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Industrial Designers as a Driver of Technology Innovation: Evidence from a Japanese electronics industry

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 Industrial Designers as a Driver of Technology Innovation: Evidence from a Japanese electronics industry

Abstract

“Design-driven Innovation” is now widely recognized as one of the most competitive business creation approach. This concept includes cross section of design-oriented innovation and technology-driven innovation (Verganti, 2009). However, these arguments tell little about innovators for such a type of innovation. This study tried to examine a potential of industrial designers to technology innovation. Using data of patents applied by Japanese major 16 home electronics companies during 1995–2004, we examined the correlation between technological quality of patents (measured by inventor forward citations and examiner forward citations) and their inventors’ categories (measured by intra-firm rank of aggregated numbers of patent applications and design registrations). In the categorization, we have set top productivity design right creator as a group of industrial designers, who are belong to the design department or the design center. Our result shows including a top productivity design right creator as an inventor will lead to be significantly higher in technological quality. Especially, creators who represent mediumtop level patent productivity and top design productivity, hold a consistently high and significant positive effect on their technological outputs. This result suggests that industrial designers who have certain amount of technical knowledge play a key role in design-driven technology innovation.

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