

Improving the idea management process

A case study from the idea collection to an idea portfolio

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Problem description

Innovation is a critical step for a long term company profitability and growth. Innovation is defined as a profitable application of an invention, or, considering the earliest stage, of an idea.

Now, having ideas does not seems to be a problem in the company, but more what to do with them afterwards. Since a couple of years a new development process has been set in place including a pre-development process and a rough description on how to handle ideas. The reality showed that ideas stay months and maybe years on a list and nobody knows how to handle them. Because generally only one idea out of hundreds could be profitable for the company. It's all about the speed of selection.

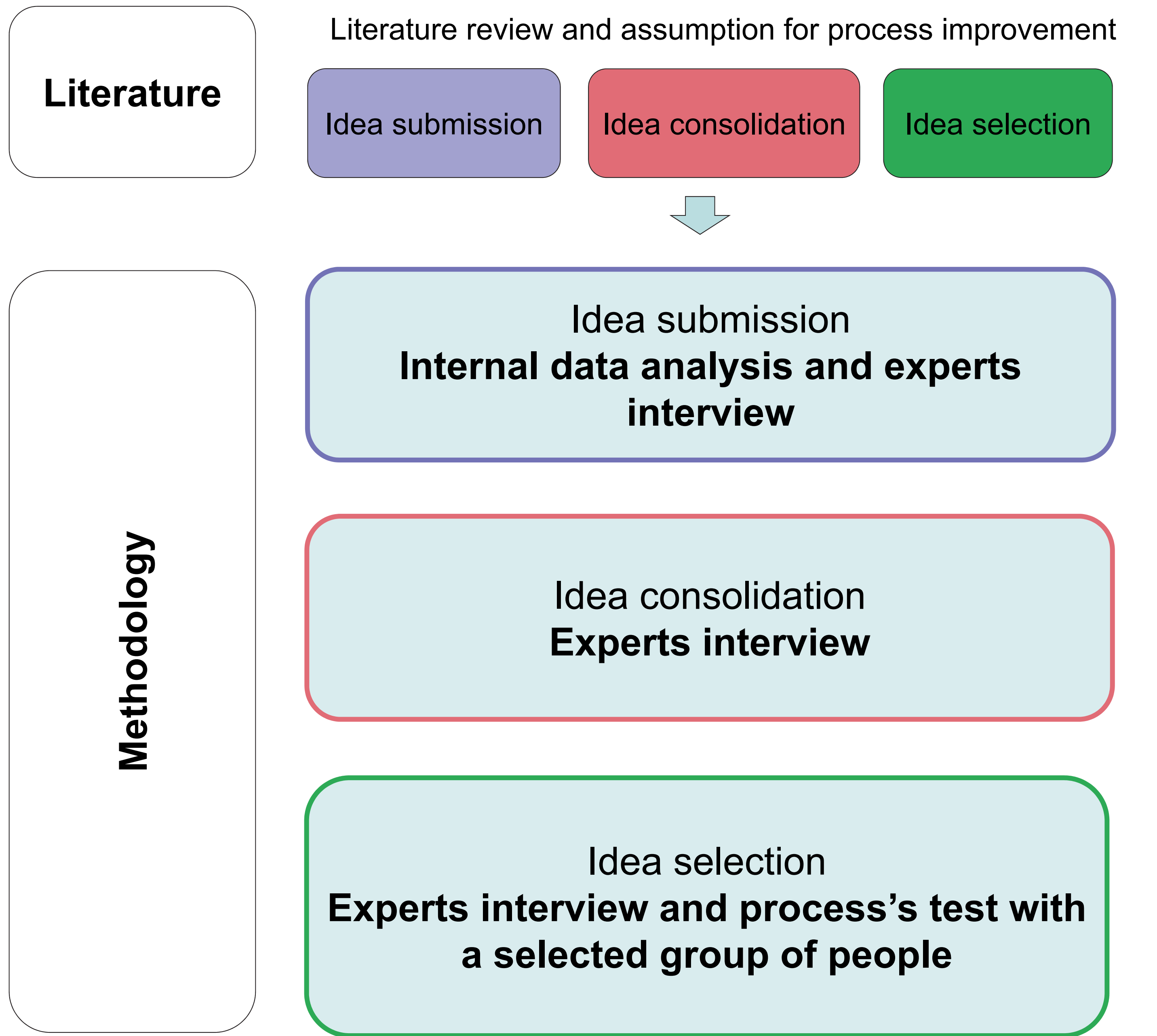
Aim of the work:

- The aim of the work is to identify **why ideas could actually not be selected**
- Furthermore, this work **will define the prerequisite for an idea selection process**, identifying roles and tasks
- The proposed selection process should at the end be **tested to check its feasibility and accordance with the company structure**.

Leading questions:

- Which information is needed and at which level to ensure a well-grounded, objective selection of ideas for development?
- Which metrics are necessary to evaluate the ideas and decide for development go?
- How can a first idea screening be carried out based on a relative high amount of ideas?
- How can pre-selected ideas be further investigated to reach the desired information level?

Methodology



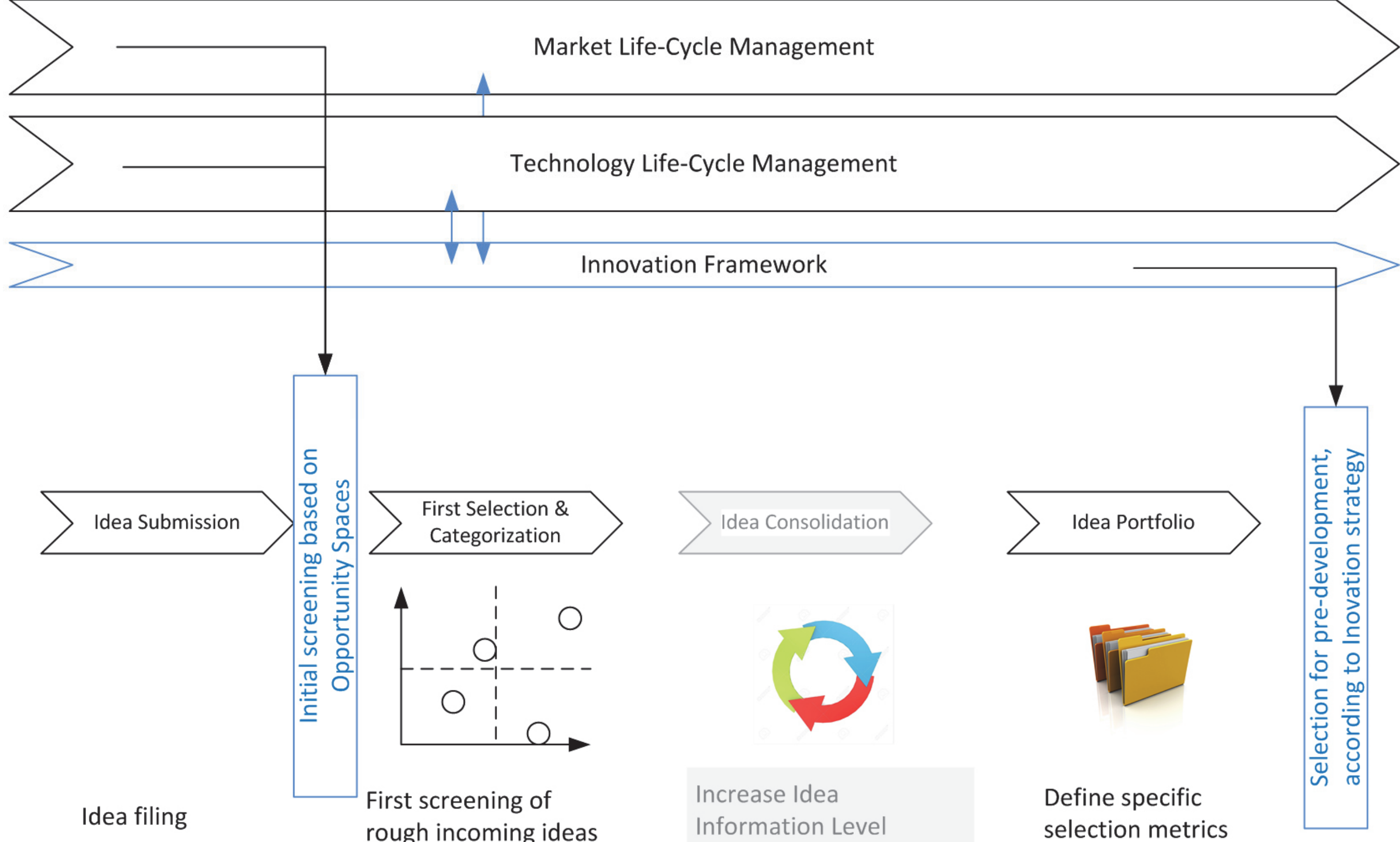
Results

Idea submission

- Internal data analysis confirmed the fuzzy character of the idea submission, no structure and a rough personal description distinguish the actual submitted idea.
- Experts confirmed the suggested **idea fact sheet** as a base for idea submission. However, they put the attention on the idea sharing throughout the company which will require an online tool.

Idea selection and consolidation

- The proposed consolidation process could not be tested as planned because of the lack of background information, which could be summarized in a lack of innovation's framework.
- Experts highlighted the importance of explicit knowledge and knowledge management. To select ideas, the knowledge on market and technology is crucial, as base to estimate the possible impact on feasibility, customer needs and acceptance.
- The evaluation has confirmed the need of a stronger involvement of market roles in the whole process, which, up to now, was prevalently technical oriented.



Discussion

Methodology

- For this purpose it was not possible to refer to general theory insights or quantitative results. The answers to the questions had to be found within the company. Literature was used in terms of supporting and leading the internal process establishment.

Overall results & suggestions

- During the interviews contradictory expectation on the idea management process were noticed from different groups of people, a clarification in term of strategy is mandatory.
- The internal data analysis confirmed the rough and fuzzy character of ideas, which had to be consolidated before undertaking any decision and selection process. This lead to a more structured idea collection form.
- The analysis showed a central leak of market knowledge and vision to use as guideline for idea prioritization and selection.
- Given that, the author strongly suggest to **invest in the definition of an innovation framework** as part of the company's strategy, defining were to act and focus in the middle and long term.
- The framework should be based on deeper technology and market analysis, introducing market maturity level and technology precondition as idea evaluation criteria.