The European Manufacturing Survey 2026

Now it is once again time for the Centre for Integrative Innovation Management (C*I2M) at the University of Southern Denmark to conduct the European Manufacturing Survey.

Since 2009, the University of Southern Denmark, in collaboration with a number of partner institutions, has been collecting data on manufacturing firms in 20 European countries. The purpose is to take the pulse of manufacturing activities in Denmark, focusing on the use of technologies and innovation, as well as how these have developed since 2022.

We take a broad interest in production sites, from the smallest to the largest, and from the most automated to the most sustainable. As something new, we are, for instance, placing additional emphasis on the phase-out and discontinuation of older production processes.

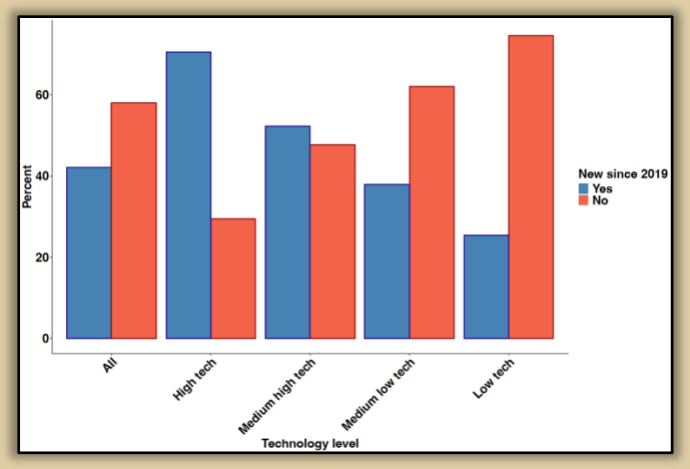
We greatly appreciate everyone who takes the time to complete the questionnaire each year. Every response makes a difference, and we do our best to make the questionnaire as good as possible. Thank you for your time and interest. We also hope that it stimulates your thinking about what could be done differently.

To demonstrate how we use the data, we present a few examples here. The last time we conducted the survey was in 2022, and we naturally hope to perform at least as well this time.

Enjoy the read!

Are Danish manufacturing companies really innovative?

In fact, the study shows that less than half of all surveyed companies (42%) introduced new, innovative products in the period from 2019 to 2021.



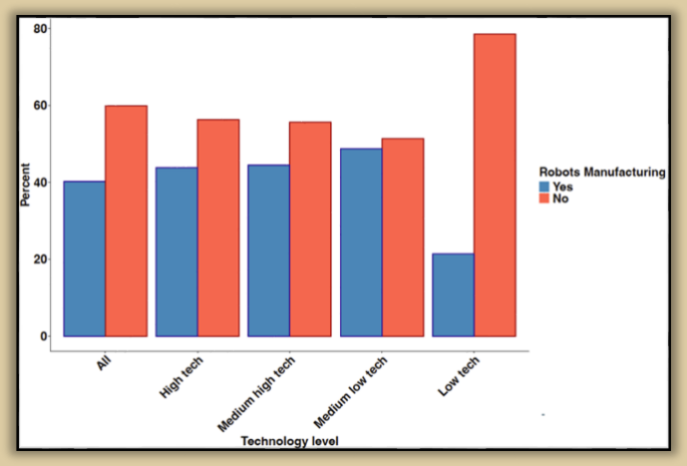
Product innovation is defined here as products that are either new to the production site or involve significant technical improvements. Based on the companies' industrial classification, it was also possible to categorize them according to how technology intensive they are, ranging from low tech to high tech companies.

There is a clear positive correlation between whether a company has been product innovative in the period from 2019 to 2021 and how technologically advanced it is. The vast majority of high-tech companies introduced new products during the period (71%). In comparison, only 25% of low-tech companies developed new products.

The robots are coming!

But not yet. Less than half of the surveyed companies (40%) used robotics for manufacturing processes in the period from 2019 to 2021, while less than a third (29%) used robots for handling processes.

Robots in the manufacturing process, for example for welding, painting, or cutting, are used fairly consistently across companies, except among low tech companies. Notably, the picture changes when looking at low tech companies, where only 21% use robots in the manufacturing process.



This may indicate that companies with higher investments in research and development and new technologies to a significant extent use their resources for automation of the manufacturing process.

When the focus shifts to the automation of handling processes, for example for packaging or sorting, the picture changes. Overall, the use of robotic handling technology across all technology categories is relatively low. However, low tech companies use robots in their handling process the most (39%), while for high tech companies it is only 19%.

The figures show that the least technologically mature companies choose to invest in automation of handling processes rather than in the manufacturing process itself.

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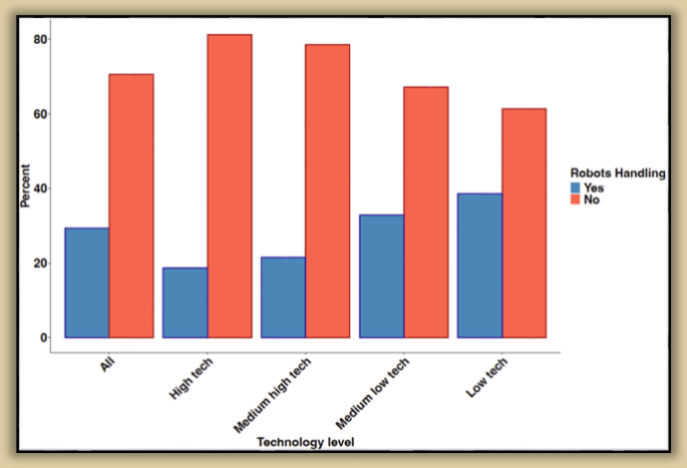
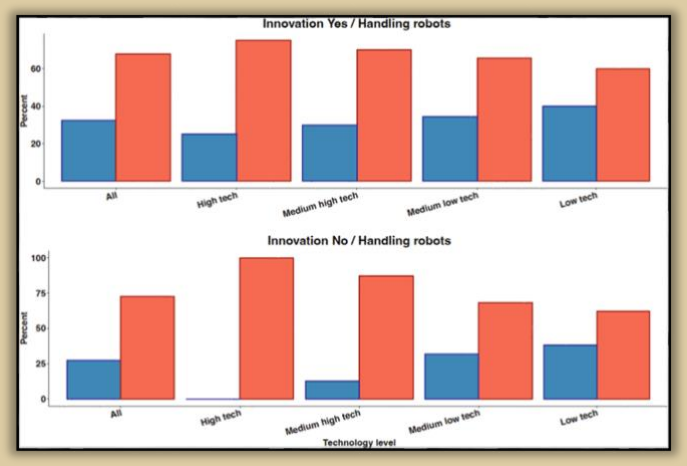
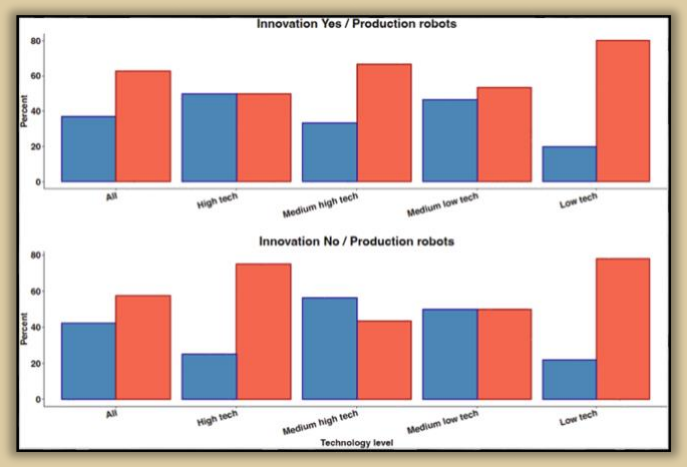


Looking overall at the distribution of companies based on their technological level and product innovation rate in relation to the use of robots across functions, it can again be observed that robots for handling processes are primarily introduced by low tech companies. This is the case regardless of whether the company has been product innovative during the period.



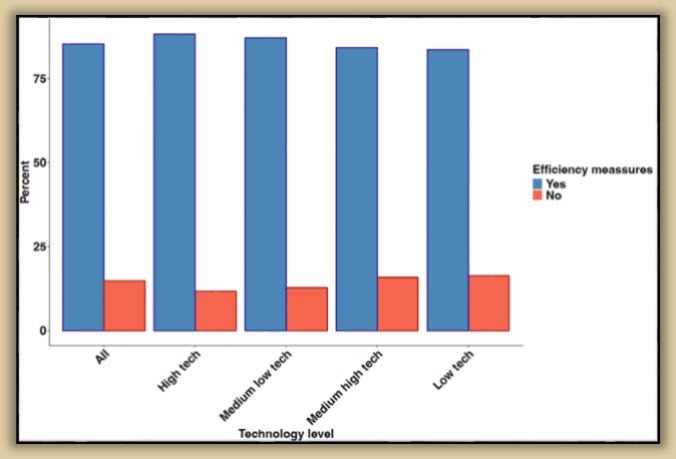
The opposite picture applies to the use of robots in manufacturing, where these are generally companies with a higher technological level. An exception, however, are companies that have not been product innovative, as high-tech companies in this group have the second lowest share of robots in manufacturing.



Again, the figures show that companies that are product innovative and belong to higher technological categories invest more in automating the manufacturing processes rather than their handling processes.

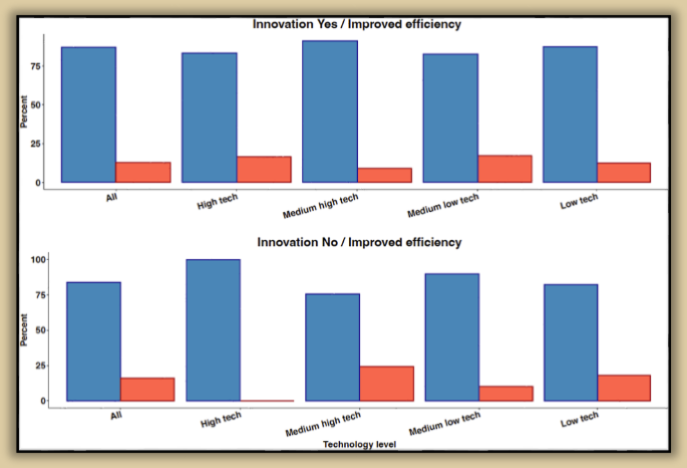
Energy optimization? Of course we do that!

An overwhelming share of Danish companies (85%) implemented measures aimed at improving efficiency in the use of energy, water, and production materials from 2019 to 2021.



All companies in the study have initiated measures to make their consumption of energy, water, and materials more efficient. The large proportion of companies that have implemented such measures indicates a positive development towards a more sustainable future across Denmark.

Looking at the difference between companies based on their level of product innovation and their efficiency improvement initiatives, this difference is again very small. It appears that companies that have been product innovative are marginally more likely to introduce such measures (16% compared to 13%)



However, it is still worth noting that more than one in ten manufacturing companies in Denmark (12%) have not managed to introduce any form of initiative aimed at improving efficiency.

The team behind the Centre for Integrative Innovation Management (C*I2M)

The European Manufacturing Survey is conducted by the research group Centre for Integrative Innovation Management at the SDU Business School.

C*I2M is an interdisciplinary research group focusing on innovation practices, innovation strategy, and new technologies. The group's vision is to create a more holistic understanding of innovation processes by integrating knowledge on innovation, market development, business models, and technology. It aims to support Danish companies in strengthening their innovation capabilities and understanding of technology.

The group carries out collaborative projects with other universities, industry partners, and a wide range of stakeholders. It is headed by Professor Mette Præst Knudsen. She established the group in 2008 and has since led the European Manufacturing Survey.

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