited amount of research on innovation, our goal was to discover how perceptions of innovation appear in contemporary organizations. To no surprise, it has been found that a majority of our findings point toward being innovative as something that our respondents “of course are”. Still, there exists a lot of ambiguity in how the respondents make sense of innovation. Such ambiguities might be of utmost importance to identify what it truly means to claim being innovative.

5.1 Deciding What is Innovative

In attempts to understand innovation, scholars have turned to conceptualizing innovation as an ‘outcome’ or as a ‘process’ (Anderson & King, 1993). Seeing as managers perceive innovation as crucial for the long-term survival of the organization (Salaman & Storey, 2002), we can understand the great interest in having clear answers as to what innovation is and further how to be innovative. From the literature on the outcome and process perspective we therefore interpret two separate interests; (1) to properly be able to define and identify innovation, and (2) to successfully foster an innovative climate that facilitates the creation of innovation. Through our findings, we will discuss these interests from the outcome and process perspectives of innovation respectively.

5.1.1 Who is the Judge of Novelty?

First, as is related to the outcome perspective, we have found that our respondents seem to downplay their innovativeness as they lack any physical product development and perceptions of “not different enough” work. While we are aware that there are distinctions between an invention and innovation (Utterback 1971), our findings suggest that innovation, when thought about, might still draw the mind toward the creation of physical products. For instance, some respondents immediately discredit any claims of being innovative as they “did not invent something”. While this is not necessarily wrong, what we might learn from this is that the physical manifestation of a product may be important to employees in their perception of what

innovation is. This also suggests that it is not exactly clear what truly separates innovation from an invention. This finding is not surprising, seeing as much of the focus of research on innovative outcomes relies on the number of patents or market adaptation of *an* innovation (Bell, 2005; Jaffe, Trajtenberg & Henderson, 1993; Whittington et al. 2009). Utterback (1971) further suggests that the difference between simply an “invention” and an “innovation” are the entrepreneurial actions that follow the creation of an invention. This view appears to be rather static, and assumes that there is a “before” and “after” stage of innovation. Is innovation then, according to Utterback (1971), simply an invention that just has not yet been subject to entrepreneurial actions (whatever these entail)? This definition seems to explain through what actions the value or novelty of an invention is realized, thus making it an innovation.

More fruitful to this debate might actually be to talk about novelty rather than innovation. If we are to accept that novelty is an indivisible part of innovation (eg. Greve & Taylor, 2000; Obstfeld, 2005), then it should be of great interest to closely examine how the members of MedLabs assess their operations as novel. We remind ourselves that novelty is the alleged usefulness of ideas deemed by certain groups or individuals (Damanpour, 1991; Dougherty, 1992). Our findings suggest that conflicting ideas about novelty might exist between members within organizational borders. While some of our findings point toward perceptions of being unique and doing something that has not been done before, others perceive their work as imitating other ideas. The ambiguity in this seems to rely on different perceptions of what is actually going on in the organization. For instance, we have found that perceptions about close relationships with customers can affect the way one thinks about the usefulness of a service. With this said, it seems rather naive to assume that novelty is judged only by external actors, such as intellectual property agencies or simply “the market”. As our findings suggest, organizational members seem to have their own perceptions of what the innovative outcome is, if it even exists. This could be explained by intuitive differences in what is considered novel, but also through their individual experiences. These potential conflicts and ambiguous ideas about novelty and the innovative outcome should not be ignored by manager’s wishing to truly facilitate innovation.

Inevitably we ask ourselves what the purpose of defining an outcome as innovative is. In contexts where innovation is perceived as a main driver for success, the ability to both measure and define something as “innovative” might be central. Organizations engaged in producing innovations indeed often have some ways to measure it (Markham & Lee, 2013). The issue that arises is that measuring innovation on a short-term basis has some fallacies. Amara’s Law points out how the value of innovation often is overestimated in the short run and underestimated in the long run (Searls, 2012). Seeing as innovation is perceived as a main driver for financial development, the desire to identify innovations in an early stage as to know where to commit the organizations limited resources makes sense. Knowing whether an idea is novel at an early stage would probably be every innovation manager’s desire. Whether this can be done in a faithful way or not seems to be the problem here, especially considering our findings that different ideas about novelty might intuitively exist among organizational members involved in the innovation process.

5.1.2 Innovation Processes or Innovative Processes?

One of the interests in studying innovation is to understand the processes and practices behind it so that the question of how to best organize to facilitate innovation can be answered. Greve and Taylor (2000) explain that the process perspective of innovation aims to show precisely the processes behind the eventual creation of an innovation. In this sense, the outcome- and process perspectives are inherently dependent on one another. Without an innovative outcome, there cannot be an innovative process, and vice versa. We found that our respondents turned to certain work processes when talking about innovation. In this sense however, it seems as if there are two different lines of thought within the organization; one that explains what *makes them innovate* and the other what *makes them innovative*. Our finding therefore suggests that a process in itself can be perceived as innovative regardless of eventual results of such a process. Specific to our case is that much of the work is perceived as routine-based with diverging perceptions of innovation. Some findings point at the autonomy of work as innovative, whereas others perceive innovation as de-coupled from their normal work tasks.

Our case serves to showcase the hardships of having consistent views of innovation within an organization. Van de Ven (1986) explains that individuals with specialized and stable jobs will be

less likely to pay attention to innovative ideas. This is interesting as innovation is contrasted to stability in our findings, both in terms of performing “normal work tasks” but also to how the members perceive their organization as operating in a regulated field. Despite the respondents perceiving innovation as a contrast to some form of status quo, they do show some form of awareness of the warnings Van de Ven (1986) convey. We turn to Ridley's (2020) definition of innovation as a “process of constantly discovering ways of rearranging the world into forms that are unlikely to arise by chance”. The message here seems to be that; if innovation is not somehow facilitated, it is unlikely to happen. Therefore, innovation has to actively be sought to some extent. Our findings seem to align with this line of thought, seeing as innovation is actively pursued through what our respondents perceive as being provided opportunities to do things outside of their regular work. Van de Ven (1986) further explains that for innovation to be facilitated, there must be room to transform the structure and practices of the institutionalized environment. This is where our respondents' perceptions about acting within a regulated context becomes interesting. There seems to be conflicting ideas about some degree of wanting to be innovative within the organization while simultaneously feeling that the environment within which they operate calls for less innovation. The perception here seems to be that MedLabs should be portrayed as a stable entity in certain contexts, rather than an innovative one. While their awareness of not wanting to be portrayed as innovative in itself is a refreshing contrast but also proof to the problems explained by Hallonsten (2023), it also shows that images of what the organization should be to an external audience might affect the innovativeness of organizations.

Lastly, seeing as we found that some perceived the autonomy of their work with clear goals as innovative raises some questions. While a vast amount of definitions of innovation exist, the one recurring theme seems to be newness and doing what has not been done before (eg. Bell 2005; Van de Ven, 1986; Jaffe, Trajtenberg & Henderson, 1993). This seems rather consensual, and some of our findings also point toward this. That is why the findings on autonomy, and especially working toward already-defined goals, are particularly interesting. Of course, considering something to be innovative could be a harmless way of describing something in the lack of a better description. A process or way of work could be novel to someone, and be just that; a perceived innovative way of working. While we are careful with drawing any conclusions based on the limited data we have collected, we have some implications that being innovative

can be understood as a state of mind that conceptually could be separated from the activity of “innovating”. Although we have not found this to necessarily be the case in this study, our findings makes us ponder about what practices are pursued in organizations because they are perceived as innovative without much thought of their substance.

5.2 The Many Facets of Innovation

Van de Ven (1986) explains that innovation is determined and measured based on the ability to generate ideas considered to be new by the individuals involved in the process. This is where innovation might start to lose its accuracy and become heavily dependent on how the individual innovator makes sense of and assesses what is and what is not a new idea. It is interesting to consider the financial incentives in this respect. Successful innovation presents the innovator with the potential to make a significant financial profit (Greve & Taylor, 2000). Financial profit as a measurement of, and incentive to, innovation is a view also present in our findings. Some respondents are very clear in this matter, which narrows the organizational understanding of innovation down a notch. However, literature on measuring innovation suggest that the process is more complicated than that, and propose caution with drawing long-term conclusions of innovation measurements in an early stage (Hallonsten, 2023). In fact, Amara’s law tells us that innovation is often overestimated in the short run (Searls, 2012). It is convenient for MedLabs to think of money as the only measurement of successful innovation, as it provides instant ground for evaluation. Though, it contrasts research on what straightforward and short-term measurements are able to produce in terms of credible evaluation. Brattström et al. (2018) write that ongoing measurements of innovation tends to lead to exploitation rather than exploration of ideas. We think this argument is intuitive, and signs of it can be found in how members at MedLabs primarily speak about current structures that differ from some competitors, when they describe what makes MedLabs innovative. However, the recurring arguments that innovation lies in the openness to think new and outside the box, and to be autonomous, might lean towards exploration.

While measurements give some indication on how innovation is experienced, we may also want to consider MedLabs in light of literature that discusses determinants of success to innovation. Salaman and Storey’s (2005) review of managers' perceptions of successful innovating firms

states radical and inclusive definitions of innovation as significant. It is further suggested that innovation as part of strategic outlooks, and an encouraging and inclusive attitude to innovation further supports successfulness. We suggested previously that such determinants also reflect managers' ability to make sense of innovation. This may also be related to our findings from MedLabs, where members are clear with their conviction of the presence of innovation. It is generally communicated that innovation is available to everyone in the autonomous and open work-environment they repeatedly highlight. However, the overall strategy does not seem to be about innovating more and all the time. Although this will not be enough to simply say that MedLabs is successfully innovative or not, which is neither the purpose here. We might however say that the positive statements and overall attention given to innovation from respondents point at sort of an innovative state of mind, as suggested previously.

Furthermore, our findings support the dependence of innovation on the individual's sensemaking, seeing as perceptions of innovation vary between individuals in the same organization. Still, the ideas about what is and what is not innovative appears to be rather easily defined by the respondents. For instance, our findings show the ease of accrediting certain aspects of work as being innovative, or simply saying that the organization is innovative without really thinking about whether it really is that or not. This may be viewed in light of Salaman and Storey's (2002) findings that show how managers perceive innovation as crucial for the long-term survival of the organization they studied, although it is less obvious specifically what being innovative really entails. Most interesting is the awareness the managers have of their own role in obstructing innovation from taking place. The paradox is clear when we learn that impediments are second-order errors (Argyris,1990), institutionalized, and consist of successful modes of organizing common (non-innovative) work (Salaman & Storey, 2002). This shows clearly how managers make sense of innovation. They are even honest to the degree that they, though implicitly, blame themselves to be the real obstruction of innovation in their organizations (Salaman & Storey, 2002).

We may relate this further to the findings at MedLabs. As highlighted in the introductory section of the analysis chapter, members describe the concept of innovation with words like “change”, “unknown”, “interesting”, “challenging”, “something new”, and “something good that helps all

the people in the world”. As mentioned, close to all members describe the organization as innovative and couple it to certain ways of doing work, autonomy, and customer closeness. However, unless we are willing to acknowledge that positive customer views, autonomous work, or having a diverse geographical presence are typical characteristics of innovation, we may question the degree of innovation actually taking place at MedLabs. Still, members may consider these aspects to be relatable to their own descriptions of innovation which we acknowledge as subjective truths. It is however interesting to consider these experiences in relation to some other, rather diminishing statements, from some respondents. They point out that MedLabs are simply following protocols of preexisting procedures, are not inventing anything, are not contributing to the world, are acting within a regulated context, and are only doing the same thing as many other actors who wanted to exploit a lucrative market during the pandemic. These expressions contrast the general perception that MedLabs is innovative and particularly the reasons stated for why they are so.

The implications we want to point at here do not aim at disqualifying MedLabs as an innovative organization, but rather to highlight what seems to be difficulties in making clear sense of the concept. Similar to the paradoxical situation in Salaman and Storey’s (2002) study, experiences of innovation are subject to a degree of ambiguity at MedLabs. Contradictions are clearly involved in how members make sense of innovation, where some claim they have not achieved anything other than following procedures, while others assign innovation to a broad scope of activities performed at MedLabs. One respondent even goes as far as saying “*MedLabs is innovative, because each and every step that the company is taking is innovative.*” This diversity in perceptions between members, out of which most are doing the same work at similar positions, arguably points at difficulties in making sense of innovation.

It is interesting to consider the reasons behind such internal ambiguities of how innovation is experienced. Social constructionism tells us that individuals construct their reality based on context and meaning (Prasad, 2018). This could be one explanation for the diversity of understandings. What drives innovation may also become paradoxical when restrained by cultural forces (Westenholz, 1993), which in turn may be influenced by power and hierarchy (Sackmann, 1992). Another may have to do with the increasing attractiveness of innovation,

leading to members at MedLabs claiming innovativeness without really thinking about how and why. It becomes a state of mind such as, “of course we are innovative”, but when tasks are explained in more detail, difficulties arise in providing a coherent description of why it is an innovative task. This may be further related to critical perspectives of innovation, that treats how the concept is going towards nothing and everything at the same time. We will examine our findings in relation to this matter further in the following section.

5.3 Innovation is Simply Not for Everyone

Hallonsten (2023) describes an increasing obsession with the attractiveness of being associated with innovation in today’s society to the degree that the term is losing meaning and substance. Our findings show a close to consensus understanding that MedLabs is an innovative organization among members. Still, respondents are more ambiguous in their descriptions of *what* makes them innovative. A quick and easy conclusion with this in mind could be that the respondents do not know what they talk about when they claim innovativeness, implying a lean towards “empty” innovation at MedLabs (Hallonsten, 2023). Though, we will not be so fast in claiming this as the final truth. In fact, MedLab’s ability to gain a competitive edge over its competitors during the COVID pandemic may be checked in light of descriptions of innovation as a game changer (Govindarajan & Trimble 2001) and its provision of long-lasting [competitive] advantages (Hamel, 2006). In this respect, we can more easily understand descriptions that it is flexibility and customer closeness that constitutes some of the members' perception of innovation. Seemingly, this is how some of them experience innovation, and who is to say that they are wrong in assuming that these things make them feel innovative. Being under the impression that one is doing something new and novel, as we have found perceptions of in our findings, is precisely how innovation is defined by many authors (eg. Greve & Taylor, 2000; Obstfeld, 2005; Jaffe, Trajtenberg & Henderson, 1993). This however turns into a chicken-and-egg dilemma. If we are to say with full certainty that innovation is a substanceless buzzword used to project grandiose images (Hallonsten, 2023), then the claim of being innovative would have to have “come before” the practices that makes one think that one is innovative. Thus we would have to assume that the respondents' views on innovation in our study are ambiguous, not because innovation is hard to make sense of, but because they are trying to save their skin. This we cannot truly tell. The ambiguity in our findings however quite

explicitly exemplifies that the meaning of innovation is inconsistent and might even be so within small organizations.

Some of our findings can be understood to show some degree of awareness of the issues Hallonsten (2023) explains. As we earlier showed, how the organization should act in what our respondents perceive as a regulated field and appearing as a stable entity serves as an example where innovation is not an attractive term. Alvesson (2013) talks about the urge among organizations to be associated with attractive terms, titles and associations and refers to this as “grandiosity”. The argument is that this obsession may lead to hyperinflation and depletion of meaning of associations of various forms. Hallonsten (2023) argues that innovation as a term is subject to overuse, inflation, and thus an increasing amount of “emptiness”. Underlying this seems to be that there is an excessive positive connotation to innovation. As we have learned, such has not always been the case. And it is not until the midst of the last decade that opinions about innovation have turned overall positive (Godin, 2012). We already suggested that MedLabs has what appears to be a refreshing view of not exhibiting innovation toward a certain external audience, as one respondent even explicitly states that they are “*fighting the innovation stamp*”. In this sense, however, it seems as if what is of importance to MedLabs is to portray themselves as stable and professional. To them, being perceived as innovative means the very opposite of this. Thus, it seems as if the med-tech industry, at least the sphere in which MedLabs operates, might not regard innovation as highly as other contexts as suggested by Hallonsten (2023).

This all boils down to the following question; if the way our respondents explain their experiences to us is how they perceive innovation, and if that perception causes them no harm, why should we question whether they are “truly” innovative when they claim they are? As we have learned, Alvesson (2013) mentions the meaninglessness of various concepts and empty hygiene factors organizations engage in. To put his thoughts into the context of innovation, the conclusion he makes can be understood as; if everyone is innovative, then no one is innovative. Innovation simultaneously seems to have become a hygiene factor in many parts of society, businesses nonetheless (Kahn, 2018). These two logics are conflicting. But for someone who is under the perception that innovation is a necessity for the long term survival of the organization

(Salaman & Storey, 2002) to also claim that they are not innovative seems absurd. Although we have no such evidence in this case, we can imagine the dissonance occurring in organizations when innovation is a core part of the business.

5.4 Innovation as an Adaptive Resemblance

By considering perceptions through the outcome and process perspective, we learn of the picture our respondents have on *what* innovation is and *how* innovation could be facilitated. Our discussion on sensemaking proves to us that we have not been able to fulfill the impossible task of encapsulating all experiences that lead to this picture. The discrepancy between what innovation means to these individuals and the explanations of what makes them (not) innovative is rather prominent. In a similar fashion, the wide array of views on what it means to be innovative also supports the dilution of the term. We have lastly turned to the critical perspective of innovation in hopes for guidance to why this might be. With how the individuals interweave being innovative with terms such as “change”, “interesting”, and “something good that helps all the people in the world”, we can further understand the desire to assign these attributes to describe oneself. However, seeing for instance how MedLabs relates to being innovative in their regulated field, it seems as if there is some awareness of innovation not necessarily being only about these “good” things as described above. Why would doing something good that helps all people in the world stand in contrast to being a stable business? Finally, this suggests that the notion of being *innovative* employs different meanings in different contexts. These meanings vary from possibilities of being a harmless way of explaining what is going on as a lack of a better word, to a way of explaining what the organization is all about, to an unwanted way of portraying the business. Through our findings and discussion, we suggest conceptually thinking of the notion of being *innovative*, and “empty” innovation specifically, as a chameleon; adapting and changing its resemblance to match its environment, rather than vice versa. This stands in contrast to how innovation otherwise might be regarded as the static, dependent variable to which the business model should adapt.

6. Conclusion

Our study aims to show how innovation and innovativeness are experienced in a small organization, MedLabs. To do this, we answer the following research question; “*How do members in a small med-tech organization experience innovation?*”. While completely coherent answers are not expected, the hardship of explaining what *exactly* is innovative in relation to the ease of claiming that they are innovative is thus what has been the backbone of this study. Below we present the empirical findings, how these have contributed to how we understand innovation, and lastly what limitations our study has and what future research might embark on.

6.1 Empirical Findings

First and foremost, our main empirical finding is that innovation is perceived in varying and ambiguous ways by the members at MedLabs. While it is perhaps not surprising that varying perceptions come to the surface during this kind of study, these vary in substance and contain ambiguity to the point where that in itself is grounds for a lot of discussions. What we found was that our respondents drew upon both intra- and inter-organizational perceptions to talk about why and how they were innovative.

As said, what is most prominent is the ambiguous ways to explain innovation. In contrast to this, but no less interesting, is that almost all members agree that they in some form are innovative. There seems to be an inconsistent agreement on what innovation is. The consensus is that they are innovative, but no one really agrees on why. We first find that there are mixed opinions on whether MedLab has made a contribution that is considered novel in an inter-organizational context or not. There seem to be varying perceptions about this, where some seem to discredit the “grandness” of their own work because they did not invent anything. The idea that innovation and a physical invention are not easily distinguishable sets the tone for the ambiguity that is to come. One way of understanding the conflicting views of innovation is to consider that there are different views on novelty. We found that some respondents talked of how they had close relations and could meet the customer needs, whereas others pointed at the general uniqueness of their service. We suggest that assumptions of novelty are taken into account, not only in

retrospect, but also in the early stages of innovation where there is not yet a clearly defined outcome.

The other area, which we refer to as the intra-organizational aspect, regards certain processes that happen within the organization which our respondents refer to as innovative. First, we have found that there seems to be clear ideas in our respondents' minds about what innovation is, seeing as they can point toward certain work tasks being innovative. To some, the ability to think freely and to have the opportunity to do things beyond their job scope feels innovative. Others refer to the autonomy of their work and lack of defined ways to reach set goals as innovative. These contrasting findings are interesting and further strengthen our claim that innovation is ambiguous and differently thought about at MedLabs. On a final note, we have in general found that the perception of innovation is closely intertwined with unpredictability and doing grand things. The results point at how innovation therefore stands in contrast to how MedLabs wants to be perceived in the med-tech industry that they reside in. The desire to be portrayed as professional and stable is prominent, and being seen as innovative is therefore something that is not necessarily attractive in this setting.

6.2 Theoretical Contribution

Our findings add interesting aspects to the discussion on innovation on several themes. First, we have found that varying intra-organizational views on the novelty of a service may exist. Current literature on innovation as an outcome mainly aims to explain how the innovativeness of an idea is judged (Van de Ven, 1986). As we accept that novelty and innovativeness are closely intertwined (Greve and Taylor, 2000; Obstfeld, 2005), we have found that intuitively varying perceptions of novelty may explain why members think differently of what is innovative or not. We have further contributed to the literature on the process perspective. In this area, research aims to explain the processes that constitute the eventual creation of innovation (Greve & Taylor, 2000). While our findings on novelty can be understood as images about the innovative outcome, these might be of importance when considering how and what type of innovation is facilitated in the process of innovation. More explicitly related to processes, we have found that contemporary definitions of process innovation, such as Riddle's (2020) about innovation being unlikely to arise by chance, rather accurately explains what is going on in this case. However, which is not

necessarily a process that generates innovation, we have found that some processes per se are perceived as innovative. This is perhaps better understood as “innovative ways of working”, rather than “processes”, as to not temper the purpose of viewing innovation through a process perspective. Still, it is a provoking thought to consider that processes can be considered innovative as this in other contexts might guide what ways of working are embraced, especially if innovation actively is pursued.

Although the varying perceptions of innovation adds to the literature on the outcome and process perspective, the ambiguity and difference in how innovation is talked about is intrinsically interesting. Hallonsten (2023) argues that innovation essentially has become a watered down concept. By critically discussing innovation, and by considering concepts such as grandiosity (Alvesson, 2013), we soon notice that innovation by its nature is a phenomenon limited to a few but sought by all. As was presented at the very start of this thesis, innovation is considered both the most important and most overused term in America (O’bryan, 2013). The gist seems to be that, if we hold true that innovation is limited to a few, then everyone cannot be innovative. Thus, talking about being innovative might in reality accommodate a bundle of other activities, such as autonomous ways of working, having close customer relationships, and other things that our findings point at. We relate this to what Salaman and Storey (2002) explains as the rationale behind innovation being such a core conception among managers. With how innovation is thought about, such as being crucial for the long-term survival of the organization, we can understand the obsession with it. Similarly, we found a certain discrepancy between how innovation is talked about and what activities are pursued that makes them claim innovativeness. This aligns well with the arguments posed by Hallonsten (2023). Lastly, we found that innovation is not necessarily as attractive as a term in the context we studied. While this is based on conceptions about what innovation is and how others relate to it, our findings suggest that projecting images of being innovative might not be as lucrative in fields where there is a perceived need for stability and professionalism.

Based on our findings and discussions, we propose a conceptual perspective that portrays the concept of innovation, particularly "empty" innovation, as a chameleon. In this view, innovation exhibits an adaptive nature, altering its characteristics to align with the surrounding environment

instead of expecting the environment to conform to it. This perspective challenges the conventional perception of innovation as a static, dependent variable to which the business model must conform.

6.3 Limitations

There are several dependencies with our study that may have steered us into making the conclusions we made. Having studied an organization that does not explicitly exhibit images of innovation to the same extent that many other organizations do might have its limitations, seeing as a big point in this thesis has been the overuse and empty use of the term innovation. While this turned out interesting regardless, as many regarded their organization as innovative, we also acknowledge that our respondents do not perform what we refer to as “conventional innovation”. We should, although be rather careful to assume what “conventional innovation” is and is not, as is the very essence of this thesis.

We are aware of the methodological limitations and present those in the methodology chapter. Of course, having more time and interviews might have strengthened our findings further. However, being pragmatic and considering the scope of this essay and the timeframe in which it had to be done, we are not so sure that necessarily having more data to process would have led to other findings than the ones presented. Lastly, our findings are highly contextually dependent. Albeit a small contribution to the innovation literature, we hope that our findings may serve to show that the issue and dilution of the term innovation is rather extensive, but that the appetite for projecting grandiose images of innovation is not present in all settings.

6.4 Future Research

We are excited to finish this thesis having found both that what Hallonsten (2023) explains as “empty” innovation appears to be a real issue, but we also want to encourage future researchers on the topic to not take for granted that innovation is necessarily an attractive term in all industries. As suggested, this study is not only limited to the med-tech field but also the sphere in which MedLabs operates. There might be fruitful data to obtain by approaching both fields but also people that do not conventionally work with innovation. To us, it seems rather obvious that

asking people with titles such as “innovation manager” will leave the researcher with an overall positive connotation of the need for innovation.

Relating to the strengthening of Hallonsten’s (2023) arguments in this thesis, we are nevertheless not able to claim that all “empty” innovation is meaningless. While this study has taken a critical approach to the contemporary understanding of innovation, the opposite could presumably also have been done. While having the implications of “empty” innovation in mind, it would be interesting to study more concretely how businesses may benefit from branding and engaging themselves with what would be considered as “empty innovation”. We are curious about how the conclusions of such findings could complement our findings, with how innovation is experienced and made sense out of.

We would again like to highlight one of our findings on differences in novelty. This is a debate that, had we had the room for it, would have liked to tackle ourselves. There are many concepts explaining how certain ideas are evaluated within organizations and we acknowledge that this is closely intertwined with the process of innovation. As was suggested, to truly understand what processes constitute the creation of innovation, or more explicitly what *type of innovation* is created, one might be intrigued by the notion of intra-organizational differences on novelty. Understanding the dynamics between people and different organizational functions, and no less the power and potentially diverging interests between them, should be interesting to further identify key actors in the screenplay of innovation.

Reference List

- Alvesson, M. & Kärreman, D. (2007). Constructing Mystery: Empirical Matters in Theory Development, *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 32, No. 4, pp.1265-1281
- Alvesson, M. & Sandberg, J. (2013). *Constructing Research Questions: Doing Interesting Research*, London: Sage
- Argyris, C. (1990). *Overcoming organizational defenses: Facilitating organizational learning*. Allyn & Bacon.
- Bell, G. G. (2005). Clusters, networks, and firm innovativeness. *Strategic management journal*, 26(3), 287-295.
- Brattström, A., Frishammar, J., Richtnér, A., & Pflueger, D. (2018). Can innovation be measured? A framework of how measurement of innovation engages attention in firms. *Journal of Engineering and Technology Management*, 48, 64-75.
- Bryman, A. & Bell, E. (2017). *Företagsekonomiska forskningsmetoder (3 uppl.)*. Stockholm: Liber.
- Damanpour, F. (1991). Organizational innovation: A meta-analysis of effects of determinants and moderators. *Academy of management journal*, 34(3), 555-590.
- Dougherty, D. (1992). Interpretive barriers to successful product innovation in large firms. *Organization science*, 3(2), 179-202.
- Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I. & Shaw, L. L. (1995). *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- European Commission. (n.d.). European Innovation Scoreboard, Available online: https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/statistics/performance-indicators/european-innovation-scoreboard_en [Accessed 17 May 2023]
- Garud, R., Tuertscher, P., & Van de Ven, A. H. (2013). Perspectives on innovation processes. *Academy of Management Annals*, 7(1), 775-819.
- Godin, B. (2011). καινοτομία: An old word for a new world, or, the de-contestation of a political and contested concept. I Project on the Intellectual History of Innovation. Montreal: Urbanisation Culture Société Centre (UCS), Institut national de la recherche scientifique (INRS).

- Godin, B. (2016). Making sense of innovation: from weapon to instrument to buzzword. *Quaderni*, 21-40.
- Govindarajan, V., & Trimble, C. (2004). Strategic innovation and the science of learning. *MIT Sloan Management Review*.
- Greve, H. R., & Taylor, A. (2000). Innovations as catalysts for organizational change: Shifts in organizational cognition and search. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 45(1), 54-80.
- Gubrium, J. F. & Holstein, J. A. (1997). *The New Language of Qualitative Method*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hallonsten, O. (2023). *Empty Innovation: Causes and Consequences of Society's Obsession with Entrepreneurship and Growth*. Palgrave Macmillan
- Hamel, G. (2006). The why, what, and how of management innovation. *Harvard business review*, 84(2), 72.
- Hasu, M., Leitner, K. H., Solitander, N., & Varblane, U. (2012). Accelerating the Innovation Race: Do we need reflexive brakes?. In *Challenging the innovation paradigm* (pp. 87-112). Routledge.
- Hess, E. D., & Kazanjian, R. K. (Eds.). (2006). *The search for organic growth*. Cambridge University Press.
- H&M Group. (2022). Our Stories, Available online: <https://hmgroup.com/media/our-stories/> [Accessed 17 May 2023]
- IKEA. (2021). Innovation and Technology, Available online: <https://about.ikea.com/en/behind-scenes/innovation-technology> [Accessed 17 May 2023]
- Jaffe, A. B., Trajtenberg, M., & Henderson, R. (1993). Geographic localization of knowledge spillovers as evidenced by patent citations. *the Quarterly journal of Economics*, 108(3), 577-598.
- Kahn, K. B. (2018). Understanding innovation. *Business Horizons*, 61(3), 453-460.
- King, A., & Anderson, N. (1993). Innovation in organizations. *International review of industrial and organizational psychology*, 7, 1134.

Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kvale, S. & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*, LA: Sage Publications

March, J.G., 1994. *A Primer on Decision Making: How Decisions Happen*. Free Press: New York.

Markham, S. K., & Lee, H. (2013). Product Development and Management Association's 2012 Comparative Performance Assessment Study. *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 30(3), 408-429.

Neely, A., & Hii, J. (1998). Innovation and business performance: a literature review. The Judge Institute of Management Studies, University of Cambridge, 0-65.

Obstfeld, D. (2005). Social networks, the tertius iungens orientation, and involvement in innovation. *Administrative science quarterly*, 50(1), 100-130.

Orkla. (2023). Brands and Innovation, Available online: <https://www.orkla.com/brands-and-innovation/> [Accessed 17 May 2023]

O'Bryan, M. (2013). Innovation: The most important and overused word in America. *Wired Magazine*.

Prasad, P. (2018). *Crafting qualitative research: Beyond positivist traditions*. 2nd edn, New York, Routledge.

Rennstam, J., & Wästerfors, D. (2018). *Analyze!: crafting your data in qualitative research*. Studentlitteratur AB.

Ridley M (2020) *How Innovation Works. And Why it Flourishes in Freedom*. Harper & Row.

Ricoeur, P. (1984). The model of the text: Meaningful action considered as a text. *Social Research*, 185-218.

Robson, C. (2002). *Real World Research*, 2nd edn, Oxford: Blackwell

Rogers, M., (1998). *The definition and measurement of innovation (Vol. 98)*. Parkville, VIC: Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research.

Rogers E.M., 1995. *Diffusion of Innovations* (4th edn). Free Press: New York.

Rosa, H., Dörre, K., & Lessenich, S. (2017). Appropriation, activation and acceleration: The escalatory logics of capitalist modernity and the crises of dynamic stabilization. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 34(1), 53-73.

Rothaermel, F. T., & Hess, A. M. (2007). Building dynamic capabilities: Innovation driven by individual-, firm-, and network-level effects. *Organization science*, 18(6), 898-921.

Salaman, G., & Storey, J. (2002). Managers' theories about the process of innovation. *Journal of Management studies*, 39(2), 147-165.

Sackmann, S. A. (1992). Culture and subcultures: An analysis of organizational knowledge. *Administrative science quarterly*, 140-161.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A. (2007). *Research Methods for Business Students*, 4th edn, Pearson Education

Schaefer, S. (2022). *Organizing Creativity*, Oxford University Press, Oxford (in press)

Searls D (2012). *The Intention Economy: When Customers Take Charge*. Harvard Business Press.

Småföretagarna. (2023). Sverige är världens tredje mest innovativa land, Available online: <https://smaforetagarna.se/kunskap/sverige-ar-varldens-tredje-mest-innovativa-land/> [Accessed 17 May 2023]

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research techniques*.

Utterback, J. M. (1971). The process of technological innovation within the firm. *Academy of management Journal*, 14(1), 75-88.

Van de Ven, A. H. (1986). Central problems in the management of innovation. *Management science*, 32(5), 590-607.

Valaskivi K (2012) Dimensions of Innovationism, pp 129-156 in Nynäs P, Lassander M and T Utriainen (eds) *Post-Secular Society*. Transaction Publishers.

Vinsel, L., & Russell, A., (2020). *The Innovation Delusion. How Our Obsession with the New Has Disrupted the Work That Matters Most*. Crown.

VSTBuzz. (2022). Available online: [https://vstbuzz.com/deals/67-off-flying-hand-percussion-by-handheld-sound/?ct=t\(EMAIL_FlyingHand_MGranularMB_2022_08_26\)&mc_cid=f4d380b5b0&mc_eid=5d23c7d2eb](https://vstbuzz.com/deals/67-off-flying-hand-percussion-by-handheld-sound/?ct=t(EMAIL_FlyingHand_MGranularMB_2022_08_26)&mc_cid=f4d380b5b0&mc_eid=5d23c7d2eb) [Accessed 12 April 2023]

Westenholz, A. (1993). Paradoxical thinking and change in the frames of reference. *Organization studies*, 14(1), 37-58.

Whittington, K. B., Owen-Smith, J., & Powell, W. W. (2009). Networks, propinquity, and innovation in knowledge-intensive industries. *Administrative science quarterly*, 54(1), 90-122.

WIPO. (2022). Global Innovation Index (GII), Available online: https://www.wipo.int/global_innovation_index/en/ [Accessed 17 May 2023]