

Editorial

Revisiting Openness: A must for Society

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Academic literature increasingly stresses the predominance of openness in contemporary organizations - porous boundaries, virtual and agile teams, temporary hierarchies, interconnectedness of networks and ecosystems. Managerial literature also abundantly depicts the benefits of openness. In contrast to what is being observed and reported at organization level, Western Societies and some of their elected leaders currently advocate closeness: protecting borders, erecting walls and barriers, either physical, administrative or legal. This paradox raises concerns: how can individuals and firms be and remain open, while nations isolate and seclude? How can we build an inclusive society while rejecting differences? How can we achieve innovation when turning our backs to variety and diversity?

The very cradle of European ideals, among others the freedom of movement of people and capital, is facing an incredible push backwards, with the tightening of its regulations and the implementation of stricter rules and policies with regard to immigration. Former Eastern European countries, which have been benefitting for about a generation – since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 – are also closing up and self-centring.

Maybe we should go down to the basics! We all live and die, but we seldom reflect upon our existence. What is life? The songs from the musical “Zorba the Greek” give us some answers, namely “Life is...” and “The First Time”. They talk about feelings and emotions, and they talk about all those things that make our hearts both beat and melt.

In a previous editorial, we discussed Openness, however, and as we see societies around the world building new barriers to protect their citizens against the unknown, the whole world should probably go through some in-depth reflection. Anyone remembers the first picture of Planet Earth taken from outer space? Did anyone realize we are all in there together? As Carl Sagan once put it “Look again at that dot. That's here. That's home. That's us.”

So, what is happening? This unprecedented shift towards closeness in Western societies clashes with the growing appetite for openness in other parts of the world, where policies and practices towards openness thrive. Asian countries build alliances, open up their markets, and initiate free trade agreements; and source ideas, expertise,

novelties and potential, drain more and more brains and hands so as to support their booming economies.

Could the Maslow Hierarchy of Needs help the mechanics of these trends? It would likely help. It is likely that people and societies from all walks to life, may be feeling a threat to their fundamental cultural component. On the other hand, safety needs such as job security, protection from harm and the avoidance of risk, are likely to be in people's minds. So, where is the solution, how can people in desperate need be helped and supported, while ensuring that everyone feels considered, respected and with the confirmed feeling that their needs are being properly considered.

Special care should be taken in the careful reconsideration of the notion of openness at a political and societal level in Western societies, so as to avoid the expectable negative consequences of isolation and of the extremes, whichever those are. A reconsideration that must be meaningful for Society as a whole. Participative revisiting of openness through a collective engagement of all stakeholders and the redefinition of common values is not optional, it is a must for so-called modern societies. Both life and society need proper innovation management framework – preferably more open one!

Innovatively Yours,

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Editors