



INNOVATION GURU STEPHEN SHAPIRO DURING THE CONNECTS SESSION AT STCA

Forget *out-of-the-box* thinking and *best practices*!

RIJSWIJK - AMSTERDAM

The more you know about a subject, the more difficult it is to come up with an innovative solution. Out-of-the-box thinking gets in the way of innovation and best practices are dull. That is part of the message put forward by innovation expert Stephen Shapiro during the Connects sessions in Rijswijk and Amsterdam.

In order to come up with good solutions rapidly for the challenges faced by Shell, it's important to speed up the process of innovation. This can be done through 'open innovation': working together with other disciplines, businesses or sectors. Over a hundred and fifty Shell staff in Rijswijk were present to hear Shapiro's vision. "Innovating is important," he said. "It changes lives, the world and the business." In order to facilitate that process well, according to the American, you have to step aside from certain natural reactions.

The right question

In the space of three quarters of an hour, Shapiro offered various approaches to improving and accelerating the innovation process, including: "Stop asking for ideas, ask

for solutions. Look for someone who has solved a similar problem." And regarding expertise: "Expertise is the enemy of innovation. New solutions come mostly from the outside, or from multidisciplinary teams." He gave an example from NASA, where a technical problem was solved thanks to a retired mobile phone engineer. And something that oil experts hadn't succeeded in doing in twenty years (clearing up leaked crude oil in ice-cold sea water), was finally solved in six weeks with the help of a cement technologist. Solutions which were found by asking the right question. Shapiro: "The way you formulate a question determines the answer you will get. The question mustn't be too abstract, but not too detailed either. In fact you need to ask for better problems; better formulated problems, to be precise."

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PLUS

SAMPLE ANALYSIS IN THE SHELL LAB

Laboratory staff at the Shell Technology Centre Amsterdam used advanced scanning technology to analyse paint chips from paintings by Van Gogh. The results form the basis for an exhibition in the Van Gogh Museum on Van Gogh's studio practice. [▶ 4](#)

A MANAGER WITH TWO HATS

He grew up in the Netherlands as the son of Turkish immigrants and was an ambitious business economics student at the University of Groningen. Kenan Yildirim now steers the financial affairs of the Shell Global Service Companies and Shell Nederland from his base at Shell Headquarters. [▶ 6](#)

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ASKING FOR BETTER PROBLEMS

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Looking further afield

Innovation Practices Manager Jaco Fok explained why innovation is important for Shell. He pointed to the increasing demand for energy, whereas fossil resources are decreasing and are located in difficult-to-access places. "Challenges which demand new solutions. Shell has a lot of clever people in-house, but there are many more working outside Shell. Space travel and defence for example invest in technologies which may be important for Shell. So we need to look outside the company more often for solutions." (See box.)

Difference

In answering questions from the floor, Shapiro stressed that each innovation process starts with the question of what differentiates you from the competition. "When you know that, you can innovate." Afterwards he expressed his admiration for the open innovation centre set up by Shell. "Not many companies would dare to do that. It offers enormous opportunities." He pointed out that Shell mustn't forget to look for solutions inside its own organisation either: "Crowdsourcing across all departments."

Jaco Fok, in conclusion: "We want to make staff more aware of the possibilities of open innovation. You need skills for that. I hope that our colleagues now know that help is available and that there are tools which they can use if they see opportunities in their daily work." PP

FINDING NEW SOLUTIONS MORE QUICKLY TOGETHER

Shell wants to become the most innovative and competitive energy company in the world. Expanding the open innovation policy is therefore a priority.

Shell is reinforcing its existing innovation tools, such as Game Changer. Maintaining contacts with universities is being given more attention and there is a new investment fund for start-ups: Shell Technology Ventures. The fund is intended to help bring new technologies to Shell, or to make new Shell-ideas successful in the outside world more quickly. Jaco Fok: "We offer start-ups more than just money. Our R&D test facilities, our experts and the partner network add a lot of value."

Innovation centre

Shell has a long history of joint ventures and cooperation with universities and suppliers, but less so with other industries. Jaco Fok: "The idea is to position ourselves in regional, innovation hot-spots or ecosystems with a high concentration of universities, research institutes, start-ups and venture capital activities. That's why we recently launched Shell

TechWorks in Boston, where we have brought together a number of experts under one roof. The Shell staff there connect with other, less obvious sectors, such as defence, aviation and space travel, the medical sector and IT. They work together on a project to develop a new product or solution for Shell. In this way we gain access to high-quality technologies from other sectors. You put a question to the network and you see how you can engineer the various answers into your own new overall solution."

Focus areas

Jaco Fok: "A good new idea only adds value when you make it commercial. That's quite difficult. Therefore the market demand from the *operating unit* is the starting point, not the technology. The one with the demand finances the development process." In principle Shell is looking for new and smart solutions for all fields, but at there are a couple of focus areas at the moment, such as automating drilling works and smarter seismics. "But also *enhanced oil recovery* – to increase the yield from oil fields – and *fracking* – the technology for producing shale gas – and safety, of course."

MORE INSIGHT THANKS TO SHELL CONNECTS

What do Nigeria, Alaska, Investor Relations, open innovation and the new Shell Scenarios have in common? They are all topics which have been on the agenda at the Shell Connects sessions in Amsterdam and Rijswijk.

The sessions were devised to involve staff at Shell Technology Centre Amsterdam and Shell Projects and Technology Rijswijk more in the activities of their colleagues at other locations and in operations around the world. Providing information on subjects which often come up for discussion at social occasions, which helps staff to be ambassadors for Shell.

Frequency

The Connects sessions began in 2011 in Amsterdam, and were so successful that Rijswijk followed suit in the middle of last year. A meeting takes place each month lasting an hour on average. Pre-registration is required since the meetings are often over-subscribed. Each member of staff can submit topics provided they are suitable for a broader Shell audience.

Ambassador role

"The Connects sessions help give staff more insight into Shell's activities and establish a link with their own work. The information provided during the sessions also helps them to carry out their ambassador role more effectively," says HP Calis, Site Manager SPTR & STCA.

► **Do you have an idea for a future Connects session? If so, please send it to Communications-STCA@Shell.com.**

📌 Stephen Shapiro: "Expertise is the enemy of innovation"

