

Participatory research on innovation – Methodological approaches to challenges in the field and practical experiences

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Innovation processes in organisations are subject to profound changes: For example economisation, standardisation, and intensification of labour. It is a key challenge to conduct participatory research in this organisational setting, especially when increasing workloads of interview partners form a strict schedule for necessary interview or discussion time. The article introduces a participatory research design to address these challenges. The methodology was developed and applied in the research project “Smart Innovation” which studied impediments and promoters of innovation in the mechanical engineering branch. It combines agile principles with classical elements of participatory research. Interview partners are involved with active parts throughout the research process and seen as experts of their work. Yet, participation in hierarchical organisations and under time and market pressure entails a potential for undesired limitations and side-effects. In fact, participative methods can enhance economic tendencies and backfire on emancipation.

Key words: participation, innovation, innovation processes, action research, agile method