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Certification of Innovation Management Professionals: Reasons for and Results from Acquiring Certification

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Abstract

This paper addresses how personal certification in innovation management can contribute to the ongoing professionalisation within the innovation management discipline. The empirical study focused a project in Sweden initiated to develop qualification, specifically personal certification, of innovation management professionals. The project resulted in a certification process and a first batch of certified innovation management professionals. The study aimed to capture the individuals' reasons for, as well as results and effects from, choosing to acquire a voluntary personal certification within innovation management. A wide range of reasons for taking the certifications was reported such as willingness to learn more, willingness to formalise innovation management competence, a wish to clarify roles, but also to promote the discipline itself. Certification was apprehended as a trustworthy format to achieve this. Identified effects were establishment of a common language, increased visibility of individuals, and innovation management professionals to feel more confident in their jobs.

Keywords: Innovation Management Professionals; Professionalisation; Certification; Legitimisation.

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1 Introduction

At present an increasing professionalisation of the innovation management discipline can be witnessed. Besides an apparent proliferation of scientific and practice-oriented publications on innovation management, a widespread diffusion of job titles, including the word innovation, can also be observed (Maier and Brem, 2018). In Sweden, which is the context for this study, a number of observations underlining the ongoing development of innovation management professionalisation can be made. One of these is the founding of Innovationsledarna, the Association for Innovation Management Professionals in Sweden in 2013 (Innovationsledarna, 2022a). The association has since the start worked with a number of initiatives to develop the profession such as formulating job role descriptions and provide mentorship programs. In 2018, the association created the first draft of their Body of Knowledge for Innovation Management Professionals.

Another significant sign of the professionalisation is that ISO, the International Organization for Standardization, has published standards on innovation management such as the ISO 56002:2019 Innovation Management System - Guidance (ISO, 2019). The introduction of standards addressing innovation management has so far been reported in diverse ways. For instance, Tidd (2021) stated that the ISO standard for innovation management system covers the most critical factors for managing innovation but also has shortcomings as not supporting the dynamic nature of innovation and being too abstract. On the other hand, experiences from Spain, pre-dating the publication of the ISO standard for innovation management system, have shown benefits in deploying such a standard. For instance, it has contributed to increased innovation activities (Garechana et al., 2017); promotion of all types of innovation (Martinez-Costa et al., 2019); positive effects for innovation capability and business performance (Mir et al., 2016); and to better decision-making based on consistent data collection (Moreno-Conde et al., 2019).

Given the recent development described above, where innovation managers are increasingly seen as having a distinct professional role, it is highly relevant to understand the drivers and effects of this development within the innovation management discipline. This article focuses on personal certification as an expected contributing factor to this professionalisation. As personal certification in innovation management is a novel phenomenon, very few studies addressing this topic are at present available. Therefore, this study will draw substantially upon knowledge regarding voluntary personal certification in other, more established areas, such as project management.

The overall objective of this study was to investigate how personal certification of individuals within the discipline of innovation management takes place, to identify reasons for people to acquire this certification, identify effects of pursuing such a certification, how this could contribute to the ongoing professionalisation, and how this, in the end, influences innovation management practices. An aim was also to contribute to knowledge around the professionalisation of innovation management. Since innovation management is an emerging profession, it is also a fruitful ground for investigating at a more general level what motivates individuals to become pioneers in the process of formal professionalisation.

2 Professionalisation and personal certification

2.1 Professionalisation and professionalism

Professionalisation within a discipline is a process where occupational work of a certain kind improves its status and standing, demarcates it from others, and transforms it into a "profession". Further, professionalisation can be observed at individual, organisational as well as institutional level (Jacob and Boisvert, 2010). Additionally, the process of professionalisation also encompasses an emergence of a market for professional services within the specific area (Larson, 1978), and an establishment of formal or informal rules and procedures, where professional associations often play an important part, e.g. organising professionals (Jacob and Boivert, 2010). A profession can, in turn, be expressed as a knowledge-based category of occupation, which includes some kind of exclusiveness (Evetts, 2003). Other aspects related to a profession is specialisation, use of skills based in abstract theoretical knowledge as well as training and experience coming from advanced education and vocational training, that the competence is "guaranteed" through examination, licensing, or certification, and that the professionals are organised in some way (Evetts, 1999; Freidson, 1999). However, defining the specifics of a field, for verifying the expertise have been found to be challenging (Jacob and Boisvert, 2010). Further, professionals are expected to act in a way that makes them worthy of the trust they are given, and in return, they get rewarded and benefit from being authorities in their expertise area (Evetts, 2003).

2.2 Voluntary personal certification

Certification is expected to contribute to professionalisation of a discipline since the utilised knowledge is in some way authorised (e.g. by a certification body) and since the profession's domain is made explicit. The qualification of the included individuals (i.e. the professionals) is a part of the process of professionalisation of a discipline. Such qualification can be in the form of licensing, accreditation, or certification. For some areas, a license is mandatory in order to be allowed to perform the work at all. Examples of this can be found in medicine and law, even if these regulations may differ between countries.

Voluntary certification of people is deployed in many domains and has been studied as a mechanism in a number of different contexts such as nursing (e.g. Byrne et al., 2014), Human Resource Management (e.g. Lengnick-Hall and Aguinis, 2012), and project management (e.g. Farashah et al., 2019). In project management, a discipline judged as highly relevant for this study, there is a significant presence of personal certification globally, where the market offers different alternatives, even if the market is dominated by a few actors (Joseph and Marnewick, 2018).

In earlier research on voluntary certification, it has been discussed whether the voluntary personal certification is about being good or looking good (Fertig et al., 2009). *Being good* means that the acquisition of a certification can contribute to developing specific knowledge and skills and that certification can serve as a competence indicator and performance predictor. *Looking good* refers to aspects such as career and status, signalling professionalism externally (ibid). To this discourse, Blomquist et al. (2018) added *feeling good*, referring to intrinsic motivation based on a sense-of-worth and own valuation of the certification.

Regarding outcomes from acquiring a personal certification it has been identified that a personal certification can be seen as an indicator for future performance, which is acknowledged by recruiters (Farashah et al., 2019). In parallel, concerns have been raised regarding a risk of losing relevance when generalization across contexts are done (Hällgren et al., 2012). In studies of its short-term effects on performance, no direct effects have been possible to confirm (Starkweather and Stevenson, 2011; Joseph and Marnewick, 2018; Farashah et al., 2019). However, more long-term effects, enabled by professional attitude and networking within the professional community, are expected (Farashah et al., 2019).

2.3 Personal certification within innovation management

As argued above, innovation management can be identified as a quite immature profession (at least in relation to the examples of project management and human resource management), and research studies on innovation management certification are very scarce. Corresponding specific studies on personal certification within innovation management have consequently not been found. Existing research publications in some way related to innovation management certification cover the development of (not empirical results from) a personal certification within innovation science (Sauberer, 2011; Landry, 2016), address innovation management certification of organisations (Garechana et al., 2017), or state that what is presented in the publications is valid as input for making personal certifications (Yanez et al., 2010; Riel, 2011).

Searching wider (beyond what is found in available research studies) for personal certification related to innovation management, a number of certifications were found, such as Certified Applied Innovation Leader (Innovation 360, 2022), Certified Innovation Leader (AIPMM, 2022), Certified Innovation Professional (GInI, 2022), Certified Manager of Innovation (IAOIP, 2022), Innovation Management Certified Professional – IMCP (CertiProf, 2022), and the Global Innovation Certification (GIMI, 2022). Searching for personal certifications complying with the requirements the ISO standard for personal certification (ISO/IEC, 2012), e.g. third-party evaluation, the

findings are scarcer. Consequently, certification within innovation management can be seen as an area in early development, where effects still have not been covered in research publications.

2.4 Research Questions

Responding to the objective of the study, investigating personal certification of individuals within the discipline of innovation management, the following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. What are the reasons for individuals to acquire a personal certification within innovation management?
2. How does such certification contribute to innovation management professionalisation?
3. What are the effects of innovation management professionalisation on innovation management practices?

3 Research design

This study aims to capture the phenomenon of innovation management professionalisation. More specifically, this descriptive study has a micro level focus, exploring expectations and reasoning on an individual level, as well as the apprehended effects on individuals' activities and responsibilities in their organisations, and how these may influence innovation management practices.

Of specific interest for this study has been a development project funded by VINNOVA, Sweden's Innovation Agency. The project was called "Qualification and professionalization of Innovation Managers", (VINNOVA, 2016), and was performed during 2017. The project had the purpose of developing a model for qualification and professionalisation of innovation managers and was led by RISE Research Institutes of Sweden, and specifically their Certification Division. The activities in the project covered the development of written and oral examinations, training of individual innovation managers, verifying their competence using the examination, and finally, evaluation and further development of the qualification process.

Outcomes of the project were both a proposed examination process of individuals as well as certified individuals. The examination process was formed as a personal certification complying with the ISO/IEC 17024:2012 General requirements for bodies operating certification of persons (ISO/IEC, 2012). The certification was formed as requiring a minimum of three years of well-proven experience in innovation management as well as a passed examination. The examination includes a written exam, based on theoretical knowledge, an experience-based part encompassing a case description, and an oral exam. Within the frames of the project, eleven individuals were certified according to the developed certification process. The developed personal certification program is now provided as a service by RISE Certification Division (responsible for the process) in collaboration with Innovationsledarna, the Association for Innovations Management Professionals in Sweden (responsible for the content) (Innovationsledarna, 2022b).

3.1 Data collection

Given the need for new knowledge in this emerging field, a qualitative research approach based on interviews was chosen as this is considered a fruitful way to collect rich empirical data (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). The selection of respondents was logically given – the list of certified people from the project. All eleven certified innovation managers were contacted, and they all accepted the request for an interview. The background data for the respondents are found in Table 1. The interviews were conducted face-to-face (three interviews) and by telephone (eight interviews). The data collection was conducted approximately one year after obtained personal certification of the

Table 1. Background data of the respondents

		Number of respondents
Gender	Female	5
	Male	6
Age	Up to 29	-
	30-39	2
	40-49	6
	50-59	3
	60 and over	-
Years of innovation management experience	<1	-
	1-5	4
	6-10	7
	11-15	-
	16-20	-
	21 and more	-
Education	College	-
	Bachelor degree	3
	Master degree	6
	PhD	2
Organisation	Private company, Products/services	4
	Private company, Consultancy	2
	Public organisation, Health care	2
	Other (institute, trade organisation and humanitarian organisation)	3

respondents.

The interviews were performed in a semi-structured manner, using an interview guide, and allowing adjustment of the precise wording of the pre-determined questions and adding follow-up questions when deemed appropriate to improve the quality of the interviews (Robson, 2002).

The data collection used the following structure:

1. Background data of the respondent: e.g. organisation, role, and years of experience in innovation management
2. Reasons why the respondent chose to acquire this personal certification within innovation management
   (a) Why choosing to undertake the certification process? (open question)
   (b) To probe further, a motivation and benefit construct developed by Blomquist et al. (2018) was modified from project management to innovation management (Table 2) and used in two ways
      i. respondents discussed how each 1st order measure (eight in total) affected the choice to acquire the personal certification (in order to make the respondents reflect more explicitly on the motivation to enter the certification process)
      ii. respondents ranked the 29 indicators (using a physical deck of cards), in a two-step process. First, the cards were sorted into three piles: "important", "not important", or "in-between". Then the respondent made a ranking within each pile of cards. In the case of telephone interviews, physical cards were sent by post to the respondent, who sorted them following instructions and reported the ranking results back.

1. Effects, so far, from taking the personal certification, including impacts on their own innovation management practice and the (potential) benefits for their organisations from this.
2. Reflections on how certification can contribute to professionalisation within innovation management and how this professionalisation contributes to improving organisational practices. Further, the fact that this personal certification was new was also discussed.

Table 2. Motivation and benefit construct (modified from Blomquist et al., 2018).

2nd order	1st order	Indicators
Feeling good	Achievement	1. to challenge myself to meet professional standards
		2. to have my skills independently assessed
		3. to prove that I can do it
		4. to provide evidence of a level of proficiency in innovation management
	Self-development	5. to learn about innovation management
		6. to increase my knowledge of innovation management
		7. to support my continuing education objectives
Being good	Affiliation	8. to network with other innovation managers
		9. to meet new people
		10. to learn from others
	Professional growth	11. to become an innovation management professional
		12. to signal my commitment to innovation management
		13. to signal my commitment to my career
	Job skill improvement	14. to become more effective in my job
		15. to improve my ability to manage innovation
		16. to help me make better decisions
Looking good	Status and power	17. to increase my status as an innovation manager
		18. to signify a higher level of competence than other innovation managers
		19. to improve my visibility within the company/organisation
		20. to have line managers listen to my recommendations
		21. to increase my credibility as an innovation manager
		22. to demonstrate my ambition
	Career progress	23. to get a better job
		24. to earn a promotion
		25. to become more marketable for other jobs
		26. to increase my external mobility
		27. to keep my job
		28. to satisfy my boss
	Financial gain	29. to earn more money

3.2 Data analysis

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. The initial focus of the analysis was to clarify "reasons for" and "effects of" certification from the transcribed text. This was done through carefully coding since the respondents' answers in the "reasons for" questions sometimes included "effects of" answers and vice versa. The next step was to extract, categorise and group the data.

The analysis of the ranking data was used as a complement since eleven respondents cannot be considered a sufficient base for a stand-alone statistical analysis of the included variables. However, the summarised ranking data was analysed in terms of patterns in the indicators' overall ranking as well as the variance along each of the ranking parameters. Finally, patterns within the data were searched for, with guidance from the overall research questions and existing theory.

4 Results and Analysis

The selection of respondents was given by the list of certified innovation management professionals within the frames of the focused development project. However, when performing the analysis, a number of reflections regarding the respondents were made. The eleven respondents represented a wide range of organisations: from the private sector (both companies and consultancies), public sector, and other types of organisations (research institutes and interest groups such as trade organisations and humanitarian organisations). The respondents, five women, and six men, were quite close in age and all highly educated. The reported length of experience in innovation management was not significantly high, which can be taken as a sign that the innovation management discipline is not yet very mature.

Furthermore, a number of the respondents were found to have several different innovation-related tasks, such as being a consultant helping other organisations, but also responsible for internal innovation management work, or being responsible for the internal operations but performing consultancy work alongside that. Moreover, it became evident that the respondents also could be sorted according to other dimensions such as (1) if they were managing other innovation management professionals within the same organisation or not, and (2) whether the respondents' innovation management work was always conducted across several organisations or focused primarily within one organisation. Among the eleven respondents, two were responsible for and managing other innovation management professionals. Most of the respondents were performing their work mainly within one organisation (either as an employee or as a consultant) but two of the respondents were innovation managers solely working with programs and initiatives covering several organisations (and never really the case of working just within one organisation). Hence, the latter ones were responsible for managing innovation work across different organisations. This has been mapped out in Figure 1 visualising the distribution of the respondents and what they represent according to these two dimensions.

4.1 Reasons for acquiring a personal certification within innovation management

Not surprisingly, several different reasons for entering a process of personal certification within innovation management were reported. Initially, many respondents raised that they were strongly driven by a willingness to learn more and get new insights regarding innovation management, contributing to both professional and personal development. Several respondents also reflected that perhaps a certification process is not where a great deal of learning may happen. In one case, the respondent even stated that (s)he just "wanted to get it done" (Innovation Manager, private company).

A motivation to go through the certification process was to be recognised as an innovation

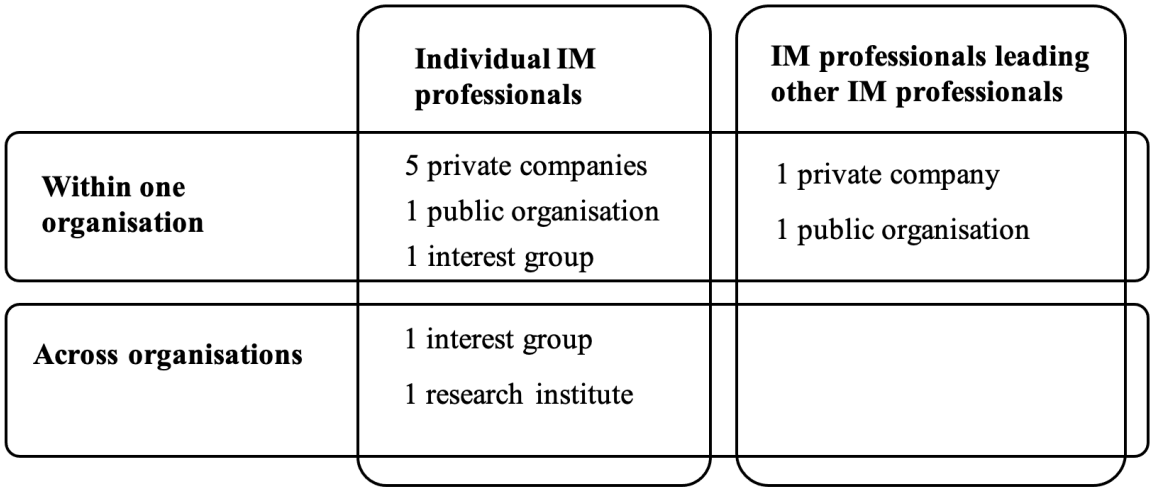

Figure 1. Distribution of the respondents across different types of positions.

management professional – for real. A strong driving force was to take the opportunity to formalise that they had the necessary knowledge. In a very direct way, "adding another line in the CV" was mentioned several times. Moreover, the respondents said that they wanted to test whether they met the levels of knowledge and experience that were required. Specifically, it needed to be a process where, if entering, one could actually fail. The respondents expressed that if they were not meeting the stakes in the examination process and not managing to be certified, they would at least get indications regarding what to develop further – "at least I get to know where my weak areas were" (Innovation Manager, private company).

The respondents' familiarity with innovation management terminology was not uniform. There were cases where respondents wanted help defining their own role and activities in innovation management terms so that they could talk about the own role, in their respective organisations, in a better way. An example of this was an innovation manager from the public sector who stated that the respondent "definitely knew the craft of innovation management" but could not describe it in a proper innovation management terminology. Such a definition was reported as important in presenting oneself – both internally and externally.

The word legitimise was used in the discussions by almost all respondents and was also reaching into legitimising the discipline of innovation management itself within the respondents' respective contexts. A legitimisation of the innovation management discipline itself was expected to result in a clearer role for the respondent in their home organisation and a stronger position to influence the organisation in general, and management in particular. Being a certified innovation manager builds trustworthiness and signals "I know what I am talking about" (Innovation Manager, public sector).

Another expectation was that the certification process would result in that the participants and their organisations developed a baseline for what is considered important regarding innovation management. Specifically, this was expressed for those respondents that had a task of also leading other innovation management professionals. The respondents were convinced that having a baseline would strengthen the innovation management professionals when they are trying to convince their organisation that innovation work can be systematically supported.

The respondents did not have expectations regarding any immediate monetary awards. Rather, it was seen as an investment for potential future benefits, such as having an interesting job and future career development.

The format and context of the certification were declared as important. Even if this specific personal certification was just in its initial phase, and not fully established, certification per se is a well-known concept. Having the certification related to an ISO standard, and the involvement of the well-known (in the Swedish context) certification body - RISE Certification, strengthened the set-up.

For the two respondents leading other innovation management professionals, the certification also served a purpose of testing if the certification should further on be used in their respective organisations for other innovation managers.

The overall results from the respondents' ranking of the 29 indicators from the motivation and benefit construct can be seen in Table 3. It is hardly relevant to perform a detailed analysis using the different available parameters given the limited number of respondents. However, from the ranking summary, it is interesting to reflect upon what indicators end up as top-ranked, lowest ranked, as well as the spread in ranking along each indicator. The indicators in Table 3 are sorted according to their summarised ranking (column Ranking details Sum), i.e. a low number means high ranking. The three top-ranked indicators are related to increasing innovation management knowledge, being professional, and providing evidence of proficiency – related to feeling good and being good. The standard deviation indicates a variety in the ranking for the indicators. Highest (High) and lowest (Low) rankings are presented (1-29 as possible values) in Table 3, together with the standard deviation (σ). It can be noted that for the three lowest-ranked indicators (to earn a promotion, keeping the job, and satisfying the boss – all related to Looking good and Career progress) lower standard deviations are registered. This may indicate that in this early phase of professionalisation career progress is not the main driving force for personal certification. A reflection can also be made regarding the apparent dominance of intrinsically driven motivation factors. This is in line with earlier findings about the importance of intrinsic motivation in innovation (see e.g. Amabile, 1998), but at the same time poses questions about the attractiveness of certification to a larger audience, given the limited importance paid to indicators related to Looking good, and in particular Career progress.

Table 3. Overall ranking of the 29 indicators from the motivation and benefit construct.

	2nd order	**1st order**	**Indicators: To...**	**Ranking details**			
				Sum	**High**	**Low**	σ
1.	Feeling good	Self-development	increase my knowledge of innovation management	88	1	21	6,85
2.	Feeling good	Achievement	provide evidence of a level of proficiency in innovation management	91	1	20	6,55
2.	Being good	Professional growth	become an innovation management professional	91	1	15	5,41
4.	Feeling good	Achievement	have my skills independently assessed	100	1	23	6,57
5.	Looking good	Status and power	increase my credibility as an innovation manager	102	1	24	7,66
6.	Being good	Affiliation	learn from others	104	4	18	4,76
7.	Being good	Job skill improvement	improve my ability to manage innovation	106	2	29	8,06

	2nd order	1st order	Indicators: To...	Ranking details			
				Sum	High	Low	σ
8.	Being good	Affiliation	network with other innovation managers	112	3	23	5,59
9.	Being good	Job skill improvement	help me make better decisions	117	3	22	6,84
10.	Feeling good	Self-development	learn about innovation management	120	2	20	6,04
11.	Being good	Job skill improvement	become more effective in my job	136	4	24	7,92
12.	Feeling good	Achievement	challenge myself to meet professional standards	142	3	24	5,78
13.	Looking good	Status and power	improve my visibility within the company/organisation	147	2	26	7,74
14.	Feeling good	Self-development	support my continuing education objectives	154	1	23	6,15
15.	Feeling good	Achievement	prove that I can do it	156	5	25	7,23
16.	Being good	Professional growth	signal my commitment to innovation management	170	7	25	5,14
17.	Looking good	Career progress	become more marketable for other jobs	172	4	24	7,71
18.	Looking good	Career progress	increase my external mobility	174	2	27	7,64
19.	Looking good	Status and power	have line managers listen to my recommendations	179	2	26	7,72
20.	Being good	Affiliation	meet new people	186	4	26	5,63
21.	Looking good	Status and power	increase my status as an innovation manager	189	9	28	4,95
22.	Being good	Professional growth	signal my commitment to my career	196	9	25	5,34
23.	Looking good	Status and power	signify a higher level of competence than other innovation managers	197	2	29	8,5
24.	Looking good	Status and power	demonstrate my ambition	205	8	26	6,24
25.	Looking good	Career progress	get a better job	212	11	29	5,5
26.	Looking good	Financial gain	earn more money	247	11	27	5,09
27.	Looking good	Career progress	earn a promotion	277	18	27	2,62
28.	Looking good	Career progress	keep my job	304	25	29	1,15
29.	Looking good	Career progress	satisfy my boss	311	26	29	0,96

4.2 Effects from taking a personal certification within innovation management

The effects that were reported covered both effects from doing preparation activities for the certification process and effects of getting and having the certificate. Included in the development project there were also activities related to actors developing training. In accordance with ISO/IEC 17024, the certification process is separated from training providers, which was also the case in the development project, even if activities of both kinds were performed in parallel. Therefore, several innovation management professionals participated in the training that was tested in the project. This training, undertaken together with peers, was experienced as very positive and a way to get insights on innovation management issues from other contexts, brought to the table by the other participants. Learning from peers during the process was nothing that was expected before the process but came out as a great retention. For example, it was much appreciated when challenges were described, similar to their own, from a different context – giving both confirmation and some new insights on how to handle the situation. For example, they discussed that they typically could encounter the situation where "first, you, as an innovation management professional in your organisation, are considered an interesting person, but later on, you are just an annoying person". Discussing this as well as other similar subjects were experienced as increasing the individuals' relevant knowledge.

The amount of learning for the respondents related to the preparations for the certification process was, of course, much dependent on their level of knowledge when entering the process. However, specific learning outcomes that were reported were, for example: "I got a better understanding of the system"; "I see the job more as a role now"; "I look at myself a bit differently"; "I can describe myself in these terms now".

Respondents stated that they now have a baseline, a reference point that they can relate to, based on a common understanding. This constitutes a base for a common language and that people can be more confident when they talk about how to manage innovation. It was said to be "much easier to talk about when you are more certain that what you say is related to some form of international consensus" (Innovation Manager, public organisation). An enhanced understanding also makes it "easier for others now when I can explain better what innovation is and why it is important" (Innovation Manager, private company). Additionally, the part of the certification that requested the person to be certified to summarise practical experience within innovation management in a case description was found to provide a great opportunity to reflect on and learn from the individuals' own innovation management work.

When receiving the proof of certification, one respondent received substantial publicity, both internally in the own organisation but also more externally, e.g. featuring in interviews in both a local newspaper and more topic-specific magazines. Exposure like this resulted in people contacting the certified innovation management professionals with curious questions regarding both the role and the discipline of innovation management.

Any direct effects regarding monetary compensation were not reported. Instead, the gains have been extra visibility in the organisation, and more interesting work tasks. For example, the certification has probably contributed to that some of the certified people have been invited to new fora within their organisations, have been assigned new tasks related to innovation management on an organisational level, and also to external board assignments. Moreover, when one of the certified respondents applied for a new job, the certification as an innovation management professional was discussed already initially in the recruitment process.

Another tangible effect is that the requirement of personal certification for senior innovation management roles was implemented in at least two organisations (one private and one public organisation).

4.3 A new certification – what is it worth?

The fact that the studied personal certification was new was for many of the certified people considered to be somewhat exciting and positive since they experienced a sense of being pioneers - "fun to be one of the first" (Innovation Manager, public organisation). However, risks related to this fact were also reflected upon, such as a risk for the profession of being apprehended as not yet really professional. "Of course you have to explain a bit more since it is a new immature area" (Innovation Manager, public organisation). Respondents also found it to be a privilege to contribute to enhancing the general awareness of the innovation management discipline through talking about their own personal certifications.

Certification per se provides a stable foundation since the concept is well known. It was considered very important that the certification was done according to the ISO-standard, and that the process was owned by RISE, Research Institutes of Sweden, Certification Unit. This compensated for some of the worries related to the fact that it was a newly established certification. "It [ISO-relation, and certification by a well-known certification body] makes it easier to talk about and for people to understand what it is" (Innovation Manager, private company).

4.4 Certification as a contribution in innovation management professionalisation

The respondents considered the certification to potentially contribute to the professionalisation within innovation management in several ways along the logic chain of raised understanding and visibility into influence and impact.

Certification can contribute to the general awareness regarding innovation management and an enhanced understanding of the essential content of innovation management, resulting in a common language. Certification can be seen as evidence that being an innovation manager is a "real job", clarifying and raising the status of the work. "Certification shows an important statement – it is not only a madcap working with innovation" (Innovation Manager, private company). Having a certification may make people more visible in e.g. the organisation, which may lay the foundation for future influence. This was explicitly underlined by the respondents from the public sector, a context where titles and certificates are strongly present. Having specific innovation management certification helps to separate innovation management from adjacent areas such as, for example, project management. The respondents point at the benefit of clarifying and separating innovation from other disciplines, e.g. from R&D. Moreover, respondents reflect that having a common understanding also makes it possible to get further scalability, which can enable innovation work from different contexts to be aggregated and contribute even more.

If utilising the visibility that can come with a certification in the right way, respondents identify a great possibility to influence and impact practice. Having a certification can help position oneself in the organisation and provide a mandate, which may also increase the possibilities to obtain resources. This mandate can also allow the certified innovation management professionals to mediate what innovation is and bust old myths regarding innovation. This can be a path to get away from the perception that "innovation is only about having a lot of ideas" (Innovation Manager, public sector). One respondent mentioned that it is easier to educate management, claiming that systematic work and a long-term perspective are needed to further innovation, if you are certified.

However, it is also required that the innovation management professionals have sufficient

innovation management skills since this is a profession that should help in driving renewal. The respondents say that hopefully a long-term, positive spiral can be induced covering: visibility – people expect innovation management professionals to deliver (getting the mandate) – you deliver – and through that become more visible, and so on. All in all, this is expected to result in a higher maturity level in the performed innovation work.

5 Discussion

5.1 From buzzword to basic?

Capturing the present state of professionalisation of innovation management, a demarcation of the profession has emerged but is still under way. For example, it was stated that being a good project manager does not guarantee being a good innovation manager. In line with earlier examples (Larson, 1978), a new market is under development encompassing both new services and new competences where innovation management is explicitly requested. Extrapolating, it can probably be seen that further on, the roles that include innovation management will probably relate to some sort of baseline (that is now also developing). One respondent (Innovation manager, other organisation) state that "I feel that the word innovation starts to get a content – not just a buzzword. When the "newsworthiness" is lost it actually becomes a real word".

Some respondents reflected that the main image of innovation work that is mediated is relating to innovation work within private organisations. Future development of the baseline, therefore, requires an adjustment to both the public sector as well as how to manage innovation work across organisations addressing complex societal problems.

However, this journey of professionalisation of innovation management may be extra interesting since the topic in itself encompasses renewal and finding new ways forward and where there can be an inherent doubt about, or even resistance to, standardisation, systematic work, and well-defined structures. One respondent (Innovation manager, public sector) expressed that "people in innovation" might react when they become part of a larger stream since they often are inherently motivated to find new paths forward and see it as their task to break away from e.g. routines, and thus perhaps do not want to be a part of a larger established group of innovation management professionals.

5.2 Is "doing good" also important?

When analysing respondents' driving forces for taking the certification it is found that at least to some extent, it is in line with earlier results from more mature professions. Primarily, the respondents reported that they wanted to learn more in order to do a good job and relate this to some sort of baseline (which in the particular case is not yet established).

In relation to the motivation and benefit construct developed by Blomquist et al. (2018), some additional aspects were identified. When increased visibility of individuals in the employing organisation was reported, it was often with a comment such as "IS there a certification for this?", showing a raised awareness about the innovation management discipline. Further, the respondents also stated a willingness to contribute to building the profession, being already strongly committed to innovation and innovation management, pioneering this area. This was also indicated by looking at the bottom-ranked indicators (Table 3), where all respondents agreed that satisfying their boss and earning a promotion were not motivating them to acquire the certification. This indicates that people involved at this early stage of the overall professionalisation process are motivated by also developing the discipline in itself, and, not only themselves as individuals. This implies that besides *being good*, *looking good* and *feeling good*, they also are motivated by *doing good* –

contributing to give the role as an innovation management professional a more profound legitimacy. These aspects are arguably highly relevant during a profession's genesis, as key questions at an early stage are what competence is at the core of the profession, how this is validated, and the signalling effect this brings about.

6 Conclusions

This article has aimed to contribute to knowledge regarding the ongoing professionalisation of innovation management through describing recent progress related to personal certification of innovation management professionals.

In this study, several different reasons why individuals have chosen to acquire a personal certification within innovation management were presented, such as a willingness to learn more, a wish to formalise their innovation management competence, and a desire to clarify roles. It can be concluded that these individuals, who are active in the early phases of professionalisation of the innovation management discipline, are also driven by raising the awareness of the discipline itself.

Personal certification, as a concept, was considered to play an important role in contributing to the innovation management professionalisation. It was discussed how such a certification contributes by (1) providing a knowledge base to relate to; (2) being a vehicle for increasing the visibility of innovation management professionals; and (3) strengthening the trustworthiness of these professionals.

Potential effects on innovation management practices were identified, including the clarification of what innovation management is and what it should be used for, as well as separating innovation management from other disciplines (e.g. project management) and in that way delineating the professional domain more explicitly. A common understanding also provides possibilities that different streams of innovation work can be aggregated – for a better overarching impact.

6.1 Implications for theory

Since innovation management is in an early phase of professionalisation, it was interesting to capture how the people taking the personal certification also saw their role of building the discipline of innovation management, potentially adding "doing good" to the motivation and benefit construct for personal voluntary certification used in this study. Further, since the study revealed several types of innovation management professionals, e.g. related to areas of responsibilities and types of organisations, these differences needs to be taken account for in further studies on prerequisites for and effects of professionalisation.

6.2 Implications for practice

The findings are interesting from several perspectives. For innovation management professionals it is interesting how personal certification may affect the legitimacy of the role and how the professionalisation may influence the possibilities to conduct fruitful innovation management work. This may also contribute to eliminate a number of innovation management ideas that are not based on research or well-proven practice. Organisations may reflect on how to utilise personal certification in innovation management; and for certification bodies it is interesting to inform their further development work of this kind of personal certification.

6.3 Limitations and further research

Since this study is focused on a specific project and a specific group, this should be considered when drawing conclusions from the study. One strength of the study is instead that it captures

the entire first batch of certified innovation management professionals according to the ISO standard for personal certification. For the future, it would be interesting to continue following this development, specifically the next generations of personally certified innovation management professionals.

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