

The Pelletier Column

Curiosity: it's where the future starts

by Christophe Pelletier



The challenges ahead are bigger than ever before, and rest assured that they will be even bigger in the future. The good news is that progress and new developments in science and technology are also now bigger and faster than ever, too. From a technical point of view, I would

dare to say that the solutions to the challenges already exist or are very close.

Often, the problem is that these solutions are not immediately economically viable. In such a fast-changing world, curiosity is undoubtedly one of the most desirable qualities to adapt in a timely manner and find new ways of running the business.

Perhaps, it is because a lot of my work is about finding as much information and gathering as much knowledge as possible about all sorts of technologies, facts, systems, science and experiences that I find curiosity quite natural. Perhaps it is also because I have a curious nature.

In my daily activities, I find that people are not curious enough. I can also see that the ones who have that quality are always ahead of the pack. What is really amazing is how much is already out there. The trick is to find it and to know about it.

Often, the information originates from very different business sectors or comes from other parts of the world or is available in a different language. I can see regularly a lot of organisations busy reinventing the wheel, going through the pain of setting up research and spending vast amounts of time, money and resources to find out results that are already available and that they could have taken over and adjusted to their particular situations. Curiosity can deliver huge savings.

Curiosity cannot be a random activity

Curiosity is quite time consuming, that is a fact and its main drawback. This may be the reason why it does not happen enough. The quest does not always deliver, although for those who have a proper strategy, the yield is quite good. Curiosity, for a business, cannot be a random activity.

It has to be structured and carried out with discipline. There is quite a similarity between curiosity and access to food, as there are those who know where to find the tasty mushrooms in the woods and those who get lost in the forest. It is the same thing when going out there to find knowledge.

Some are talented and find it often and fast, whilst others just wander endlessly without spotting anything significant. Just as it is important to know the right spots

to find food when hunting and gathering, there are some places where the good knowledge is.

As with food, it is important to know the supplier and the origin of the knowledge. To pursue the comparison with mushrooms, some knowledge is good and some can be toxic. The supply chain is just as important; especially considering how fast and far social media can replicate and distribute information.

When it comes to knowledge, the reliability, seriousness and quality of the sources is of utmost importance. A discerning knowledge consumer must be critical about what they find. A solid critical sense is of the utmost importance. Regardless of whether the knowledge is found through a hunting/gathering activity or comes from a knowledge farm, it is essential to double-check its validity. However, the packaging can be deceiving.

Next to focused curiosity activities, it is also important to encourage what I would call open curiosity, in which there is no particular objective but just letting new findings lead to new discoveries. There is no business discipline involved. It more often research you would do in your free time. One piece of information generates interest to know more and you just follow.

It is similar to a child-like exploration in which each answer triggers the next "why?" question. It is pure learning. There is no way to tell when or even whether the new learned knowledge will be useful, but there is no such thing as too much knowledge. The trick is to be able to retrieve it when it is needed.

Linking experience to knowledge

Another important aspect of curiosity is to link experience to knowledge. Usually, knowledge is the result of certain protocols. The knowledge itself takes its full dimension and value only through the use we make of it. Some people make good use and others do not. When gathering new knowledge, it is essential to also learn about the lessons from the experience of others. Why do certain things work in certain conditions and others do not? Which factors influenced the outcome and how would different conditions or a different environment affect the outcome?

Getting the big picture is a very important part of curiosity. Expanding the scope and seeing how the pieces of the puzzle come together are the fundamentals of future successful strategy and adaptation.

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