Subjectivity of Innovation Management in SME’s

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Abstract: Researchers and managers, over the decades have devoted significant amounts of time in trying to understand and manage the innovation process. This research paper explores one particular part of the innovation journey, the subjectivity of innovation management and the influence that a change in leadership style can have. A framework is presented which explores the sensemaking and subjectivity of innovation management, and the close link to both positive and negative outcomes of the innovation process. The paper sets out the research undertaken by the co-researchers and myself in one small business over a three year period. The research shows that the coordination of group activities surrounding the innovation process are heavily influenced by dominant individuals, namely the founder and key senior managers. The negotiated sensemaking of the different groups is arrived at through consensus and based on the group’s customer values associated with the innovation process. These customer values are closely linked to the group’s aspirational expectations. But a gap was observed between the espoused and mental model customer values of some groups, and was linked very closely to their interpretation of the small business market-oriented strategy. In managing innovation, it is important for all parties to understand the subjectivity of other group’s value judgments. The research framework helped the groups understand the complex relationship between group’s actions and the observed outcomes. It further assisted the groups in building their own skills and experiences associated with sensemaking during the innovation journey.