

1 In 2004 you published *The Medici Effect*. What inspired you to write this book and explore the idea of innovation?

I grew up at the intersection of different cultures and countries and ethnicities. My mom is from the States and my dad is from Sweden. She is black, he is white. I grew up in Sweden. And so culturally there are all these intersections in my background, and later on I realized that I had a great interest in intersections of the sciences and of fields, disciplines, and industries.

I discovered that I love the places where different fields, industries, or cultures meet because they are soil for innovation. And in 2001 all of this came together to me as a singular idea. I woke up one morning literally seeing a mathematical equation—a combinatorial map—that helped me understand what happens at these intersections. I saw in front of me this idea that if you connect two fields or two industries or two cultures, the number of ideas that you create should be exponentially higher than if you stay within a single field. That was the origination of the book.

2 The book thoroughly, and thoughtfully, explores the idea of intersection and the role it has in innovation. What exactly is intersection and why is it important for innovation?

What's interesting about innovation is that not only is it necessary; it's become absolutely critical for all fields and industries. So the question that people try to figure out is, how do I become better at innovating? How do I become successful at creating ideas and making those ideas happen? And one of the assumptions is that to become successful we have to rely upon expertise and a logical approach, and both of these things are not true. New ideas are really combinations of existing ideas, and those combinations are more powerful if they are seemingly unrelated because they allow us to come up with ideas that are different from those that we think about every day.

3 Structural and civil engineers spend a lot of time working in teams. What are your thoughts on creating project teams likely to devise innovative solutions? What is the benefit of doing so?

Innovative team thinking has to be developed through diversity. We have worked with close to 2,000 teams around the world, and it is one thing to theoretically describe why diversity drives innovation, but we've seen it empirically.

Questions

WISDOM AND GUIDANCE FOR
SUCCESSFUL CAREER BUILDING

An interview with Frans Johansson on innovation

•••• By CATHERINE A. CARDNO, PH.D.

Frans Johansson is a business strategist, speaker, and the author of the international best seller *The Medici Effect* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2004) and *The Click Moment* (New York City: Portfolio, 2012), which focus on different aspects of finding and recognizing one's path to innovation and success. On September 28 he will be the keynote speaker at the ASCE 2016 Convention, which will be held in Portland, Oregon, September 28–October 1.



I would introduce members with whom you don't usually work into the team. In particular I would ask myself, who is the logical choice of people who should be on this team? And then I would change it up. The more predictable the team members you work with are, the less likely that you're going to be innovative. You want to maximize diversity—create teams that consist of people from different fields or functions, different levels, different cultures and countries, different genders or ethnicities. In each of these cases you will find that the perspective that people bring to those teams is going to be different and your chances of innovating go up.

4 A lot can happen in a decade, as you make clear in the book. What do you see as the most significant changes in the marketplace in the 12 years since you published *The Medici Effect*?

What has changed is that now you find almost all organizations and most leaders asking for innovation. They want to break down the silos that they spent decades building. They want to bring together people from different parts of the enterprise, and as leaders they want to make sure that they are not stuck in a particular way of thinking. Instead, there is much greater resonance, acceptance, and desire for these types of intersectional ideas.

Another development is that if the world was changing quickly 12 years ago, it's changing even more rapidly now. In 2004 social interconnectedness did not exist to the degree that it does today. You didn't have Facebook. You didn't have Twitter. You didn't have these incredible networks that exist today, which means that the spreading of ideas is now happening at a record pace.

5 On the basis of your own experiences in the past 12 years, are there any concepts in the book that you'd refine if you were writing it today? Why or why not?

Yes. When I wrote the book I spent a lot of time writing about passion,

and ultimately it didn't end up in the book in a big way because I didn't feel like I had anything new to say. Now, after having worked with tens of thousands of people around the world and with leaders and CEOs of some of the largest companies on the planet, I have a better frame of reference to talk about passion. The passion that somebody feels, the enthusiasm somebody has to make something happen—it is incredible how important that is in driving success.

When you are doing innovative work you don't know if it's going to work. What is going to give you the wherewithal to withstand all the mistakes and failures you experience as you develop your ideas? Your passion and enthusiasm are going to do that.

6 Your new book, *The Click Moment*, is about the interconnection of randomness, serendipity, and luck. What is a click moment?

The book explores three different types of serendipity or randomness. And the first one of those is what I call a click moment. And that is a moment that comes about unexpectedly but that matters greatly as to the future success of whatever enterprise that you're pursuing. So, for instance, one of the examples that I use in the book is about Microsoft and how when Microsoft launched Windows 3.0, they actually intended to shut it down. They had only three people working on it 18 months before it was released. Now, Windows 3.0 became the most successful software in history—up to that point—by a wide margin. It became the dominant operating system, so how come they only had three people working on it? It's because Windows didn't work. Well, one night at a company party one of the people working on it runs into a guy who is just visiting the Microsoft campus. They end up talking, and through that conversation they figure out what the solution to Windows is. And they fix it. Now that's a click moment.



Cardno

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7 As a follow-up question, why do you think these three elements—randomness, serendipity, and luck—are the “new normal” in the marketplace?

The meanings are a little bit distinct, but generally speaking they overlap. But what they suggest is that something that you haven't planned for or predicted will happen. Our ability to predict what's going to happen has dropped with the ever-shifting introduction of new technology, new competitors, new consumer behaviors and norms. We have to be open for the unexpected to happen, and we have to capitalize on it. CE