

“INNOVATION ABYSS”

***Prof. Archana**

In the preface of his new book, Innovation Abyss, Chris boldly says: “If you want something more than amusing anecdotes and useless theory, then read on to find out what’s really holding innovation back and what you can do to unleash it.” Chris DeArmitt is an award-winning innovator who started inventing from his home at a young age. He delved into the field of plastics while at university and continued on to work with chemicals, smart materials, and more. He worked many years for large corporations such as BASF and subsequently worked as an independent consultant and innovator for international clients. Throughout his career he has strived to bridge the gap between the scientists who create products which no one wants or needs and the managers who are unable to prioritize because they don’t understand the science. All through the book Chris describes many problems faced by innovation practitioners and creatives, which are often ignored by the so-called experts. Some of his ideas run counter to popular belief at the moment. Chris describes and example to the incorrect management of creative people.

There are numerous offers for online innovation training, as well as books and courses to improve one’s creative ability. But creative training, Chris says, is not the answer. He explains that creativity is 80% genetic; either it’s in your blood or it isn’t. Instead

companies should focus on hiring Myers Briggs NT (intellectual) personality types and building the right environment where creative people flourish. Then you teach your creative people business skills, which is easier and more



effective than trying to teach business people creative skills. This last argument made sense to me. While I do believe that everyone is creative in some way(s) and creative skills can be improved with intentional practice and training, there are certainly aspects of creative abilities that are instinctual and more pronounced in some people, even from a young age. Regarding the right environment for creatives, Chris goes into detail about typical large corporations with work cultures that are too controlled, with too many safety protocols and red tape, and all the wrong reward systems. And while no one will argue with his criticism, this argument isn’t new. People have been complaining for years that even during all the innovation type in recent years, corporate culture remains more or less the same; in some cases with the addition of more brainstorming



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meetings, bean bags and ping pong tables, Chris also has issues with popular methodologies such as Stage Gate and Six Sigma. He argues that innovation is the exact opposite of structured, predictable, repeatable processes.

Chris concludes with tidbits of useful advice for innovators and creatives navigating their way through the innovation maze as well as to middle managers and leaders. I thought that Chris' ideas and opinions were clear and his complaints well-founded. Reading *Innovation Abyss* felt more like sitting down at the pub to discuss work challenges with a friend as opposed to the more analytical or inspirational content commonly seen today. *Innovation Abyss* is a quick read, and full of helpful feedback actively which can be considered.

To 'think like an innovator' is something that nearly everyone aspires to. After all, who doesn't want to be more creative or artistic in their endeavors? How many people dream of coming up with a great idea that will bring them fame and fortune? To feed this visionary need there are tools and resources to help people develop their creative abilities, but to become a successful innovator one needs more than just creativity.

For instance, the ability to convince others or simply ignore their disbelief and criticism is one characteristic that differentiates the trailblazers from the people who have great ideas, but never see them through to fruition. A person needs to possess passion, self-confidence, patience and above all persistence.

In his new book, *Think Like an Innovator*, Paul Sloane gathered a diverse collection of people with these attributes. He describes their personal background, challenges faced, and the solutions they proposed and finally the lessons learned —practical advice for you to apply in your own situation.

The book contains more insights than I attempt to list here, but there were a few themes that were significant tidbits of wisdom that creative thinkers should keep in mind:

Be original: David Bowie, Miles Davis, Freddie Mercury, Salvador Dalí, Picasso, J.K. Rowling, and the list goes on—each had a distinct and sometimes controversial perspective of what their art should be. They stayed true to their beliefs and overcame great obstacles, no matter what the critics said.

Be curious and question everything: the inventors of Velcro, Penicillin, and a mechanic who invented a simple device that could save millions of lives during child-birth all kept an open mind and active curiosity about ordinary events in their daily lives. Outstanding inventions can come from the simplest observations.

Trust your people: transparent organizations with little bureaucracy and self-organizing teams have achieved sophisticated products, a loyal workforce and fortunes to boot.

Mix with people from outside your profession (and comfort zone): Hans Christian Andersen used to listen to wild stories from inmates in a lunatic asylum. And one of the world's most successful mining giants was not a miner. He listened to scientists, data analysts and geologists instead of the mining experts. Diversity of thought and experience is vital to divergent thinking and problem solving.

Other themes and lessons include:

Hardship and hard work come with the territory.

Take risks, break the rules, use brazen stunts or be offensive when needed.

Design a platform, not a product.

Don't be afraid to copy and combine.

Learn from your customers

Storytelling and effective communication are powerful tools for the innovator.

For the experienced entrepreneur or innovation manager, you will find many well-known names in this book, but you're also bound to find interesting unknown details about their lives or new perspectives about their work. Sloane managed to pack a great deal of wisdom in a light and easy-to-read format, perfect for reading on the go or in bite-sized portions.

The final section is the conclusion, and here the authors share several innovation myths, many of which center around one main idea. Managing the innovation process is not the result of people breaking rules, creating crazy ideas, and throwing things against the wall to see what sticks; what I have called running a casino inside your company. Instead, managing innovation requires just as much discipline and rigor as managing the Performance Engine.

There is no room for running on autopilot, as the team needs to be on their toes constantly to evaluate what they are doing to see if they are getting closer to their goal. The authors do a great job of calling out and dispelling these myths repeatedly throughout the book, and it's nice to see them listed out at the end.

Finally, this book is clearly for people looking to manage the execution of innovative ideas to make them real within an organization. It is not for people who are looking to create new ideas. In fact there was only one observation that I disagreed with, and it came at the end of the book. As the authors were reiterating their point that innovation cannot happen without disciplined execution, they correctly point to the fact that most organizations focus most of their innovation efforts on the Big Idea Hunt. They then say that the Idea Hunt may be serendipitous and difficult to manage, but that this random nature applies only to the Idea Hunt.