

Editorial



Dear readers,

Innovation by those who do not have it as a task in their job description has been highly successful over centuries. Early open innovation initiatives date back more than 450 years, when the king of Spain initiated the Spanish Longitude Prize to discover a method to find longitude at sea (Masters and Delbecq 2008; see also Haller 2012). In 1795, *Napoléon III* offered a prize of 12,000 francs to anyone who could find a way to preserve food as he needed to provide the military with a safe food supply: “After 14 years of experimenting, the French confectioner *Nicolas Appert* developed a method for preserving food by heating and canning in glass jars. For this solution, *Appert* was awarded the prize in 1810. The new method of preserving food spread rapidly and was the beginning of modern food technology” (Adamczyk 2012 based on Englund 2004). However, also without government initiated initiatives individuals and teams with various backgrounds have always acted as inventors or innovators as two examples might illustrate:



The Bavarian priest *Sebastian Kneipp* (1821 – 1897), now well-known and famous for the so-called “Kneipp Cure” can be seen as an entrepreneurial user innovator. At the age of only 25 he started to suffer from lung tuberculosis, which was seen as a terminal illness at his time. He experimented with different treatments and managed to heal himself. In the following, he combined different applications of water and integrated them into a well-rounded “system of healing” consisting of hydrotherapy, herbalism, exercise, nutrition and spirituality. As author of “bestselling books” like “My Water Cure” or “Thus shalt Thou Live”, but also by travelling across almost all of Europe, he gave the approach the visibility and diffusion it needed to become the major naturopathic medicine movement it was and still is. By granting the rights of commercialization to a close friend he even was encouraging and enabling the foundation of the “Kneipp Werke” – a highly successful family firm till 2001 that now belongs to the Hartmann Group, Germany.

Or, let us have a look at the case of *Walter E. Diemer* who – while working as an accountant for the Fleer Chewing Gum Company in Philadelphia – in 1928 invented the bubble gum: “Here’s what *Walter Diemer*, the inventor himself, said about it just a year or two before he died: ‘It was an accident.’ ‘I was doing something else,’ *Mr. Diemer* explained, ‘and ended up with something with bubbles.’ And history took one giant pop forward. What *Mr. Diemer* was supposed to be doing, back in 1928, was working as an accountant for the Fleer Chewing Gum Company in Philadelphia; what he wound up doing in his spare time was playing around with new gum recipes. But this latest brew of *Walter Diemer’s* was – unexpectedly, crucially – different. It was less sticky than regular chewing gum. It also stretched more easily. *Walter Diemer*, 23 years old, saw the bubbles. He saw the possibilities. One day he carried a five-pound glop of the stuff to a grocery store; it

sold out in a single afternoon. Before long, the folks at Fleer were marketing *Diemer's* creation and *Diemer* himself was teaching cheeky salesmen to blow bubbles, to demonstrate exactly what made this gum different from all other gums. The only food coloring in the factory was pink. Walter used it. That is why most bubble gum today is pink. *Gilbert Mustin*, President of Fleer named the gum Dubble Bubble and it controlled the bubble-gum market unchallenged for years, at least until Bazooka came along to share the wealth. *Walter Diemer* stayed with Fleer for decades, eventually becoming a senior vice president. He never received royalties for his invention, his wife told the newspapers, but he didn't seem to mind; knowing what he'd created was reward enough. Sometimes he'd invite a bunch of kids to the house and tell them the story of his wonderful, accidental invention. Then he'd hold bubble-blowing contests for them." (www.ideafinder.com).

Innovation by those who do not have it as a task in their job description can be illustrated with an endless range of success cases. However, with the advent of industrialization firms started to professionalize their research and development function. Highly specialized research and development (R&D) labs and innovation centers were created that follow well-structured innovation processes, employ well educated researchers and developers and follow highest quality (and mostly also security) standards. And, throughout this process, we seem to have – step by step – forgotten about the power of the non-professional innovators and their enormous role to not only add to the successful product spectrum of a company (as in the case of the bubble gum inventor), but also to create innovations and solutions that address broader problems of society (as in the case of *Sebastian Kneipp's* "healing system"). Thus, the professionalization of innovation has driven us to forget over time about the rich power of innovation outside these corporate or government-run centers of "closed innovation".

With his book "Open Innovation" (2003), *Henry Chesbrough* did not only popularize the term "open innovation", he successfully contrasted it with "closed innovation" in corporate R&D labs to remind managers and researchers alike of the richness and power that individuals and teams outside the corporate R&D function bear for innovation in society. With his book "Democratizing Innovation" (2005), *Eric von Hippel* went a step further to claim that user-centered innovation processes might even have clear advantages over the well-established and professionalized manufacturer-centric innovation processes. In fact, already in a 1967 paper in Research Policy *Eric von Hippel* had pointed to the dominant role that users can take in innovation processes. Today, the rapid development of the internet and technology in general acts as a major driver for the proclaimed democratization of innovation: "When I say that innovation is being democratized, I mean that users of products and services – both firms and individual consumers – are increasingly able to innovate for themselves" (*von Hippel* 2005, 1).

It does not come as a surprise, that open and user innovation have received intense attention in recent years by individuals, industry and universities alike. There is no shortage in books, papers or even special issues of journals on the topic. Equally, it seems to become a standard for organizations to run open innovation initiatives with customers, suppliers, partners, employees, ... There seem to be no limits. With this special issue, however, we would like to draw your attention to a different focus. Let us for a moment ignore the majority of firm-sponsored, company-driven corporate open innovation initiatives that aim at supporting strategic (or even less strategic) goals of profit-oriented organizations. Let us focus on "Open Innovation for the Greater Good" and try to better understand the

power of open and user innovation for addressing the overarching societal challenges of our globalized world. This is a broad and exiting field that – for sure – cannot be understood with just one special issue. Still, we hope that the four focused papers in this special issue and eight interviews we have conducted with experts in the fields that complement them might trigger more in-depth thinking, more well-crafted projects and more focused research in the area.

For individual user innovators, this special issue might encourage engagement for open innovation even outside of the immediate field where you act as a user. For governments, public service providers and many types of non-profit organizations, it might act as an eye-opener to enable more public engagement for the grand challenges of our time. In addition, we are convinced that this special issue is a valuable recommendation for all corporate readers. The area of “Open Innovation for the Greater Good” offers incredibly promising options for private investors and all kinds of for-profit organizations. Already today, we see a broad range of open innovation initiatives run by firms that call for solutions that serve society as a whole, address pressing problems of our time or try to attract attention and engagement for the creation of solutions beyond a firm’s product and service spectrum. Not all of them are well crafted. There is a huge potential for more and better open innovation activities and initiatives that serve the greater good.

Join us on our journey!

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