Designers as the determinants of design innovations

Design innovations have become increasingly important appropriation mechanisms for firms. Since 2003, the number of applications for design rights (protecting design innovations) has tripled compared to a doubling in the numbers of both patent and trademark applications. However, despite the growing interest of firms in design innovations, knowledge of the determinants of design innovations is limited. Prior work on labour mobility within the innovation studies literature has focused primarily on the discussion of scientists as being crucial for the creation of technological innovations. The present paper expands on this discussion by drawing parallels with the relation between scientists and technological innovation and the relation between designers and design innovation. We explore whether a similar positive relationship exists between the labour mobility of designers and the generation of design innovations and which determinants influence this relation. We employ a unique Danish dataset containing information on firms, their hiring of designers, and their design innovation activity measured by design rights. Our findings show that hiring a designer does increase the likelihood of producing a design innovation. Hence, designers are a determinant of design innovations. However, in order for the firm to benefit fully from hiring a designer, prior experience in design innovation is required.

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