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January 23, 2008, 10:40 am

Tracking the World's Appetite for Innovation

By STEVE LOHR

TAGS: H P, INNOVATION, KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY, MICROSOFT, PRODUCTIVITY, UNISYS

In its quest for what it calls “new metrics for the knowledge economy,” a nonprofit research group has come up with an index of global innovation confidence.

The poll of 25,000 people in a dozen nations, published on Tuesday, found the United States squarely in the middle of the pack. America trailed the populations most enthusiastic about new technology, gadgets and services, a group that included the United Arab Emirates, India, Brazil, Ireland and China. Still, the United States came out ahead of those dour Europeans — the least thrilled by technology were the Netherlands, Finland, Slovenia and Turkey.

Jonathan Levie, author of the study and a senior lecturer at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, noted that the nations most confident about innovation tended to be fast-growing economies with young populations. Innovation confidence, he said, doesn't closely track consumer confidence, as one might expect. So it is a separate sentiment.

But innovation confidence, Mr. Levie said, does show a strong correlation with age worldwide. “We find that innovation confidence starts dropping after people reach 40,” he said.

A sign of wisdom or technological exhaustion? Further research, it seems, is required.

That is precisely what the Institute for Innovation and Information Productivity, the group that sponsored the index, has in mind. The group plans to conduct the innovation confidence studies annually as part of its broader research agenda as it seeks to measure what works and what doesn't in the knowledge economy — as opposed to the industrial economy.

The institute's members include companies like Microsoft, Hewlett Packard and Unisys, and universities like the London School of Economics and the University of Washington.

The institute is simply presenting the poll results instead of trying to draw conclusions from them. Still, its members — reasonably enough — tend to assume innovation and enthusiasm for innovation is a good thing. “What it shows is where the uptake for new ideas is great and where it's lagging,” said Daniel Rasmus, a member of the institute's board and the director of information work vision at Microsoft.

“This is something that developed nations have to pay attention to both as they look for market opportunities and for competitive threats,” Mr. Rasmus said.

The innovation confidence index, its questions and a description of the methodology used can be found at [the institute's Web site](#).

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