

Guest article from Prof. Dr. Marion A. Weissenberger-Eibl

Making the impossible possible

Professor Dr. Marion A. Weissenberger-Eibl, Director of the Fraunhofer Institute for Systems and Innovation Research (ISI), is an expert on innovation. In addition to her role at ISI, she also serves as the Chair for Innovation and Technology Management at the Institute for Entrepreneurship, Technology Management and Innovation (ENTECHNON) at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT). The Freudenberg Magazine editorial team asked her about her views on agility, an enthusiasm for experimentation and a learning culture.

You are an expert for innovation processes and systems. How can these processes and systems be made more agile in large companies with complex coordination structures?

Agility and complexity do not contradict each other. Agility can be achieved by constantly sharing information and improving collaboration across areas and departments. If we want to turn ideas into successful innovations, we need to create a framework to quickly apply these ideas. To do so, people from various disciplines, departments and fields need to be involved from the start in generating user-oriented solutions and not get involved in the process little by little. Interdisciplinary teams can think outside the box and see ahead. They can recognize problems early on and resolve the issues – or abandon the project at an early stage. Companies become more agile if they systematically support and create space for sharing and understanding within their organization.

There can be no innovation without experimentation. How can employees' enthusiasm for experimentation be purposefully encouraged without compromising quality?

Many employees are very familiar with their company's technologies or processes and have great ideas for new products, services or processes. However, they need opportunities and possibilities to develop and test their ideas. The question is less how to encourage employee experimentation but whether the company can provide the necessary space to experiment and work out high-quality solutions. The greater the personal freedom, the higher the motivation. This in turn leads to better results – meaning higher quality – and gives employees a sense of purpose and a stronger feeling of identification with the company. Companies gain highly motivated and competent employees, helping them win the War for Talent.



Prof. Dr. Weissenberger-Eibl: "Companies become more agile if they systematically support and create space for sharing and understanding within their organization." (Photo: Private)

How can you implement a corporate culture where errors are allowed, without endangering a company's existence?

Faultless products are a hallmark of German performance – that is something companies active in sensitive areas should not and must not compromise. Nevertheless, advancement and innovation require us to quickly try out new things, thereby accepting the possibility of failure. Companies should not ignore or hide any errors they uncover but take a close look at them to learn from their mistakes in the future. Development and optimization require an open handling of errors, their analysis and a structured approach to deriving potential improvements. A constructive error culture does not ignore or cover up known weaknesses but uses them for further development and optimization. This creates a culture that makes the impossible possible.

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Example of our new employer branding campaign

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