Serendipity: fortuity and hazard in innovation

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Abstract

Statement of the Problem: Serendipity is a term used to describe the occurrence of a fortunate discovery originating in chance. Because of this, this term is often associated with the creative process or scientific discovery. Hazard and randomness, factors considered intervening in research and scientific experiments, play a relevant role in the phenomenon of serendipity. In the study of creativity, such a phenomenon can impact discoveries, inventions and innovations, such as penicillin, discovered by Alexander Fleming, or the "invention" of Velcro, by George de Mestral. Serendipitous phenomena contain a fortuitous, "inexplicable" element within the framework of formal logic. Although its importance for creativity is recognized, serendipity can be hampered by the contemporary tendency to standardize answers in online searches, and by the enchantment of algorithms, among other obstacles. This is because the era of ready-made answers proposes patterns, models, and formulas for the resolution of problems that seek to "eliminate" chance and fortuitousness. Serendipity, often connoted as mysterious, miraculous, or inexplicable, by the presence of the right person in the right place, capable of a serendipitous encounter, lies beyond rational explanation and can then be attributed to the encounter between divine creation and human creativity. Methodology & Theoretical Orientation: The present study addresses serendipity through the discussion of this concept, exemplified by widely known cases, and points out the potential contemporary obstacles to the occurrence of the phenomenon. Findings: Although the era of ready-made answers brings about difficulties for serendipity discoveries, it is also an opportunity to be open to unexpected and unanticipated findings. Conclusion & Significance: In contemporaneous scenario, it is important to be alert for the traps represented by the enchantment of algorithms and ready-made answers, due to the fact that it can misguide researchers in opening-up to potential new avenues of discoveries.

Key-words: serendipity; creativity; discoveries; Science.

Biography

Lisete Barlach is a professor at School of Arts, Sciences and Humanities of University of São Paulo (teaching undergraduate students) and at Faculty of Administration, Economics and Accounting at the University of São Paulo (for graduate students). As a researcher, main themes are entrepreneurship behavior (including career transition from employee to entrepreneur), creativity and resilience, having published articles, chapters and books. As a consultant, has large experience with organizing courses as well as with experiential learning. Previous experience with career coaching, detaching a group of professionals of different nationalities, undertaking International MBA in Brazil, who came to stay and work in the country, and orientation for expatriates. Organized and selected people for Brazilian startups in a business incubator, in São Paulo, Brazil.



Recent Publications

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