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INNOVATIVE POTENTIAL OF POSTAL OPERATORS IN LOGISTICS

The paper deals with evaluation of readiness of selected Slovak postal operators for implementation of innovations in the field of logistics. Their readiness is represented by innovation potential, which rates four areas - strategy and planning, quality of services and environment, technological processes and marketing. Based on total value it differs between four groups - from postal operators with high innovative potential to operators with very low innovative potential.

INOVAČNÝ POTENCIÁL POŠTOVÝCH OPERÁTOROV V OBLASTI LOGISTIKY

Príspevok sa zaoberá hodnotením pripravenosti vybraných slovenských poštových operátorov na implementáciu inovácií v oblasti logistiky. Vyjadruje ju prostredníctvom inovačného potenciálu, pričom hodnotí štyri oblasti – stratégiu a plánovanie; kvalitu služieb a životné prostredie; technologické procesy a marketing. Na základe výslednej hodnoty rozlišuje štyri skupiny – od poštových operátorov s vysokým inovačným potenciálom až po operátorov s veľmi nízkym inovačným potenciálom.

1. INTRODUCTION

Most of postal operators have had monopoly position in the market for a long time. Their main task was to allow access to information exchange for public. As postal services are important for development of society and economy, the monopoly status has not change. Postal operators have not focused on customers' requirements and majority of innovations have been implemented only as a result of new technologies, not customers' needs.

Nowadays, the situation is different and postal operators have to succeed in competition with other operators and logistics companies. Their competitiveness depends

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significantly on ability to respond to the changing environment, add value to offered services and to innovate.

2. INNOVATIONS IN THE POSTAL SECTOR

During recent years, innovations in the postal sector have shifted from developing new services towards application of existing tools and skills in a new way - there were developed new forms of access to services, which improve their accessibility. Initially, innovations in the postal sector were focused on increasing efficiency of manual processes and their automation through new tools and technologies. Nowadays postal operators try to use own experiences and new information-communication technologies in order to provide services based on information (for example Track & Trace). [1]

Innovative environment of enterprise can be expressed by several indicators. One of them is innovation potential, which represents ability of enterprise to use knowledge and resources in order to increase its competitiveness.

3. INNOVATIVE POTENTIAL OF POSTAL OPERATORS

Measuring of innovation potential of Slovak postal operators was realized through questionnaire focused on determination the readiness for implementation of innovations. The main aim was to find out current situation of innovations in the postal sector, to set further opportunities for increasing capacity for innovation of operators and how they can benefit from these opportunities.

We also wanted to verify hypothesis, that postal operators have the highest value of innovation potential in the field of technological processes. This hypothesis was based on the opinion, that operators are able to use best the skills and experience related to processes which represent part of their core business in providing postal and logistics services.

The survey was carried out during March and April 2009. All 21 postal operators providing services in the Slovak market were contacted and 11 of them were willing to cooperate. The survey was conducted electronically with members of senior and middle management.

Questionnaire was based on methodology from the project U-SME Innovation - Design of a Model for Joint University - Enterprise Innovation, produced by Západočeská univerzita v Plzni (the University of West Bohemia in Plzeň), which was adapted to the conditions of postal sector.

Following renowned consulting companies (Ernst & Young, AT Kearney) and actual standards of the European Union, authors have defined important areas for evaluation of innovative potential:

- Strategy and Planning,
- Technological processes,
- Quality and environment,
- Marketing. [3]

This decomposition into areas was applied also in the questionnaire. Each area contains six questions and for each question there were four options of responses which represent very low innovative activity, low innovation activity, average innovative activity or very high innovative activity. Postal operators chose one of them that best describes their current situation.

Aim of the first area – *strategy and planning* – was to determine how postal operator coordinates its activities in regard to its visions for the future (strategies, plans, innovative intentions and programs, etc.). In the second area, focused on *technological processes*, we asked about suggestions leading to the change of technologies, technological processes and resources necessary for further development.

In the third area regarding *quality and environment*, we were interested in changes that affect quality system of postal operators, employees’ contribution to quality, etc. This section of questionnaire also contained questions about impact of operator’s activities on the environment and their approach to this issue.

Last area – *marketing* – was focused on the evaluation of postal operators’ orientation to the market and customers. We evaluated competitive market position, customers’ attitudes to offered services, etc. [3]

Particular responses of postal operators were assigned points from 1 (reflecting very low or null innovative activity) to 4 (corresponding to very high innovation activity). Postal operator could achieve at least 6 points and maximum 24 points in one area. According to achieved count for particular field, postal operators have been placed into one of four groups (Tab. 1):

Tab. 1. Criteria for placing the postal operator in particular areas

Group	Count	Evaluation of innovative potential
A	21 – 24	postal operator with high innovative potential
AB	16 – 20	postal operator with average innovative potential
B	11 – 15	postal operator with low innovative potential
C	6 - 10	postal operator with very low innovative potential

After counting all points in four areas, operator could get at least 24 points and a maximum 96 points. Based on the overall results, postal operators were placed into four groups (Tab. 2).

Tab. 2: Criteria for placing the postal operator according to total innovative potential

Group	Count	Evaluation of innovative potential
A	79 – 96	postal operator with high innovative potential
AB	61 – 78	postal operator with average innovative potential
B	43 – 60	postal operator with low innovative potential
C	24 – 42	postal operator with very low innovative potential

In group A, there are postal operators that care about their development potential and try to seek other options for improving their operation. They have great assumptions to be competitive not only in the medium, but also in the long term. Postal operators which

belong to group AB have assumptions for successful implementation of innovations and are able to exploit potential for future prosperity.

Third group B represents postal operators, which are not able to work with innovative initiatives and strategies yet, but makes changes in organizational structure and approaches which will allow them to use incentives in the future.

Last group C includes operators whose environment is not suitable for implementation of innovations and if they would like to apply them, they have to realize significant changes in operation and organization.

Based on this information, two postal operators (18%) belong to group A, so they have high innovative potential. Seven operators (64%) achieve average innovative potential, and belong to group AB and other two operators (18%) are in group B with low innovation potential. None of postal operators has very low potential for innovation (Fig. 1). It can be said, that Slovak postal operators show mainly average innovative potential and have great assumptions for effective implementation of innovation. [2]

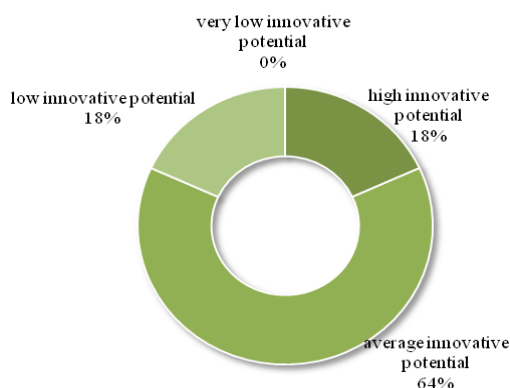


Fig. 1: Innovative potential of Slovak postal operators (Source: own analysis)

As Fig. 2 shows, selected postal operators achieve the highest average value in the field of technological processes. This finding confirmed hypothesis, which assumed that postal operators have the highest innovation potential right in the field of technological processes, which represent core of their activities.

Postal operators reach the second highest average value of innovative potential in the field of *strategy and planning*, which is closely related to enterprise management. *Quality and environment* reflects level of quality management and environmental management. Postal operators have the lowest value in marketing. This result should motivate them to pay more attention to marketing activities which are crucial in relation with customers.

As results from questionnaire, postal operators have during last years implemented especially innovations related to new information-communication technologies, upgrading of operational processes, optimizing delivery and collection of items, etc.

Source of innovation is often design of own employees, adoption of innovation from parent company, own development department, cooperation with other companies or purchase of technology from its provider. [2]

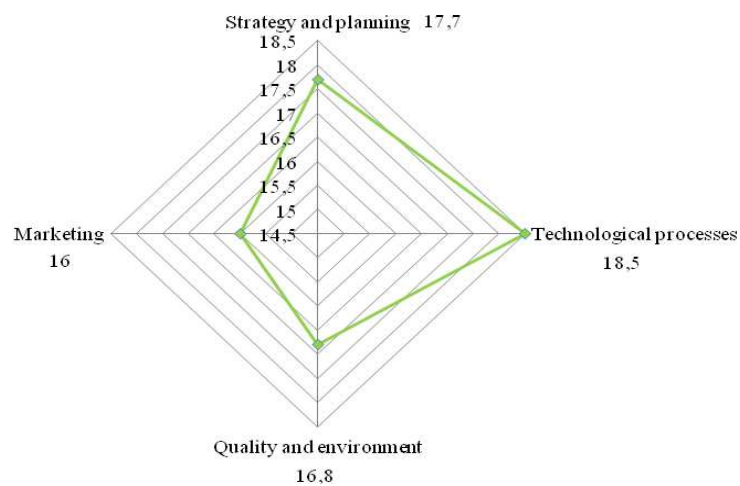


Fig. 2: Average value of innovative potential of selected Slovak postal operators (Source: own analysis)

Fig. 3 illustrates average value of innovative potential of postal operators, which participated in the survey. Because of anonymity promise to respondents, individual postal operators are marked only with different color, without name.

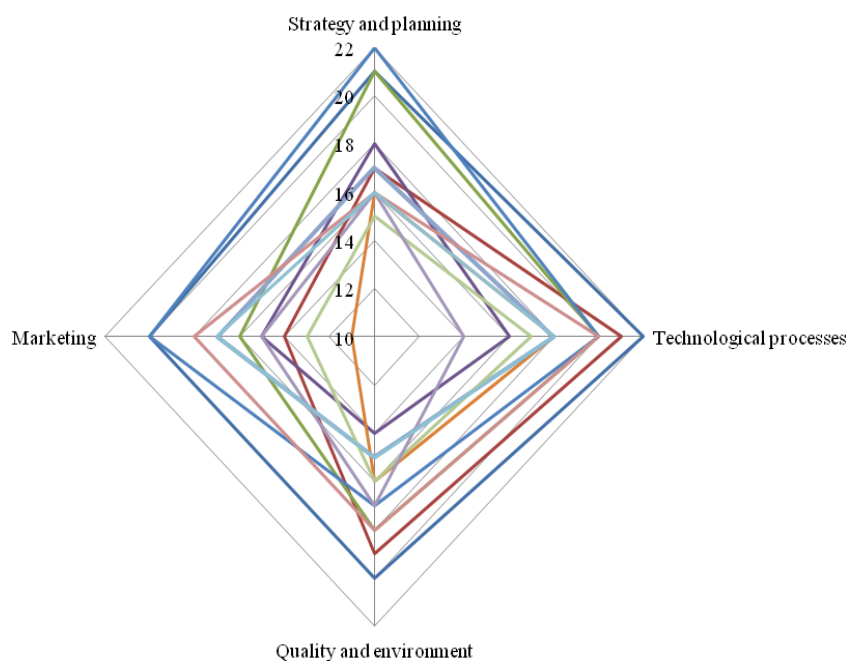


Fig. 3: Polygon of innovative potential of selected Slovak postal operators (Source: own analysis)

It is clear that larger area of polygon of particular postal operator represents higher innovation potential and also appropriate skills for implementation of innovations. For using existing potential properly, it is necessary to choose appropriate strategy in order to create logistic and innovative solutions for their customers.

4. CONCLUSIONS

We could say that traditional postal operators are not generally regarded as innovative. This results from fact, that they have had monopoly position on the market and so were not forced to provide services that best meet customer needs. But nowadays, postal operators are aware that innovation is right tool for the creation competitive advantage and therefore try to seek and exploit new opportunities.

5. REFERENCES

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