
Interview *Dr. Bettina von Stamm*, Innovation Leadership Forum

Interview Question

John Bessant and his co-authors coin the term ‘crisis-driven innovation’. Do you see potential for open innovation in this area? If companies start to think about ‘crisis-driven innovation’, can you think from your work about tools and methods to support their thinking in these new trajectories?

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Let me answer that question in a roundabout way. I think it is hard to argue against the existence of crisis-driven innovation; it has always been such: whenever there is a crisis we need to innovate (or die, as they say). It is a common preconception that we only change (innovate) if we have to – unless of course it is for the better, then there are generally few objections! Hence crisis is only one trigger for innovation; the other is spotting an opportunity. Or perhaps the two are the same? I would argue that they are. Those who see crisis as a threat will shut down, resign, withdraw. Only those who see crisis as an opportunity will find the courage, energy and inspiration to do something about it and innovate. The question is, what

needs to happen for someone to see crisis as an opportunity rather than a threat? Why is that so important? From brain research we know that if we feel threatened our Prefrontal Cortex, the centre for creativity, imagination, and reflection shuts down and our energy withdraws to the Amygdala, the older part of the brain and seat of ‘fight or flight’; conscious thinking, consideration and creativity do not exist here and no innovation will happen once we are in ‘fight or flight’ mode.

The question was about tools to facilitate innovation in times of crises which for me means getting people out of ‘fight or flight’ mode. It seems alarmingly simple: offering inspiration, hope, possibility! How to achieve that? Offering people the opportunity to be involved, to take charge, to influence. Listen to their concerns, worries, ideas, dreams. Dream and laugh together, and tell stories; in order to innovate ourselves out of a crisis we need a shared destination that is worth reaching. (And no, cost cutting alone does not carry much inspiration..). Not quite sure how well that sits with prevailing leadership styles... That is why open innovation might be an answer – IF it is managed and facilitated accordingly (which again is a leadership question...).

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