

Building knowledge hinders innovation, according to new research

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Building knowledge, if managed incorrectly, can hinder innovation, according to new research from HEC Paris (<http://www.hec.edu/Knowledge>) business school.

PhD student Pier Vittorio Mannucci, demonstrated that the trend amongst professionals for developing specialised knowledge can become a detriment to their ability to be creative over the course of their careers, negatively impacting their organisations.

His study examined the ebb and flow of creativity over a 35-year period in Hollywood animation studios such as Pixar, Disney, and DreamWorks, analysing the awards of a selection of core members of creative teams to determine individual creativity.

He found that a focus on building specialist knowledge early on in a career can help foster innovation over a four to five year period. However, beyond this, specialism can cause individuals to become increasingly inflexible.

Mannucci identified two different types of knowledge-building which, when employed concurrently, can enhance creativity across different stages of an individual's career; specialised knowledge – building skills and abilities in one particular area, and diverse knowledge – building skills and know-how in other areas of the company, or in another discipline altogether.

By allowing employees to diversify and broaden their focus to other interests, Mannucci says managers can avoid over-specialisation in their staff, and keep perspectives fresh.

Mannucci says: "There are dangers that arise after around 10 years when over-specialisation can occur. The more the employee knows about something, the more it becomes the only thing they see. By realigning the focus to areas outside of the field, managers can promote agility of the mind and fresh perspective, which will translate as renewed creativity."

He concludes that creativity over a long career is dependent on an ever-evolving balance of specialised and diverse knowledge-building. Managers should support specialisation throughout an individual's early career, yet new stimulation is needed later on to enhance creativity. Offering new methods of output, further education is the most successful means of achieving this.

Mannucci adds: "Is it any coincidence that much HR research suggests that employees are most likely to leave after about 10 years' service? This is because a lack of diversifying knowledge leads to reduced creativity, making work dull – and resulting in a loss of valuable human capital. This is a huge risk for businesses that are relying on individual creativity to stay ahead of the curve in business."

More details about the research can be found here on the Knowledge@HEC platform (<http://www.hec.edu/Knowledge/Strategy-Management/Innovation-Entrepreneurship/How-knowledge-can-stimulate-but-also-in>

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Founded in 1881 by the Paris Chamber of Commerce and Industry, HEC Paris is a founding member of the Université Paris-Saclay. It boasts a faculty of 138 full-time professors, more than 4,400 students and over 8,000 managers and executives in training each year.

HEC Paris was ranked second business school in Europe by the Financial Times' overall business school ranking in December 2015.

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