Chapter 2
Innovation in Higher Education in Israel: Public Policy Implications

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ABSTRACT

In order for education systems to cope with social and economic changes and perform efficiently, innovation is essential. Innovation in education (and particularly in Higher Education systems) has not been regarded as an important issue by policy makers, education stakeholders, and leaders; it seems to be regarded as “nice-to-have” rather than a necessity. Recently, innovation in education has started to gain attention. This includes systemic study of innovation, innovation strategy, and implementation of innovation strategies by policy makers and leaders. Scientific outputs and research findings can be used as input in national-international policies. In order to achieve this goal it is imperative to conduct close studies and for policy-makers to cooperate, ensuring the relevance of topics, and improving communication, dissemination, and implementation of research recommendations. These are the tools needed for leading change, innovation, and implementing new strategies.

INTRODUCTION

The nature of the knowledge-generating process itself is evolving towards a more network-embedded process, with an increased emphasis on stakeholder partnerships, trans-disciplinary growth, and heterogeneity of all players involved. The concepts and practices of “Open Innovation” are gaining wider acceptance in both the public and private sectors.

This research was carried out using a Grounded Theory approach and tools and could be of interest for policy makers, stakeholders and organizations in the Higher Education industry.

The purpose of this study is to define, map, analyze and quantify the existing (or the lack of) innovation policies in the Higher Education system in Israel. The outcomes of this study can potentially provide insights into interdisciplinary organization innovation application using models.
Innovation in Higher Education in Israel (from the business sector) for higher education and the public sector. The study is meant to capture in a systematic way evidence—based documented data, to understand whether Israeli Higher Education reality is adequate and following the innovative nature of this country as frequently described as “Start-Up Nation” (Senor & Singer, 2009) and an “Economic Miracle.”

Do the innovation policies of Higher Education in Israel comply with and supply the needs of this “Start up nation?”

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW: INNOVATION

Definitions of innovation abound throughout the literature. Some define innovation in the context of using economic tools whereas others emphasize engineering, business and management fields, technology expertise, or socialism. Most definitions refer to the notion of doing “old” things in a new way. Some of the terms refer to added value to process or products, implicative aspects of the ideas (McKeown, 2008), or to the degree of change (mild or incremental/revolutionary). Other definitions relate to “introduction of a new or significantly improved product (good or service), process, or method” and to “systemic innovation” as “any kind of dynamic, system-wide change that is intended to add value to the educational processes and outcomes (OECD, 2008).

Innovation policy, although fashionable, is often misunderstood; it should not be an annex to science and technology policy, as often presented. Innovation—the application of knowledge of all types so as to achieve desired social and economic outcomes—is broader than science and technology, often combining technical, organizational, and other sorts of change (World Bank, 2007).

Innovation is becoming popular in many fields such as policy, business, the public sector, and technology. In a world of globalization, economic crisis, incremental changes and competition, its importance is rising. Even though innovation has traditionally swung into and out of fashion, as Barsh, Capozzi, and Davidson (2008) put it “like short skirts: popular in good times and tossed back into the closet in downturns.” Today, as the world descends into one of the sharpest downturns of several decades, policy makers look to innovative and entrepreneurial activities to form a basis for long-term, sustainable production (OECD, 2009).

Literature review and researches in the field of Innovation refer to different types of innovation (Technion Innovation Center website):

- **Management Innovation**: The invention and implementation of a management practice, process, structure, or technique, new to the current state of the art, with the intention of furthering organization goals.
- **Product Innovation**: The production of new and creative solutions to problems by means of a process in which novel and appropriate ideas are generated, implemented, and launched as new or improved products.
- **Process Innovation**: The improvement of an organization’s efficiency through high-level coordination of the organization’s activities, in a rationalized system of end-to-end processes.
- **Service Innovation**: A novel or significantly improved service or improvement in service procedures, implemented to meet customer demands and needs and increase customer satisfaction.
- **Technological Innovation**: An invention incorporating embryonic technology that is rapidly developing in the general scientific community. Innovation may arouse interest and be well understood by others. This innovation can provide the organization with options for initiating or responding to technological change.
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