

**New Perspectives on
Innovation Communication**
Findings from Germany's Survey
INNOVATE 2006

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New Perspectives on Innovation Communication

The aim of this paper is to provide new perspectives on Innovation Communication by highlighting selected findings from INNOVATE 2006. This second German trend survey on Innovation Communication offers longitudinal data in comparison to the findings from INNOVATE 2004¹ as well as specific insights in journalist's and corporate communication and marketing expert's point of view. At the end of this paper main conclusions on the state of development of Innovation Reporting and corporate innovation communication will be drawn.

1 Introduction

When economies decline, the demand for more innovations is voiced instantaneously. The ability to innovate is a major aspect for economic growth and social welfare is widely acknowledged as fact. But examples like Germany – which has a leading position in the worldwide innovation ranking – show that the mere number of inventions does not necessarily result in favorable public awareness or in economic success. Different studies indicate that it is rather a lack of innovation communication than a lack of innovation itself that western economies have to cope with. Regarding the question of innovation diffusion², the communication and explanation of an innovation to different stakeholders or audiences becomes relevant.

What does “Innovation Communication” refer to? We define Innovation Communication as symbolic interaction between organizations and their stakeholders dealing with innovative products, services, technologies and ideas.³ It covers Innovation Reporting on the macro level, corporate innovation communication on the meso level and all sorts of micro level communication on innovation, like e.g. leadership communication on innovations.⁴ In order to learn about an innovation, the public needs to be informed by journalism as well as institutional corporate communication. Therefore, expert journalism is required which covers technical, business, legal, and political aspects of innovations⁵ – not only for a specialized audience, but first of all for a broader audience. Its task is to

¹ for the findings from INNOVATE 2004 see: Mast/Huck/Zerfass (2005)

² Rogers (2003)

³ Mast/Huck/Zerfass (2005)

⁴ Zerfass (2005); Zerfass/Huck (2005)

⁵ Nordfors/Kreiss/Sandred (2005)

present innovation in a comprehensible way and to evaluate them regarding the value of benefit for the audience.⁶ At the same time, corporate innovation communication is needed.⁷ It communicates corporate innovations to opinion leaders like journalists as well as directly to stakeholders.⁸ In this context, the possible range of internal and external communication is broad: it reaches from customer communications, media relations or online relations to communication in the internal scope. Both groups require specific knowledge and skills to reduce the complexity of an innovation for a general audience. Additionally, the organizational contexts are important. First theoretical and empirical insights in *how* innovations can be communicated to different audiences only recently contributed to a body of knowledge.⁹

The survey INNOVATE 2006 was conducted as a self-recruiting online survey. It is based on two different questionnaires which overlapped in some parts, but in other sections were specifically tailored to Innovation Reporting or corporate innovation communication. By keeping some questions of the INNOVATE 2004, longitudinal findings regarding the development of Innovation Communication in Germany are available for the first time. During January and February 2006, 346 communicators participated in the survey, 266 communication experts and 80 journalists. In PR and Marketing departments of companies, communication agencies, political institutions, science and research organisations, the questionnaire first of all reached decision makers: About two-thirds of the polled communication experts are in a leading position as communication executive, CEO or general manager. The biggest part of the respondents works in corporate communications (76.7%), merely ten per cent in marketing and four per cent in research and development departments. Nearly half of the communication experts work at private enterprises (47.1%). Another third works for communication agencies, ten per cent for research institutions, universities or educational establishments and six per cent in politics and public administration. Five per cent are employed in not-for-profit associations, non-governmental organizations or at competence and branch networks. Regarding the sample of polled journalists, one third of the eighty participants are chief editors or editorial leaders. Another third respectively works as editors or as freelancers. Like the polled communication experts, journalists in executive positions could be reached by INNOVATE 2006 to a proportionately greater extent. A total of 62.4 per cent works in the print media sector (thereof 22% for daily newspapers, 13.4% for popular magazines and 27% for professional journals) and about 12 per cent respectively work for broadcasting, online media and in freelance bureaus. 56 per cent of the respondents report first of all on science and technology, about 41 per cent on economy and business, followed by approximately 23 per cent working in a special field of reporting.

⁶ Nordfors (2004)

⁷ Höij (2004)

⁸ Mast/Huck/Zerfass (2005)

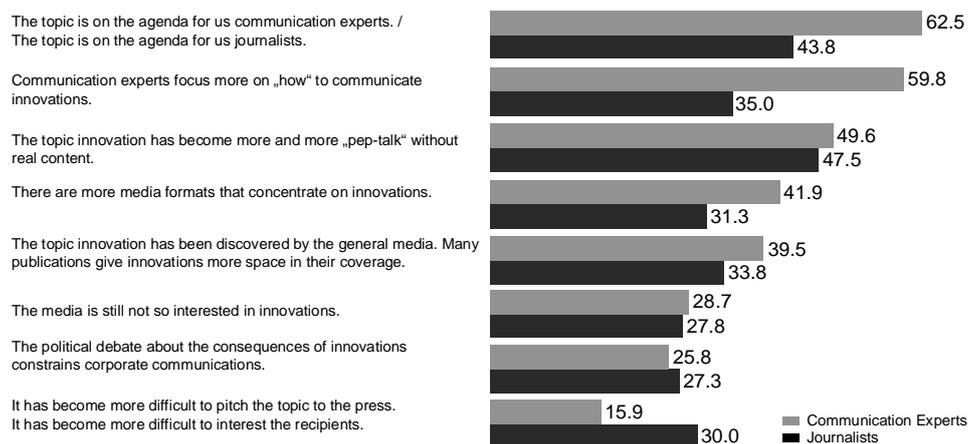
⁹ Zerfass/Sandhu/Huck (2004a/2004b); Mast/Zerfass (2005); Carrascosa (2005); Granelli (2005); Kalmi/Kauhanen (2005); Nordfors (2004)

2 Innovation Communication in Germany

Innovation Communication plays a crucial role for an innovative company as well as for society: To inform people about new ideas, products, technologies or services, to position a company as an innovator or to foster a climate favorable to innovating are the main purposes of communicating innovations to a broader public. For the diffusion of innovations it is inevitable to make them popular, among the specialist community as well as within broader parts of society. In 2004, the first German trend survey on Innovation Communication revealed how journalists and communication experts perceive innovations as a topic for corporate communications and the media. The second German survey, INNOVATE 2006, shows that most of the perceptions and ratings regarding the innovation climate in the country stayed the same. On the other hand some significant aspects changed during the last one and a half years.

2.1 Changing Contexts for Innovation Communication

Two thirds of the communication experts stated that the concept of innovation communication has gained more presence in organizational communication compared to 2004 (62.5%). Meanwhile, “only” 43.8% of the journalists who participated in the survey agreed that the topic is more present in editorial offices than before – a difference of almost 20 percentage points (see Figure 1). At the same time approximately one third of both groups agree to the statement that the media’s interest in innovations is still low.



Source: Trend survey INNOVATE 2006; n = 80 journalists, 264 communication experts, numbers in percentage („totally agree“ and „agree“);
Question: The communication of an Innovation is vital for the success or failure of the innovation. How have the general conditions for Innovation Communication changed in the last one or two years?

Figure 1: General conditions for Innovation Communication in Germany

About 50 per cent of all interviewees regard innovations as a topic for corporate information or reporting as clearly mundane. Thus, innovation communicators should keep in mind the risk that innovation could become more and more a babble. Six out of ten communication experts declare that – compared to 2004 – they consciously pay more attention to how innovations are mediated (59.8%). Compared to the communication experts, only about half of the journalists (35.0%) state that they themselves pay more attention to the way of Innovation Reporting. The results show that communication experts in economy, politics and science are attuned more positively to innovations as a topic for their communication than journalists are.

Has it become more difficult to pitch innovation to the media? The results show a significant difference for journalists and PR experts. Again communication experts are more positive on the possibilities of Innovation Reporting than journalists are: 30% of the journalists seem to be convinced that their audience is more tired of the topic than it was one and a half years ago. They believe that it becomes increasingly difficult to get their readers, viewers or listeners interested in innovations. Communication experts are more positive on this issue: only 15,9% of the communication experts share this pessimistic view. Similar differences appear in the perception of the media's amount of Innovation Reporting. While approximately 40% of the communication experts are convinced that innovation today play a more important role first of all in general media, one third of the polled journalists agree with this statement. Even if journalists tend to be less convinced of placing innovation in general media, the results clearly show: innovations have become an integral part of media reporting since 2004. Innovations went mainstream. Even the amount of Innovation Reporting has increased, say the respondents.

In conclusion, innovation has become a topic for mainstream media. Although it still is and always will be a very special topic that will not anchor itself on the public agenda as a topic of utmost importance, it is more evident in the minds of communication experts and – to a lesser amount – of journalists. Thus, the general conditions for Innovation Communication and Innovation Reporting improved since INNOVATE 2004.

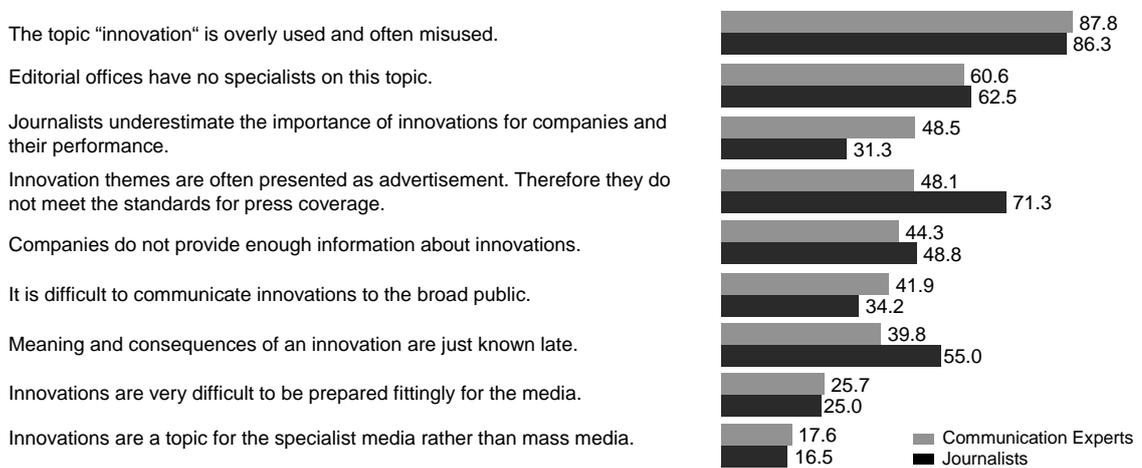
2.2 Causes for the Low Amount of Innovation Reporting

Journalists and communication experts state that innovation as a topic is still picked up comparatively seldom by the media. What are possible reasons? 87.8 per cent of the communication experts and 86,3 per cent of the journalists are convinced that the term innovation is overly used (see Figure 2). Comparing those findings with INNOVATE 2004 only marginal differences can be ascertained: Two years ago 90 per cent of the communication experts and 95 per cent of the journalist held this opinion. Another challenge is to present innovations customized to the media. While in 2004 52.6 per cent of the communication experts and 48.1 per cent of the journalists named the difficulties of communication, in this year's survey only 41.9 per cent of the communication experts and 34.2 per cent of the journalists held the same opinion.

These significant differences across time seem to show that the INNOVATE initiative which triggered discussion about basic conditions, applications and success factors of Innovation Communication helped to learn how innovations can be communicated. At the same time, the formerly predominant belief that innovations are too complex for general media does not continue anymore: Today only 17.6 per cent of the communication experts and 16.5 per cent of the journalists consider innovations merely as an issue for specialist media. In 2004, about 40 per cent – twice more than today – of both the journalists and communication experts held this opinion. Today most respondents take it for granted that is possible to communicate an innovation to all audiences and in all possible kinds of media. Only the way of communication can vary.

Reporting on innovations in different media the results of the survey show interesting longitudinal differences: Today only one fourth of the polled communication experts and therefore 10 per cent less than in 2004 is convinced that innovations cannot be edited compatible to every kind of media outlet. At the same time, journalists became more sceptical on this point. While in 2004 only about one fifth of the journalists agreed upon the assumption that innovations cannot be edited media compatible, today every fourth holds this point of view. However the interest of readers, viewers and listeners in innovations seems to be given. Almost all respondents completely decline the statement that the audience is not interested in innovations.

Figure 2: Main reasons for the constantly low media coverage



Source: trend survey INNOVATE 2006; n = 80 journalists, 264 communication experts, statements in percentage („totally agree" and „agree");
Question: The media coverage of innovations is still on a low-level. What are the main reasons?

The reasons for the comparatively low media coverage of innovations is not only due to the characteristics of innovation itself but can also be found in the contextual factors of organizational communication and journalism: About 63 per cent of the interviewed journalists named – by all means self-critical – the lack of skilled experts as one possible cause. The rating of the communication experts is similar with an approval-rate of 61 per cent. Compared to 2004 only little has changed concerning the material provided by companies. Again about 50 per cent of the journalists state that they miss appropriate material from companies. PR people know that their materials do not yet fit the needs of journalists. 44.3 per cent affirm this point of view. In the opinion of journalists it is first of all a question of the right format of the information for media reporting. Almost three thirds of all journalists do not publish material on innovations from enterprises without intensive editing. They state that most PR information on innovations is too similar to advertising. Hence they are not qualified for editorial reporting. With a percentage of 48.1 even the polled communication experts realize this “impression of advertising” of their press material.

Almost half of the communication experts accuse journalists of underrating the importance of innovations for companies and job situation. Only 31.3 per cent of the interviewed journalists share this point of view, revealing a clear discrepancy. Evidently the selection and coverage criteria in the context of the reporting of innovations are different from what communication experts expect them to be. From the journalist’s side there is a markedly high affirmation to the statement that the consequences of an innovation can be observed only over time (55.0%; communication experts: 39.8%).

3 Corporate Innovation Communication

Regarding corporate communications, Innovation Communication is an important aspect for positioning the company or non-profit-organisation as an innovative player. If journalists complain about a lack of appropriate material from corporations, how could media relations react? When comparing the results of the current survey to the findings from 2004, obvious changes are evident.

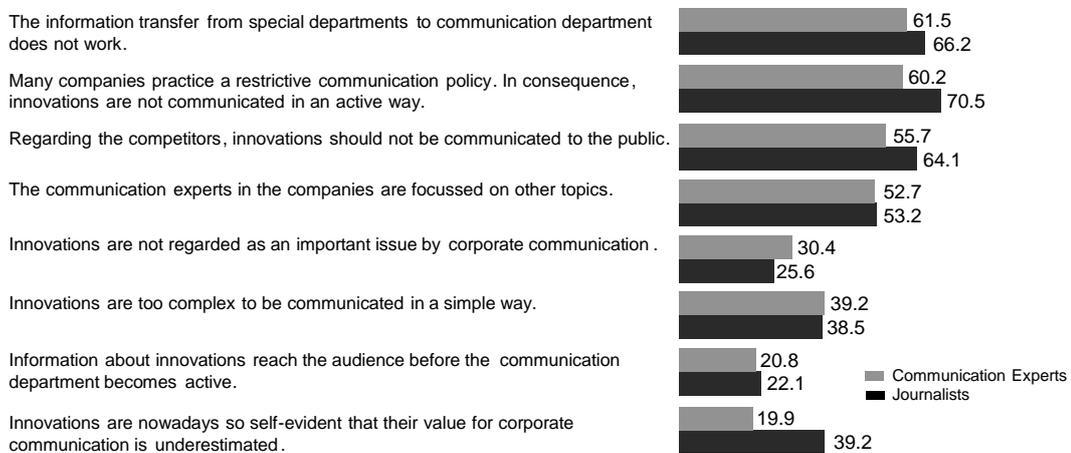
3.1 Internal Barriers in Information Flow

Internal barriers are still the main reason for many innovations not finding their way from a corporation to the public (see Figure 3). Although the results indicate that in comparison to 2004 the flow of information from corporate divisions to the communication department has improved, 61.5 per cent of the communication experts are convinced that the information transfer from departments to the communication executives has to be improved (2004: 74.7%). This impression is confirmed by around 66 per cent of the journalists (2004: 74.1%). Nonetheless, there is one small comfort from a PR point of view: Only about one fifth of all interviewees complain about information reaching the public before the communication department is informed.

Another reason for flaws in Innovation Communication has its source in the information policy of many corporations itself. About 70 per cent of the surveyed journalists (69.2% in 2004) and 60 per cent of the communication experts (57.1% in 2004) consider a restrictive information policy as a further reason. Closely connected to this aspect is the conviction that plenty of innovations would not be communicated because of fearing a competitor's early imitation. 55.7 per cent of communication experts and 64.1 per cent of journalists share this opinion.

Another reason for the small coverage is seen in the communication policy of PR and marketing experts. About 50 per cent of the interviewees are convinced that at present, corporations concentrate on other topics. The topic innovation already competes with other subjects like e.g. job losses, market crises or corporate change – topics, that often have a higher priority than innovation itself. In this context there is also a comparatively strong agreement on the statement that innovations would not be considered as an important topic for communication. While about only one quarter of the polled journalists agree on this statement, there is a stronger approval among the interviewed communication experts (30%). Without question this is a reflection of the experience of communication experts in their own organisations with management board, superiors and departments. As much as some communication expert may want to place this subject on agenda, as much he enters an area of tensions and has to consider other interests and requirements.

Figure 3: Reasons for the small proportion of Corporate Innovation Communication



Source: trend survey INNOVATE 2006; n = 80 journalists, 264 communication experts, statements in percentage („totally agree“ and „agree“); Question: Although some companies have departments for Innovation Communication, only few practice an active Innovation Communication. What are the reasons?

Even if the communication expert wants to place the subject on the agenda, he or she needs to be aware of the overarching mission, office policies and management decisions. A broad gap however shows up in the last item of figure 3: Twice as many journalists (about 40%) than communication experts (about 20%) stick to the opinion that innovations are presently taken that heavily for granted that their value

for communication is often not being recognized. Is it true that corporations do not realize the value of their innovations for communication at all? Whatever reason there exists for such differences in rating, the result indicates the basic interest of journalists for the topic innovation. The high rates imply that an innovation definitely has a value of reporting for them.

3.2 Early Involvement of Communication Management

Innovation Communication is dependable on with communication departments being informed about innovations. As in corporations, politics, associations or scientific institutes – an innovation can only be transferred to important stakeholders if communication experts in organisations know about it. As shown in figure 3 a defective internal flow of information from organisational departments to the communication section can therefore be the main reason for failed Innovation Communication. Besides that, the timing of an innovation being communicated internally and externally is important. In INNOVATE 2006 the interviewees are questioned to the “optimal” time of integrating additional stakeholders in innovation processes. In addition to this, the study focuses on media relations as they are the most important channel in addressing the public.

Figure 4: Timing of informing stakeholders

| | idea | development | manufacturing | public announcement | introduction into the market |
|------------------------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|---------------------|------------------------------|
| internal | | | | | |
| - management | 87.5 | 11.3 | 0.0 | 0.4 | 0.8 |
| - employees | 12.5 | 55.3 | 29.8 | 2.0 | 0.4 |
| - marketing | 37.3 | 36.5 | 14.5 | 9.0 | 2.7 |
| - public and media relations | 31.9 | 37.4 | 17.3 | 9.8 | 3.5 |
| external | | | | | |
| - specialist media | 4.8 | 33.2 | 24.4 | 35.6 | 2.0 |
| - general media | 0.4 | 9.1 | 18.3 | 42.9 | 29.4 |
| - customers | 4.4 | 17.5 | 15.9 | 48.4 | 13.9 |

Source: trend survey INNOVATE 2006; n = 254 communication experts, statements in percentage; Question: At which point of time of the innovation process would you propose to inform the different stakeholder groups about an innovation?

Regarding the percentage distribution of answers, the necessity of an early integration of management becomes clear. 37.3 per cent of the interviewees prefer an early integration of marketing during idea generating, while 36.5 per cent indicate the phase of development (see accentuations in figure 4). According to 31.9 per cent, public relations should be informed in first stage of the innovation processes. This seems to be wishful thinking of communication experts as –

according to the result of failed information transfer – reality in German companies often differs. Concerning the information of external stakeholders one has to differentiate. While 33.2 per cent of interviewees prefer an integration of special interest media in the development stage, 24.4 per cent tend to assimilate them in the production and 35.6 per cent in the phase of market information. Certainly this is due to the fear of informing competitors too early. Besides that, the results state that special interest media are regarded as the most important target group concerning media relations. In comparison to public media, the communication experts queried indicate that they should be addressed two phases earlier. 42.9 per cent of the interviewees agree on taking public media and customers into account in context of market information at earliest. One third in contrary think that informing public media in the phase of rollout is sufficient.

An interesting aspect arises in terms of customers: About one fifth of interviewees prefer early information of customers in the stage of development respectively of production. Probably this is due to concepts like “open innovation” which integrate the important stakeholder “customer” in the process of developing an innovation already.

4 Innovation Reporting in Journalism

Reporting on innovation reflects the innovative power of a country and affects the prevalent innovative climate. It can promote the evolution of a culture of innovation by generating public interest for this topic in general and for specific innovations in particular. There is however the need of a good informational transfer from corporations, politics and associations to editorial offices for journalists being able to report on innovations. Furthermore, journalists have to actively investigate innovations themselves. Which editorial departments are perceived responsible for Innovation Reporting? Which sources are tapped to get further information about innovations? For what information and proposals of communications experts in economy, politics or associations are journalists longing for?

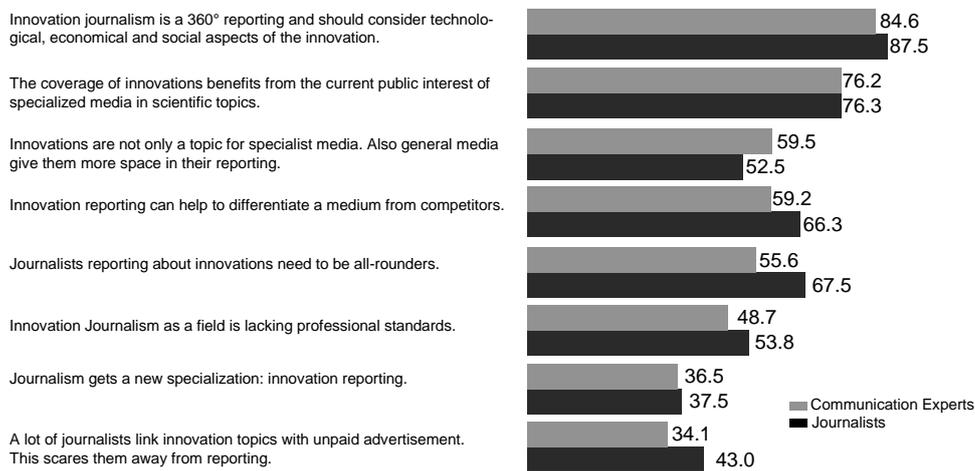
4.1 Current State of Innovation Reporting

Even if only 30 per cent of journalists believe in an increased number of media specialized in Innovation Reporting, in Germany a trend in Innovation Reporting can be observed. Three quarters of all interviewees, both communication experts and journalists, report that Innovation Reporting benefits from a general interest in innovations, which can be presently observed in public (see Figure 5). The amount of magazines and broadcasts as well as dedicated columns focussing on the topics knowledge and innovations has increased tremendously over the last few years. However, Innovation Reporting is also important to general media. Both journalists and communication experts state that there is a trend for general media in covering innovations as well. At the same time 59.2 per cent of communication experts and even 66.3 per cent of journalists emphasize Innovation Reporting as a useful distinguishing mark to differentiate from competitors. Innovation Reporting then

becomes a branding aspect of a medium. Both comparatively high ratings of journalists who require a broad knowledge to report on innovations and the allusion to a lack of specialists can disembody in a demand for interdisciplinary qualification of journalists. There are hints indicating to Innovation Reporting being a transverse function in editorial offices. An ability to integrate innovations and their consequences in broader contexts is therefore postulated. As a consequence Innovation Reporting cannot remain in one special department but takes place in all departments.

When considering the assignment of Innovation Reporting to specific editorial departments, this aspect proves to be true. According to INNOVATE 2006 Innovation Reporting is prevalently performed in the following departments:

Figure 5: Innovation Reporting in media



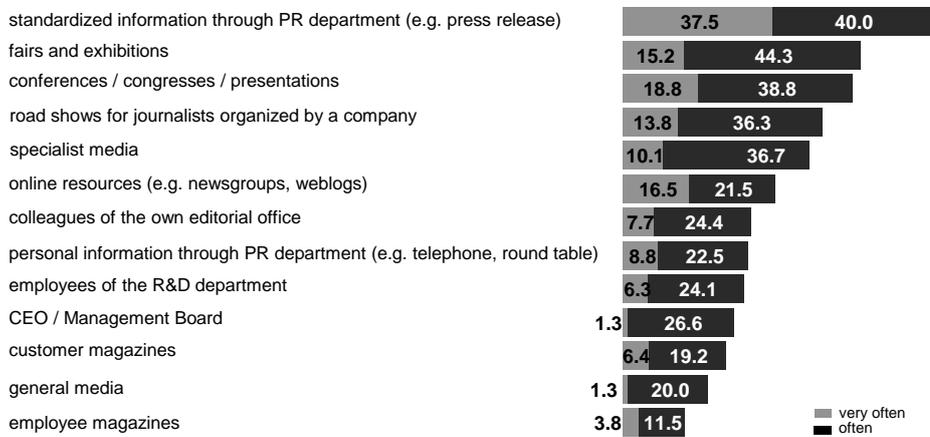
Source: trend survey INNOVATE 2006; n = 80 journalists, 264 communication experts, statements in percentage („totally agree“ and „agree“);
 Question: During the last years the topic Innovation has gained in importance in media coverage, be it a one-page summary in the daily press or specialized topical issues. In your opinion, what is the current state of development of Innovation Journalism?

knowledge and technology (67.9%), economy (50.0%), ensued by expert departments (32.1%), healthcare (28.2%), politics (25.6%) and services (25.6%). In local news desks as well as media, miscellaneous and culture departments on the contrary no or only small Innovation Reporting takes place. Do editorial offices have journalists assigned with Innovation Reporting more often than their colleagues? Two thirds of the interviewees confirm this question. 68 per cent of journalists remark that colleagues in their editorial offices frequently report on innovations. What is the reason for this phenomenon? Being questioned about possible motivations of these colleagues, personal interest in the topic respectively personal concernment is named by 76.5 per cent of all interviewees. 58.8 per cent furthermore mention specific expert about innovations respectively in concerned

areas, whilst competence in department (47.1%), correspondent job profiles (43.1%) and a specific qualification (37.3%) are named in following order.

4.2 Sources of Innovation Reporting

In order to get journalists reporting on innovations, information has to be given by public relations experts in economy, politics and society. In terms of press releases, background conversations or product demonstrations corporate communication informs journalists about innovative products of their corporations. How do journalists come to know about product innovations? Which informational sources act a role?

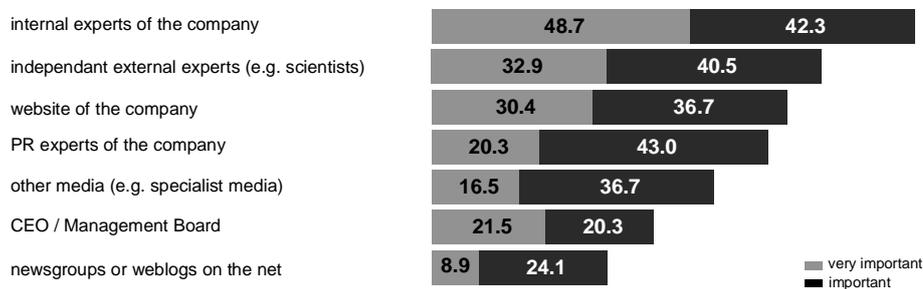


Source: trend survey INNOVATE 2006; n = 79 journalists, statements in percentage; Question: How do you come to know about a product innovation of a company? Please indicate, how often you get informed about an innovation from the following sources.

Figure 6: How journalists come to know about product innovations of corporations

The accumulated frequentness shows that journalists are early informed about product innovations by standardised press releases. More than three quarters of the interviewees state that they are most often addressed by standardised written press releases (see Figure 6). According to 37.5 per cent this channel is “heavily used” by public relations, being followed by speeches, congresses and meetings. Trade shows and exhibitions are named by 60 per cent as “often” or “very often” used sources, which are ensued by already mentioned congresses, meetings and talks (57.6%) as well as informational events of corporations themselves (50.1%). About half of the journalists (46.8%) also mention independent expert media being a useful source of information, while online sources are often used by 38 per cent. Compared to this, hints of colleagues, personal conversations with public relations experts of the respective company and information from corporate staff (e.g. R&D department) are less important, although these channels are still named as often or very often used by one third of the interviewees. About a quarter of journalists often turn to customer magazines, while 20 per cent use general media and about 15 per cent staff magazines.

As soon as an editor comes to know about an innovation, which sources does he head to for further investigation? Does he revert to written informational material of corporations, staff of specific departments or to independent sources? For journalists the most important sources for investigation are expert staff of corporation (91.0%), independent experts like e.g. researchers (73.4%) as well as corporate websites (67.1%, see Figure 7). Apart from that, the communication department of a company is also named in being an important source of information. Conversations with public relations experts are ranked fourth (63.3%), whilst 53.2 per cent of journalists use other media (e.g. special interest media). Contacts to management boards as another source are appreciated by 42% of the interviewees. Further, but less used channels are forums, newsgroups and weblogs (33.0%).



Source: trend survey INNOVATE 2006; n = 79 journalists, statements in percentage; Question: When you heard about a innovative product, which additional sources do you consult in the context of your investigation?

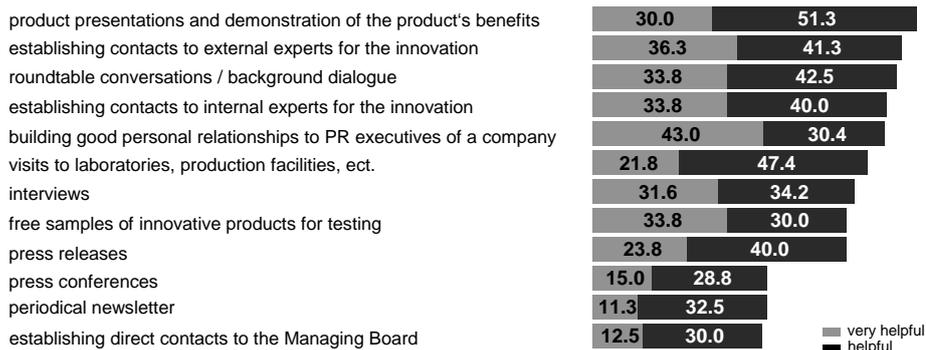
Figure 7: Additional sources for investigations on innovation

These results eminently deny a mere impact of corporate public relations on Innovation Reporting. In addition to this, time exposure for further investigation also allude to an established, independent (post-)investigation of innovation topics. About 43 per cent of journalists spend between 31 to 90 minutes for it. One third even mentions a time exposure of more than 90 minutes to half a day, while a fifth spend more than half a day for getting more information about an innovation.

4.3 Informational Needs from Corporate Communications

The results of INNOVATE 2004 indicated that journalists were unsatisfied with corporate media relations on innovations. Almost half of 84 journalists queried stated a lack of material, whilst 69 per cent scolded a restrictive information policy, which prevents an active communication of innovations. These results were the basis of questioning journalists about their need for information and support provided by corporate public relations this year. Which corporate material and support helps you in reporting on innovations? The result surprises: It is not written press releases or direct contacts to the board which are most important for journalists, but possibilities to test product innovations on their own, providing internal and external contacts as well as background and roundtable talks (see Figure 8). 81.3 per cent of the interviews state that application references provided by product demonstrations as well as explanations of how innovations are used are

the most important need. Establishing contacts to external specialists concerning the respective topic (77.6%), background talks (76.3%) and contacts to internal experts (73.8%) are named as helpful or very helpful corporate communication instruments likewise.



Source: trend survey INNOVATE 2006; n = 780 journalists, statements in percentage; Question: When reporting on an innovation, which information or assistance from a company helps you?

Figure 8: Need for information and support provided by innovation public relations

Furthermore, journalists mention personal contacts to public relations staff and ordinary media relations as being helpful in maintaining appropriate information about innovations. In sequential order opportunities to visit laboratories and production plants (69.2%), interviews (65.8%), press releases (63.8%), press conferences and regular newsletters (43% respectively) are ranked. About 42.5 per cent of the journalists note that getting a direct contact to management board is at least helpful for their work on Innovation Reporting.

From the journalists' point of view, there are two distinct preferences: On the one hand journalists long for an individualized provision of information, as they do on every reporting topic. On the other hand there is an explicit need for support to get a contact to internal experts. Internal experts are much more able to supply journalists with specific contents than the communication department is. These specialists act a central part in Innovation Reporting, they even displace conversation with management board from top of ranking to its centre-field.

5 Conclusions on Innovation Communication

The findings of INNOVATE 2006 highlight that Innovation Communication as a topic has become more apparent and important in Germany during the last one and a half years. It is no longer only a topic for specialized media. Nowadays, new products, technologies, services or ideas are communicated to a broad audience, in journalism as well as in PR. Several papers, programmes and shows emerged in print and audio-visual media which focus on knowledge in technology and science. Therefore, innovation as a topic is no longer bound to regular media formats like daily newspapers or newscasts only. Innovation communication can now address a broad audience interested in knowledge magazines.

In this context the awareness on the importance of the communication of innovations has increased in journalism, PR and Marketing. To communicate innovations, expert journalism is needed. Most respondents name Innovation Reporting as a task for all-rounders: to report on an innovations means to combine economical, technical and social aspects. Although many of the polled journalists state that special training programmes would be helpful to succeed in this “360 degree reporting”, most of the respondents deny the emergence of a new field of journalism. They do not see themselves as “innovation journalists”. Innovation Reporting is seen as an integral part of editorial offices specialized in business, technology or science. To be able to fulfil this special task journalists often depend on information from companies, not-for-profit organisations or research institutions. One main allegation verbalised by journalists: PR information often is too similar to advertising. Hence corporate innovation communications needs to tailor their information to the requirements of Innovation Reporting in media.

Questioned what information from which sources they require, journalists tend to expect “innovation stories”. Holistic outlined stories are stated to be more important than one-dimensional press materials like press releases simply naming the features of an innovative product. An “innovation story” composed by PR departments does not only contain information about an innovation or statements of management board and communication department, but also provides contacts for further investigation. Establishing contacts to internal experts is a classical instrument in public relations. Linking journalists and external (independent) specialist constitutes a new and exceptional aspect of communication supply, especially as it is the heart of journalistic work to find and contact independent third parties.

Investigating information – especially from external experts and third parties – is a core task in journalism. The possibility and dimension of outsourcing the formulation of “innovation stories” to PR departments remain to be seen. Especially if corporate communications tends to euphemise new products, technologies or services of the organisation, independent journalism is crucial for verifying and assessing innovations. At the same time, taking on the journalists’ point of view it is not withstanding desirable to receive contact information from

the corporate public relations. During the last years German media has lived an enormous commercialization and an ongoing downsizing of staff in editorial offices. Money and time have become strongly limited resources for many media outlets. The lesser the number of journalists a medium relies on, the stronger the impact of media relations input. However, investigating information from internal and external experts as well as editing articles about an innovation, journalists will never pass over to public relations staff. When PR experts provide contact data to external experts, it is still the journalist interviewing the expert and evaluating his or her independence. Thus, even if some parts of formerly journalistic investigation seem to have passed over to corporate innovation communication the impartial and therefore credible reporting on an innovation still is an individual duty of quality journalism.

Regarding corporate communications, innovation gains more and more importance. On the one hand, it is the question how to select and edit information on innovation to meet the journalist's requirements. On the other hand, corporate innovation communication currently is emerging as a new field of strategic public relations. Especially corporations in dynamic industries like telecommunication or communication technology increasingly realize that innovations as a special issue need to be addressed in the context of strategic corporate communications. Thus, organizational innovation communication needs to be integrated in strategic decision making of a company: Many communication experts claim that PR departments should be informed about an innovation in the very first stage of the innovation process meaning that there is a direct access to decision makers of the organization, the topic itself is of crucial importance for corporate reporting and all relevant stakeholders should be addressed specifically in the context of an integrated innovation communication.

6 About the initiative INNOVATE

INNOVATE is a joint initiative of the Department of Communication Studies and Journalism at the University of Hohenheim (Stuttgart) and MFG Baden-Wuerttemberg (Stuttgart), a center of excellence for IT and Media run by the federal state of Baden-Wuerttemberg. It brings together experts from business, research, and media to discuss the meaning of innovation for corporate communications and media reporting.

Apart from the German-wide trend surveys INNOVATE 2004 and INNOVATE 2006 the researchers in charge – Prof. Dr. Claudia Mast, Dr. Ansgar Zerfaß and Dr. Simone Huck – investigate best practices and publish widely on Innovation Communication. In winter 2004/05 the initiative has conducted a series of public lectures dealing with the topic that have been attended by more than 600 experts. At the University of Hohenheim a course on Innovation Communication research was taught and several master's theses were written on different aspects of Innovation Communication and Innovation Reporting.

More information including presentations and publications are available on the internet: www.innovationskommunikation.de

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