



The creative-rollercoaster

by the head of a global R&D function

The task joined. Ideas shared. Prejudices common. Perfect teamwork. Like a polished machine. Perfect harmony. Faultless output. Job done. Smooth. That's the way to do it! Or is it?

In R&D especially, an outcome can't really be called innovative if it isn't also unexpected. Business and R&D often have set assumptions about what each other needs and can deliver, but new market segments can only come from resetting the envelope of possibility. The emotional feel of breakthrough is more turbulent, but ultimately more satisfying. Views diverge. Assumptions are broken. There are different approaches. The objective keeps changing shape like Jekyll and Hyde. Spirits slide. Progress seems impossible. Despair. Sleepless nights, clinging to the question. Feeling like failures. Stumbling around. Crazy ideas. A half-formed thought. Clutched and expanded. Breakthrough. Relief and excitement. Vision and energy. Unconscious alignment. Wonder and amazement. Unimagined solutions. Exhilaration, exhaustion, commitment.

My experience, and the collective wisdom, is that smooth is predictable. But predictable cannot be innovative. Smooth inches forward. To leap forward means leaving the predictable behind. Innovation comes from an impossible challenge. Co-creation springs out of chaos. Innovation is the unknown.

Letting go into the unknown is hard; it feels wrong. It leads to disagreement as the team explores different perspectives. It can feel frightening, and even physically unpleasant, just like the sensation of plunging down to the bottom on a rollercoaster. But when things are that bad, prejudices are suppressed and there's a willingness to explore things which otherwise would have been considered too far out, maybe even stupid. But innovation can only come from the unexplored, so it is absolutely where you need to be for a breakthrough. And the sheer sensation of finding a new way and rediscovering agreement and harmony can be stunning and energizing.

Ride the rollercoaster, learn to enjoy it and surrender to it, because it's the only way you can get to places you'd barely imagined and cross unbridgeable chasms. The smooth path stops at the edge.

