



The man from Tel-Aviv:

“Your promises, not your products, are what are most important”

Amnon Levav, CEO of Systematic Inventive Thinking, referred to as “the man from Tel-Aviv” by Haluk Sicimoğlu in our August Issue, was in Turkey a short time ago. We interviewed Levav, who is on Sicimoğlu’s genius list, as soon as he arrived in Turkey. – Hande Çetin Ongun

Amnon Levav, the CEO and founding partner of Systematic Inventive Thinking, has come to Istanbul to meet with various important names on the Turkish market, which he has just started to get to know. Levav, whom we met as soon as he arrived, pointed out the discrepancies between the two famous concepts of innovation and sustainability while discussing the work methods and models of SIT.

Could you please talk about SIT’s working methods?

SIT has a “three-tiered” working method. We work together with the company to obtain creative results, educate the company based on our methodology, and help them to establish a structure that adheres to both of them. First of all, we help them to think differently as individuals and companies. Even though the business we run is evaluated within the framework of advertising and marketing communications, we also act as

consultants for new product development and problem solving. We do not provide companies with strategic consultancy. We help them to develop different ways of thinking about improving the company.

For the last 3-4 years, we have specialized on how companies can be more innovative in general rather than just being experts in one field or department. Some companies seek to develop some new products or services and they think they will be more innovative in this way. But, it is impossible to sustain such processes in the long run. Some others say, “Teach us the methodology only - it is sufficient”. But simply educating people is useless because reality beats education when people face the reality of daily life. If you do not create some structures to support the company, innovation energy will be depleted over time. When I say “supportive structures,” I am referring to structuring in the organizational sense. We predict a structural

change in terms of a company evaluating its employees. However much companies advocate innovation and impose this notion on their employees, you are not able to see at the end of the year how innovative you are either in your career or in salary at the end of the year.

In our August Issue, Haluk Sicimoğlu mentions you in his article titled “The Man From Tel Aviv”. At a workshop study hosted by BBDO in Spain in 1999, you divided a crowd into groups, handed them cell phones, and asked them to develop ideas. Everyone added a new feature to the phone. However, you advised them to eliminate a feature instead of adding a new one. Sicimoğlu states that this is one of the creative-thinking models of SIT. In order to talk about these, we need to go back further into the past. The practices of SIT originate from Russia - an engineer called Genrich Altshuller conducted a study in which he analyzed the common

characteristics and structure of creativity. When people see a very good advertisement or invention, they usually think about why these are different than the others. However, Altshuller looked at their similarities.

We got this basic idea from Altshuller and applied it to advertising. We reviewed the jobs that received awards at the Cannes Lions in 1995. We divided them into groups and tried to find out which ones were used by advertisers again and again unintentionally. We looked for logical similarities rather than external ones. When we analyzed the winners of Cannes Lions during those years, we found out that 6-7 patterns were used repetitively. Teaching these patterns could be very useful to improve the jobs of advertising agencies.

What kind of a method did you follow at this point?

First, we identified these models and determined the procedures. At the beginning, it was not easy to make the advertising agency people believe that this job has a certain formula. We were lucky that Fred Lamperter from Orgilvy, New York gave us a chance. We slowly started to relay our thoughts to the people at the agency, and we realized at the very beginning that it would not be enough to explain this job to the people in the creative department only. There are professionals in the other departments of the agency, as well. However, creative thinking and customer relations departments speak in completely different languages. There was no professional way to talk about creativity. So we focused on the common language of inventors based on these patterns. We converted the term "New

Product Development" in the SIT terminology to "New Promise Development" because the most important thing is not which new product you push at the market, but rather which new promise you offer in the market. Today we are also working towards building new structures for agencies. I previously asked agencies to think about "a cell phone without a keypad". Now, I am asking them to think about "an advertising agency without a creative department or customers". If we are laughing at this now, then it means that we need to take this possibility into account.

Does reduction also mean simplifying?

Actually the answer is both yes and no. When we say "innovation," "enhancing and increasing" comes to people's minds. DVD players in our homes have 300 features, but we use only 5 of them at the most. Generally, a company increases the number of such features when it comes up with a new innovative product. However, reducing creates a contradiction to this general viewpoint, and it brings about simplification.

A Swedish sociologist named Karl Dunker developed a notion called "functional obsession". This refers to assigning certain tasks to objects. A glass is a glass, and a pen is a pen. As a matter of fact, functional obsession is both a very strong notion as well as a useful one: This is what you to step on the brake when you need to stop while driving, or to sit in a chair when you enter a room. But what does functional obsession tell you if the car does not stop when you step on the brake? To step on the brake again and again. In exactly the same fashion, lots of companies, agencies and organizations step on the brake

again and again, harder each time, even though they see that it is not working. SIT presents this idea to companies, along with an "on-off" key, showing them how to use this concept or get rid of it whenever they want.

How was your book *Cracking the AD Code*, published last year, prepared?

We included over 100 case studies and examples in this book, showing the perspective of the advertising sector. We grouped our examples according to creativity models. A prevailing notion in this book is *Convergence*. When we talk about advertising and innovation today, we are not only talking about how innovation should be conducted within the traditional framework, but also how this framework can be broken down within each platform.

LOVE-HATE RELATIONSHIP

How do you assess the relationship between innovation and sustainability?

It was hard to find someone to talk about innovation in the 1990s because then such information and ideas were not established in companies. Today, we are in an advantageous position. We were aware of the importance of the concept of "sustainability", but we have noticed that our profession was directly related to sustainability about 4-5 years ago. Our models, such as Reduction and Task Unification, serve sustainability by using existing resources in different ways. There is a love-hate relationship between innovation and sustainability.

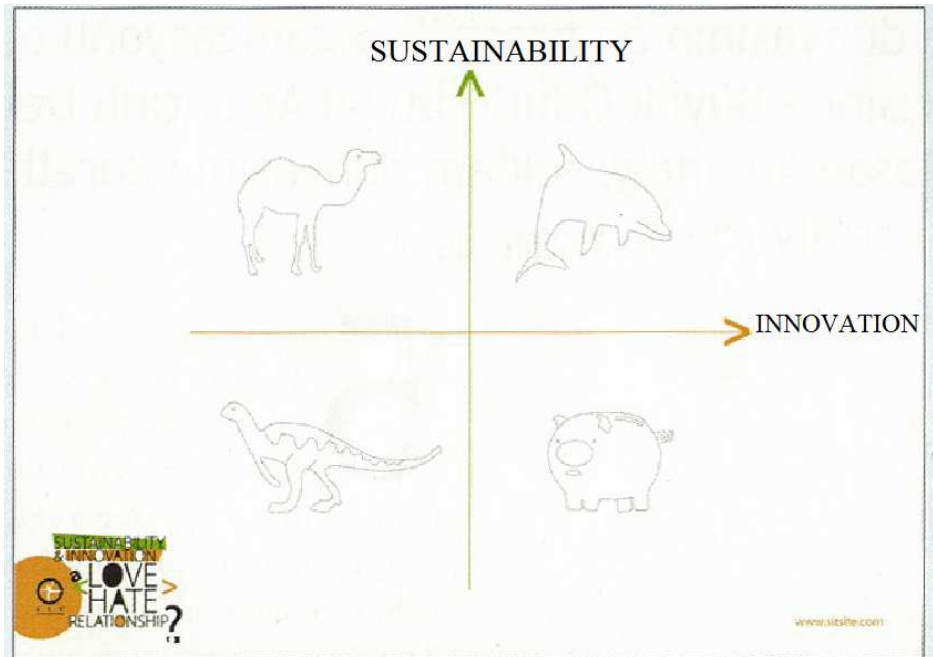
Let's take a chair as an example. For the sake of innovation, you make it more sophisticated by

adding a cup holder, a laser-light, and a motor. Then someone comes forward and tells you that he needs a more sustainable chair. This time, you manufacture the chair out of organic materials and make it less comfortable. While innovation is considered to mean producing much more than needed, a sustainable product is produced by using completely opposite methods. What you should do is to find the harmony between sustainability and innovation, and to make the chair more comfortable, simpler and recyclable.

We have given the relationship between sustainability and innovation animal names: The area in which old methods are used is called Dinosaur. The area in which sustainability is increasing while innovation is not showing any progress is a Camel - it can go without food or water but it is not attractive. An area where innovation makes good progress but nothing is done for sustainability is referred to as the Pig. And the area in which both ideas have the best harmony is called Dolphin.

How do you interpret this relationship on a company basis?

Many companies are transitioning from Pigs to Camels since they feel the pressure of innovation on them. For instance; if you ask someone how they imagine pens in the year 2025, he/she will add lights and laser to the pen. But in fact, it does not have to be in that way. And of course, we should not be misled and think that “the simplest is the best”. An airplane is more complicated than a horse-drawn carriage, but of course it is more functional. Here, our role is to direct the company towards a direction that it has never thought about. If the company always produces simple solutions, then we can act accordingly and help



Think4Better is the partner of SIT in Turkey managed by Cin Kapancı, Haluk Mesci and Melike Belkis Doğar. contact: melike.dogar@think4better.com them to think in more complicated ways.

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