EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Dare to innovate: constructing a society of innovators

Background and method of study

Every year since its inception in 1969, the Fondation Nationale Entreprise et Performance (FNEP, www.fnep.org), a public-private foundation based in Paris, forms a Working Group of ten to twelve professionals to reflect on a given topic. Since 1970, the end result of this reflection has been published as a report, and, since 2012, edited in the publication series *La Documentation française*.

The topics are covered in three-year cycles. The cycle for the years 2015-17 focuses on various dimensions of innovation and innovative processes. The task of the 2016 FNEP Working Group was to reflect on the theme of the culture of innovation – how to create and maintain a culture conducive to innovation across society, in organizations, in companies and even in individuals, and how such a culture can be sustained.

The 2016 Working Group was composed of 12 mid-career professionals from both public and private organizations ranging from transport to health and from public utilities and technology to diplomacy. Some of the group members had active responsibilities related to innovation and innovative practices, some only passing experiences.

The principal method of investigation of the FNEP Working Groups is to interview representatives of selected organizations both in France and internationally. For the 2016 study, the Working Group interviewed more than thirty organizations and individuals in France, and made study trips to Germany (Berlin and Munich), Switzerland (Zürich and Lausanne), Barcelona, London, China (Shenzhen, Guangzhou and Hong Kong) and Canada (Toronto and Montreal).

The objectives of the interviews and meetings were to study methods, best practices, initiatives and actions which are conducive to strengthening the culture of innovation. The Group examined the organization of work in the private sector as well as in the public sector. The study trips were particularly helpful for identifying inspiring experiences outside of France, for discovering operational examples of various factors contributing to an innovative culture, and for putting into perspective French practices compared to those in other countries.

For the members of the 2016 Working Group the notion of "culture" covers a broad range of issues : the notion of company culture, but also different methods of organization and management. It also includes the notion of national culture, represented by different symbolic actions and values. The Group studied various factors that contribute to individual or collective innovative actions. More specifically, the

Group analysed three aspects: innovation in the private sector, innovation in the public sector, and the role of education in innovation. Cross cutting themes for all three aspects of investigation included the question of the impact of technology, attitudes towards risk-taking, as well as the nature of innovation to be favored: incremental or disruptive.

Constructing a society of innovators

Today, innovation is seen as a panacea for economic growth, prosperity and development, both in public and private organizations as well as in society at large. Through innovation, organizations become more competitive and yield more returns. Thus, the ability to foster innovation becomes a key factor for organizational development, innovators are talents in high demand, and literature on innovation abounds.

Why then another report on this topic? Inspired by the innovative examples encountered during the investigation process, the 2016 FNEP Working Group decided to put into practice some of these elements by renewing the end product of the reflections of the Group, the report itself. The report as it is now presented is intended to be, above all, a practical tool for introducing innovation in any organization, as well as a reflection tool to support the change of culture that innovative thinking implies.

The Working Group proposes to put an end to the idea of innovation as an icon, presented as an ideal, but all too often seen as unattainable. The ideas presented in the report stem from the conviction that it is possible to develop a culture of innovation within all of us, as individuals and as organizations.

Rather than an ideal, the "culture of innovation" can be seen as a new form of thinking and, by extension, working: the mindset of prototyping and advancing step by step instead of resolving a problem all at once, combined with the learning of lessons from failures and the agile ability to co-construct with colleagues from various backgrounds.

To develop a culture of innovation it is necessary to influence the mindset of individuals, preferably from a very young age, or at least to overcome many habits and preferences. The encounters during the investigation of the Working Group have convinced the members that it is possible – not through complex innovation programs but simply through day-to-day actions that will plant the seeds of innovative thinking.

These actions should be taken at all levels of organizations, in a progressive manner, and with the support of individuals or small groups who will test the practices, who will experience the power of these actions, and who will make sure they are multiplied across the organization.

The Working Group encourages readers to cultivate innovation in and around themselves. To "construct a society of innovators" is to put the four following statements into action:

- Innovation is essential. How can we make it common practice?
- Innovation requires hard work. How can we make it easier?
- If innovation is not disruptive, how can we innovate?
- Innovation should be natural – how can we make sure it becomes an integral part of our organizations and ourselves?

Thus, the Working Group proposes an approach that makes it possible for everyone to find their own innovative practices and to develop themselves as "cultivators of innovation."

Summary of immediate action points

This is also the spirit of the report. The four main parts of the report each examine a different aspect of the culture of innovation, grouped into *fiches*, or action cards. On each action card, the topic is briefly introduced, followed by inspiring examples and best practices as observed by the Working Group. For each action card, a number of pragmatic recommendations are proposed, as well as immediate action points. The four main parts as well as the action points are summarized here.

Part 1: Born to be an innovator or learning to be one?

The first part of the report is centered on the role of the individual in the innovation process. While the role of illustrious role models is undeniable in the disseminating of innovation and entrepreneurship, the report argues that innovation potential is often undervalued and that, in the end, almost anyone can be innovative if given the right support and opportunity.

In parallel, innovation is often the result of a collaborative process, not just the ingenuity of one person. Using specific methods and models can also, at least in part, nourish innovation. Thus, innovation is not just the privilege of a happy few; it is rather a process, which can be extended to many individuals and teams for the benefit of the organization at large.

Immediate action points

- I identify an inspiring individual and invite him or her to speak about his or her experience as an innovator.
- I discuss with my colleagues which factors in my organization can inhibit innovative and creative process. How could these be overcome?
- I assess whether I am able to identify innovative individuals in my organization? Do innovative team members get the exposure and the credit they deserve? Is innovation (ideas, concepts, solutions) rewarded in the review processes?
- I take a critical look at ongoing projects and have the courage to stop those that aren't working.
- I take every opportunity to speak about my project.
- I define the areas where I am willing to take risks.

Part 2: The catalysts of innovation

The second part of the report discusses the possibilities for the innovator to interact and benefit from the immediate environment. There are naturally cases where innovation stems from an inspired idea, but mostly, an effective innovation process is constructed, with its own specific methods and tools, supported by external elements which act as catalysts. The particular catalysts identified in this report are the physical environment, technological tools, networking with others, the value of copying, and lucidity when facing constraints. All these act as levers for supporting interaction, creativity, risk-taking, and experimentation – in short, elements that provide the freedom in which to innovate.

Immediate action points

- I observe my teams and identify working environments that favor teamwork.
- I organize an "out-of-the box" event for my team, or, I give my team the means to organize such an event.
- I transform the meeting room with inspirational elements.
- I sign up for a MOOC[1] on a topic that I would like to explore.
- I try out various communication and collaboration tools, such as Prezi, Storyline, XMind, Stormz, and invite my team members to do the same. I reward the use of these tools and the sharing of experiences. Could any of the tools help us in our innovation processes?
- I pay particular attention to information and communication technology skills when recruiting new team members. A team member with new and specific skills and a capability to share them would bring valuable insights to the team.
- If I see a great idea somewhere, I think about ways to adapt it to my market and my profession.
- I think about ways to disseminate an innovation in my organization and in my network.
- I update my LinkedIn or other professional profile and send out invitations to enlarge my network.
- I launch an initiative to open up the innovative process in my organization to other actors in the network and value chain.
- I identify legislative and other normative hurdles to my project and plan a way to develop a prototype to test these limits.
- I join an international network of experts in my field with whom I can share experiences on constraints and solutions.

Part 3: Can innovation survive in large organizations?

There seems to be a continuous debate regarding the possibility of staying truly innovative within a large organization. For many, it is possible, but requires a lot of effort. For others, the only solution is to externalize innovation to outsiders, mainly startups.

The third part of the report argues that innovation is possible in large organizations, but that it requires putting in place particular conditions in order to maintain the innovative spirit. The report shows that while organizations may be constructed in many ways, there are certain key elements that are essential in order to nourish innovation: freedom, diversity, encounters (even those that appear serendipitous), defined spaces, small multidisciplinary teams, appropriate scale of activity, prototyping, experimentation, networks, sharing and feedback. An active human resources policy is also an essential factor for identifying innovative profiles and supporting them through various programs, including international exchanges.

Immediate action points

- I contact a university in order to set up a hackathon for a specific problem.

1 MOOC : *Massive Open Online Course*. Formation de masse en ligne et ouverte à tous.

- I make one day a month a day when team members choose what to work on and how to do it.
- I set up a network of innovators in my organization.
- I give more freedom to my team members by introducing new attitudes: I provide them with a budget without exact guidelines.
- I propose to define what would be the best "sandbox" for our organization in order to support creativity and innovation.
- I experiment with new working methods: I open my meetings to people from other parts of the organization.
- I invite my team and a team from another department to share a drink on Friday in order to promote informal exchanges.
- I contact a colleague from another organization in my network in order to organize an afternoon of experience sharing between teams.
- I recruit team members with an international profile and invite them to share their visions with the team.
- I look for startups outside of my field of expertise with whom my team could collaborate.
- As a large organization, I invest in startups, giving them complete freedom and supporting them as needed.

Part 4: Successfully placing innovation in society

The fourth and final part of the report discusses the place of innovation in society in a broader perspective. Four factors are identified as elements that influence innovation on an individual level as well as on an organizational level: power structures and elites, education, attitudes towards failure and public support measures. Which are the institutional forms that they take in society? Under what conditions can they accelerate the potential for innovation?

Immediate action points

- I ask myself how future managers are identified in my organization.
- I update myself on the usage of media tools and the codes they are associated with. I actively use the social media channels of my organization.
- I make a point of developing networks with universities or other institutions of higher learning for my organization.
- I ask myself how I react and give feedback if a team member does not achieve his or her objectives. Do I give credit for the effort?
- I reflect on what I have learned from past failures. I have none… a cause for concern! Which are the proposals I have turned down recently?
- I act as a role model by speaking openly of my failures and explaining what I have learned. I encourage team members to do the same.
- I investigate which public support measures are available for my organization.