

Momentum for the unstoppable Development of an Innovation Culture!

The ICoach Initiative at Visteon

Overview

In early 2009 I spoke with Harald Korsten, head of motiv GfI. Our theme was the Innovation Management Training Program, provided by his institute. It was during a time of massive cutbacks and where the crisis within the financial and automotive markets had reached its peak. It was now important to use this time effectively and to take measures to emerge stronger from the crisis. While the production of systems and components in low-wage countries had already been migrated, high-wage countries like Germany were more important than ever before in bringing innovations to market. Our decision was therefore to create appropriate measures to strengthen the innovative power of Visteon Germany. The contents of the training offered by motiv seemed appropriate for this goal. It was clear from the outset that ways had to be found to spread the skills acquired at our site.

During this time I was with the heads of divisions, Climate, Electronics and Lighting, and was finally able to inspire two of these areas to participate in the training. They each nominated a participant who had the ability to apply the acquired knowledge within the organization. Finally, I also decided to take part. It took until the second module of the course, at least for me, until I was sparked with the idea of jumping in. My initial suspicion of famous "old wine in new bottles" quickly gave way to "continuous improvement" in its purest form, supported by permanent reflection loops.



Immediately, it was clear to each participant: innovation itself can't be communicated, but on the way itself with many useful methods, settings, techniques and approaches that are waiting along the road to be used which was based on a "needs-oriented" approach. It's often said "The way is the goal". This often overly used term was applicable here. In this way, we acquired three trained and certified innovation coaches. Subsequently, I went onto support my trainer colleagues with coaching and to carry out and develop an internal training programme, where by the learning process is integrated and can be taught effectively. The "why" is obvious: in order to achieve an unstoppable multiplier effect in the company and to develop employees to be able to achieve and to arouse the enthusiasm, give hope for future, and a management understanding to ultimately develop a culture of innovation, as it was not previously available.

Dr Guido Malzkorn has a doctorate in business administration, graduate business and management teacher as well as certified coach and change management coach. He was active from 2007 to 2009 at Visteon as a personnel manager and most recently as Managing Director. Since then, he is now Executive Vice President Human Resources at FTE automotive GmbH.

The Project

Following a management decision, an external innovation trainer was selected to train two managers. A colleague from the climate control area and me were chosen. Together with our HR manager over a three month period, we went through the training and final certification. In the first module, we wondered what exactly the issues had to do with innovation. The recognition came during the second training module. The placement of content, especially with practical work in small groups, it impressively showed us the foundations of a culture of innovation within a global company. What was very interesting and well observed, was that our role moved away from the more passive participant-consuming to adopting an increasingly self-confident coaching role!

After successful certification, we planned the next steps for transferring the knowledge gained within an international company with development and production sites, spread across the globe. It quickly became clear that three trained innovation coach's needed more colleagues to establish a culture of innovation. For 2009, the first year, we therefore sat down and developed the following objectives and tasks:

- 10% of employees in the Kerpen location to be innovation coaches – our new internal use of language: "ICoach".
- The training would be done internally by newly trained Innovation Coaches
- The certification workshop would be conducted externally, to allow an independent quality control

Make ICoach knowledge standard by snowball effect, so that momentum is developed rapidly.

To arouse the interest of employees, we organised an information meeting with the aim of informing as broadly as possible within an hour the training principles and to generate a "wanting more" approach. In the same style of our experienced training environment we created significant interaction, so the number of participants was limited. To ensure the selection of candidates that are really interested, we created two small hurdles.

Via an announcement we asked the candidates to apply to the HR Department and to bring along an innovative product, and not just from the automotive sector. After the event, we were fortunate to have more prospective participants than places available and therefore created the following criteria for selection of the first 12 training participants:

- Representatives from as many different areas as possible such as development, finance, procurement etc in training to support the snowball effect
- Different hierarchical levels within the training, a combination of heads of departments and staff to avoid the conflict of exclusion
- Participants with development potential because ultimately it is training for managers
- Participants are suitable as multipliers (knowledge transfer capable)
- Only interested participants who actively and continuously express their commitment
- Participants are willing to commit after the training both in innovation projects and in the forwarding of acquired knowledge.

The pilot run was a complete success. After the participants were initially surprised by the coaching-based training approach, they quickly recognized and appreciated its advantages. Learning from each other in smaller groups is much more effective than frontal teaching with continuous expert input. For me as a "fresh-baked" inexperienced trainer, it was fascinating to experience this type of learning in my new role. The coach in me was asked to be a lot more than the technical expert, as the participants in the context of group work often mutually closed their knowledge gaps, especially through constructive feedback.

Thus, a participant who thought he was well trained in moderation skills, to his astonishment had something to learn from the other participants. With this behaviour, I also felt I was less in the "firing line" because statements and feedback from other participants became empirically more acceptable rather than those from internal trainers.

We followed this up with three more rounds within a year. For this, we recruited respective trainers from our fresh pool of graduates. We made sure that they worked first as Co-Trainers, thus we avoided changing the training concept through the "Chinese Whispers" principle.

We were aware that selecting an off-site training location enhanced the exclusivity of the training and hence the appreciation of the employees. We also wanted to make sure that the participants weren't tempted to go back to their jobs during the breaks. As during the motiv- training, a period of at least three months was necessary for the participants to deepen their skills in small groups and to complete their "homework" for the next module.

Between training runs, we conducted workshops with the ICoach- graduates with the aim of identifying projects to enhance the innovation strength of Visteon. Everyone was expected to engage themselves in addition to their daily work in such projects. Nurdal Kücükaya (CEO Visteon GmbH, Germany) and Christian Feltgen (Global Director of cockpit electronics) also took part in the workshops. Their commitment as sponsors and mentors contributing to the success of the entire initiative, was considerable. Monthly reviews of the innovation projects with the respective project managers also further strengthened their priorities.

The Benefits

In the meantime, the innovation activities of the trainers have developed their own momentum. The essential elements of the training flow more naturally into daily work. For example after meetings, short process analysis were conducted to continuously achieve small improvements in the workflow according to the Kaizen principle. Effective workshops for the generation of structure and the development of ideas will be performed much more frequently. And thanks to neutral facilitators they are clearly more goal-orientated than in the past. The moderators are usually from various departments of the organization and are not familiar with the problem settings, and therefore focus entirely on the systematic, and thus create motivated teamwork. This in turn has a noticeable effect on strengthening cross-border co-operation that is so essential for an innovative company. More consistent coaching encourages staff much more than before, which will also makes them feel more valued as surveys have shown. Any idea is welcome, a willingness to change and innovate are required and expected, that is now clear to everyone.

Conclusion

The thinking and behaviour of employees has changed positively towards innovation and will change further. We are successfully moving towards a culture of innovation in a process that of course never ends, and have proven that through a systematic snowball effect, relatively fast and noticeable changes in the company's culture are possible.

Our key factors for this are:

- Externally trained Innovation Coaches train enough internal colleagues as ICoaches
- The ICoaches acquire and manage innovative projects and processes
- The two executive champions as sponsors and mentors fully support the project, communicate appropriate expectations, and are very interested in the results.

The next logical step now would be to train ICoaches at locations outside of Germany to strengthen the innovative power in those locations. The same concept as used in Germany could also be used: The education of two innovation coaches, one at each location who are then locally responsible for the further spread of knowledge.

Markus Kreye studied Electrical Engineering at Rheinische Fachhochschule in Cologne and earned an MBA from Henley Management College in England. Since 1997 he has been working at Visteon in different positions in the Electronics sector. In his current position as product manager for audio / infotainment products he is responsible for the Innovation Management in this product area in addition to portfolio

Innovation Trainer education enriches every professional trainer and manager who wishes to develop high performance teams. The participants learn how to develop employees into teams, achieving increasingly better results with high identification, initiative and fun at work. Harald Korsten and his training team provide an excellent challenging syllabus. The participants take away considerably more than the usual fat folder. For me, this was one of the best opportunities for development I've received so far in my professional career with BMW and Mercedes and now thanks to TOYOTA.

Peter Tholl, Regional Sales Manager, TOYOTA D GmbH

The training is a challenging analysis with organizational development, with the trainer role for the next generation, and me.

Nina Mrugalla, Head of HR, PHOENIX CONTACT GmbH & Co. KG

The Innovation Trainer education has been very productive. Opportunities were generated by consistently encouraging leadership behaviour clarified practically in every training module. In particular, the ability for self reflection of the trainer's self-image was initiated and is still an ongoing learning process.

Dr Petra Giese, Business Developer, SWK STADTWERKE KREFELD AG

The "Innotrainer" was the best education I've participated within. The very demanding and complex topic was imparted with absolute professionalism, varied, motivating and with logical, comprehensible steps. The process and training method were exemplary. I was fascinated by the culture of constructive criticism, the supportive leadership and coaching behaviour, the dealing with difficult situations and the skilful use of the moderation methods including useful team development techniques. The special thing is that these skills will be very useful to me in daily working life. This training earns a "highly recommended".

Bruno Marengi, Head of Infrastructure, Swiss Railway Company SBB AG

The Education in Innovation Competency is the best ever trainer training I've had. For me, a management consultant and project manager, these are the trained and acquired skills crucial in order to deliver my projects and to implement change management skills in teams successfully.

Armin Bratz, Senior Consultant, HANSE Management Consulting GmbH

This education is a prime example of an interactive and challenging human resources development in the form of a seminar. In this case, it confronted the roles of innovation, leadership, development and also your own personality. Actually, it could be a compulsory course for all young people and experienced managers as well as for trainers of any experience on all levels. We always keep on learning. Thanks **motiv!** I look forward to the next time.

Hanns Horváth, HR Developer, NORDEX AG

I was strengthened and developed with more confidence on a path to become an innovation trainer. The training was the best, liveliest and most interesting I have ever participated! With any issues, the trainers ripped the participants out of their seats and allowed us to work towards success autonomously. The tools I learned can always be used with success whether at work, in the family or in associations.

Heinz Wohlgensinger, SAP HR Specialist, SBB AG

This training has shown me impressively, how an organisations innovation capacity can be increased by creating the necessary basics. While companies are usually focused on the processes, the training clarifies that innovative capacity has to be supported by an equivalent corporate culture. Innovation is regarded as a team effort - the training clarifies how teams will be able to increase maximum performance. The important skills for this, such as coaching and facilitation techniques, are unfortunately still very much neglected in large companies. Motiv deserves praise for the training concept. Here, intensive group work is delivered instead of a "PowerPoint teacher-up front style". Participants learn primarily through mutual criticism and mutual coaching. Unlike many other training systems, sufficient time is provided to practice the learned skills intensively. By this, the transfer into working life will be much easier. For me, that is the best training I have ever attended!

Markus Kreye, Product Manager, Visteon D GmbH

The education for the innovation trainer is a crucial step for my professional development. I've learned how to accompany employees in innovative action with a structured approach and thereby enabling me to promote their willingness for change. This is not just for employees but also for me and for cultural change on issues of organisation, processes, teamwork and leadership. Each module of this training series has always had a practical relevance, and clearly pointed out to me the benefits of the issues learned. Exceptionally important for me was the collaboration with the training's learning partners. In the group, an open and constructive feedback was given. That was an ideal help for self-help. For me, the two very competent trainers Martina Held and Harald Korsten were a special experience.

Stefan Rottländer, Head Measuring and Metering System, SWK SETEC GmbH