



## **Innovation means challenging preconceived ideas and assumptions**

**A company can aspire to excellence by taking the tried and tested route of tradition, but an alternative is to undertake projects which combine both excellence and innovation. Following a predefined route is no guarantee of success, so why not explore new paths? Xavier Claramunt was one of the keynote speakers at the opening ceremony of the Year of Creativity and Innovation in the Basque Country.**

Companies which have decided to take the innovation option need to rid themselves of all preconceived ideas concerning what they should offer clients; finding the right response for every project, each with its own particularities, means avoiding assumptions and studying basic concepts again, no matter how familiar they may seem.

Creative thinking strategies depend on having no qualms about checking once again the ingredients of the soup or how the wheel works. In doing so, it is highly unlikely that the exact same soup will be invented, or that the wheel will be discovered. It is fundamental to start work with no assumptions, to begin a project without knowing the solution. Getting rid of preconceived ideas makes it much easier to attend to clients' real needs, before these are even conscious needs, and to be attuned to innovations, which may be of a technical, organisational or product nature, or even in other, parallel areas.

It is necessary to have a system, a working strategy which acts as a guide at those moments when we feel lost; however, being in a position to really innovate means getting away from routine, avoiding the known answer, shaking off labels.

The most striking feature of the innovation we bring to projects is the total response we offer clients. These are generally surprised to discover that the response we offer is much broader in scope than what they had expected; we consider that comprehensive innovation means applying strategies used in other professional areas such as

economics, gastronomy, and jewellery design, to give just a few examples. This is what makes us stand out: an open mind and a refusal to follow recipes and accept limitations.

## **Learning from accumulated wisdom**

However, tradition is also fundamental for any company, no matter how innovative it may be. All that has been done, thought, enjoyed and suffered previously is a treasure chest which should be taken advantage of. At the start of any project, previous contributions should be studied and the classics analysed, from an excellent design to the basic definition of what a chair is, or the significance of an everyday gesture such as a handshake. Similarly, it is also useful to have in place a strategy for reincorporating senior professionals, those specialists or technicians who have been removed, for such an illogical reason as age, from positions which are still rightly theirs. Their knowledge and experience is priceless. This is how excellent teams are built.

In innovation terms, growing means being aware of the fact that the learning process never ends. If our aim is innovation, we have to be open to everything we still do not know, and which will have to be assimilated. The tradition that precedes us is a key factor in interpreting new developments as they arise; it should help us to identify and understand them, but not to label or restrict them in any way. Furthermore, although we may well be aware that knowledge takes up space – a lot! – it is worth defending the dynamic of the constant sum. The bottom line is that those who are unwilling to learn will never innovate.

## **Imagination, vision and action**

The innovation process begins with imaginative thinking, but using one's imagination is often risky. Being imaginative means not being afraid to offer unconventional solutions.

It is also true that, in order to innovate, one must have vision, and be able to intuit and see what nobody else can see - maybe because they are not looking in the right direction, or perhaps because they are simply not using their eyes in the right way. Sometimes, what we perceive is simply a dizzying optical illusion, but the effect it produces means that, once our vision clears, nothing will be the same again. When one looks in an unaccustomed direction, it is quite natural for the eyes to have to refocus. Until they do, what we see appears as a blur.

Finally, once an interesting idea has been conceived, innovation means implementing it, putting it into production: we are people of action.

Likewise, we should not be afraid to introduce an element of uncertainty, which must be counterbalanced by the highest possible degree of precision. We have to free ourselves of the complexes which prevent us from listening to certain voices or from using an outrageous idea. What matters is the generation of suggestive starting points which give us the strength to progress, in any direction. From that point onwards, individual motivation and the need for ideas to be realized will result in the innovation. We do not always achieve the same level of success in all our projects, but studying failures is also a useful part of the learning process.