

The Future of Innovation

Edited by
Dr Bettina von Stamm and
Dr Anna Trifilova

GOWER



The Future of Innovation is in Our Hands



Name	Stefan Kohn
Affiliation	Fujifilm Europe GmbH
Position	Head of Innovation Management
Country	Germany
Area	Innovation management, fuzzy front end, culture
Email	kohn@fuzzyfrontend.eu

culture responsibility risk globalization mistakes

Before looking at the future of innovation it seems worth looking at its past. The term 'innovation' was created and introduced to economic science by Schumpeter in 1939. For a long time innovation just happened. It actually was a while before researchers started to analyse the innovation phenomenon and investigate how to improve it – how to *manage innovation*. This research stream started in the 1970s with studies like the famous SAPHO study.

In the past 40 years innovation research has focused on trying to explain how innovations can be more successful. In the 1970s and 1980s we learned a lot about innovation processes and portfolio management. In the 1990s we learned about interdisciplinary collaboration and involving the customer and in the past 10 years we have been talking about – besides many other interesting and important issues – the importance of culture and its influence on innovation.

As a result of this research we see that the flop rates of new products and services dropped significantly till the middle of the 1990s, but since then they have remained on a quite high level. At the same time product lifecycles become shorter and shorter and thus innovation becomes more costly.

What can we learn from that? In my opinion the crucial learning is that innovation means, has always meant and will always mean *taking risks*. Neither the corporate planning staff nor the research community will ever – despite some interesting attempts in the 'computer-aided innovation' community – be able to find tools and methodologies to correctly predict which products will be successful and which not. In the end innovation becomes a matter of attitude and by that a matter of corporate culture and leadership. This is where we stand today. Companies need to accept that innovation has the risk of failure and the chance of success.

For the future of innovation this raises several challenging questions:

- In a world where we are more and more trying to avoid mistakes and errors – how will we be able to muster the courage to take the risk of innovation?
- In a world where culture is a local phenomenon but corporations are becoming more and more global – how will we be able to manage a diverse set of individual cultures of employees in different countries and markets and maintain an innovation-friendly culture that allows for mistakes and taking risks?

- In a world where responsibility is more and more placed in the hands of committees and consultants – how will we be able to identify and motivate the individuals who can be the innovation heroes with the spirit and the courage to fight for their ideas?

To answer these questions is the task of everyone working in the innovation field. And answering these questions will show the future of innovation.

Stefan raises several important and interesting challenges and you may want to ponder how you are dealing with them. Are you aware of them? Have you embraced them and are you working to start addressing them, taking others along with you? You may think, 'What can I do, as an individual? I cannot change the course of the world.' We do not agree. We may not be able to change the world immediately, but the choices we make may influence others. If enough of us embrace the change it gains acceptance, and at a certain level of acceptance it becomes the new norm. Think of Mahatma Gandhi. Think about something more abstract such as environmental awareness. Twenty years ago when Bettina started recycling, her parents' generation looked on in amusement and wonder, arguing that it was ridiculous to have a number of different rubbish bins. Now recycling has become the norm, and her parents are certainly doing it too.

Any change requires an awareness of the status quo. What is good about the change? What is less good about it and how can you evaluate these aspects from different viewpoints and through different lenses? Once you have done that you can decide what to do and how to approach the change. Unless we are aware of the challenges, and unless we are willing to start addressing them, the future – let alone the future of innovation – may be a little tricky. But then, as Eduardo Sicilia Cavanillas suggests in the opening to his contribution, unless there is innovation there is no future!

