

Innovation flows where there are innovative people

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Ideas are important, but the people who stimulate them are even more so. We talked about this with Alessandro Garofalo, former president of Trentino Sviluppo and professional innovator.

Creativity must be stimulated – explains Garofalo, a physicist and owner of Garofalo & Idee Associate srl – and to do so there are numerous techniques. He revealed some of them to us during a seminar held at the FBK science center.

In particular, we discussed the three fundamental elements that can push ideas to become innovation:

- **paradigms.** To innovate, it is necessary to break them and question them;
- **paradoxes.** Thanks to these it is possible to move away from mediocre solutions of the problem;
- **multisensoriality.** If we really use all our senses we can find associations of seemingly unthinkable ideas.

But when does creativity become innovation?

Creativity and innovation are two fairly contiguous concepts. We say that creativity is like a kaleidoscope, it is the ability to connect existing products or objects in such a way as to create something new, that had never been thought of and that meets a need that had not been expressed before. A good example is the pencil with rubber tip: from their union we create a product that writes and cancels at the same time. This creativity is profitable: it creates profit, business and satisfaction from the customer. And above all it improves the quality of life of those who use this innovation.

What are the ideal conditions for creating innovation?

Creating innovation requires fairly important boundary conditions. No need to have structures. From my point of view it is important that the places where innovation

occurs have the possibility to exchange ideas and people. Lesson learned: innovation is born where there are places in which innovative people meet. So I can have somebody next to me who has set up a millionaire startup and who, at the bar, gives me some advice. Abroad, this happens all the time. In Italy, we have a way of innovating linked more to brick. Creativity springs to life in the right settings, where the right ideas and the right people can hang out together.

Is it better to have horizontal or vertical skills to bring innovation?

In my opinion it takes mastering two or three disciplines, or having experts who can provide support with them, and strong vertical skills. In addition to this it takes method, application and sweat. As Edison says: "None of my inventions came by chance. When I see that it is worth reaching it, I test it time and again until it arrives. 1% of inspiration and 99% of sweat. "

What is the difference between the US startup ecosystem and ours?

First of all the average age. In America they are much younger, and therefore from my point of view there is more energy and more capacity. Then, if I can be not so nice, in the Italian ecosystem we have, around startups, a world of evangelistic/digital training that sometimes leaves me a little perplexed. A system that doesn't help startupper that much, I think. This thing in America doesn't exist, skills exist. At the bar, or surfing at the beach, you meet the successful entrepreneur who gives you the idea or help. There, the exchange with the know-how holder is direct, here we have a little too many intermediaries, also recycled ones.

In your opinion, what can an institute like FBK do to improve research and innovation?

Here it is hard to make suggestions, but as a native from Trentino and as a person who has approached this world, I have some ideas. One is certainly increasing interdisciplinarity. Also, opening to subjects far from the fields of work and application so that ideas and vision can be expanded. Another idea, which is not mine but I have seen being implemented in a large German pharmaceutical company, is that each research center explains to others what the other centers do. So instead of talking about the nice things you do, you must humbly tell the nice things that others do. This is something that I find very interesting and provocative.

With his long experience in many companies, Alessandro Garofalo gave us an overview on how to improve the creative and innovative processes in the working groups. Of all the useful elements that we could learn, of one thing we are all certain: there is no innovation without contamination of ideas.

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