

4. The sexiest phrase in innovation, and how you can use it

 By [Douglas Kruger](#)

25 Sep 2015

If ever there were a contest to find the sexiest phrase in the lingo of innovation, I would propose the term 'adjacent possible' for the crown...

'The adjacent possible' works like this: As new ideas build on one another, our species increasingly gets to see 'the next possibility along.' This is really just a way of saying that certain things were not possible prior to the ideas that came before them. For example, only after we discovered the explosive power of gun-powder did guns enter the realms of the adjacent possible.



© Alexander Mtrofanov – [123RF.com](#)

Because new concepts are arising all the time, being interested in the world around you allows you to see the ever-evolving adjacent possible. And we're moving so fast now that new things become possible every day. There are new adjacent possibilities opening up all the time. Knowledge now doubles approximately every 12 months. That presents a lot of opportunity for seeing new possibilities.

Based on this dynamic, it turns out that people living in densely populated cities are, on average, around three times more innovative and creative than people living in rural areas. This is because they live in the interconnected world of ideas, competing forces and new adjacent possibles. Urban dwellers, surrounded by new things and new ideas, have a much greater opportunity to notice something new and say, 'That's awesome. Now imagine if ...'

In terms of the way ideas grow and develop, thinking 'That's awesome! Now imagine if...' is the heart and soul of innovation.

Here's an example: Audi have just created a new innovation for their A8 limousine. Their cars will soon be able to park themselves while you go to your meeting.

This innovation is the simple result of thinking, 'That's awesome! Now imagine if...' It's also a quintessential example of how one idea springs into being because of the idea directly before it, which opened up the adjacent possible.

This is how it unfolded: decades ago, car manufacturers introduced cruise control, which meant that for the first time, a car could continue to operate on its own without human input. This was the first step in the cascade of ideas leading up to self-parking cars.

A car in the state of cruise control was unintelligent: it didn't know where it was and could happily drive itself into a bridge or off a cliff.

Then cars were given parking aids, in the form of radars that detect their proximity to obstacles. Put those technologies together, and suddenly you introduce the adjacent possibility of adaptive cruise control. The car can operate automatically, but now it can also detect obstacles in front of it and slow down if necessary.

Car makers then introduced GPS in their vehicles. As a result, it became possible for a car to 'know' where it was in relation to the surrounding environment and determine which routes to follow to get to a destination. And then came lane-detection technology, which allowed cars to 'see' where the white lines are on a road, to prevent drifting across lanes.

Lane-detection technology opened up another adjacent possible. If a car could run by itself, detect obstacles in its way, read the lane markings on roads and know which roads to take to get to a destination, then the next possibility became a car that could go off on its own, look for a parking spot and park itself.

That's how ideas evolve. That's how innovation occurs.

We need people who say, "That's awesome! Now imagine if..."

At the same time, however, you don't have to be Audi or Apple or Google, with their massive resources, to use this technique. The same principle of thinking applies right down to small things - like making your workspace a bit better, improving your website, putting together a stronger presentation, or upgrading your simple, completely analogue product.

You need only look at new ideas around you and say, 'That's awesome!' Then apply that new principle to your own scenario and add, 'Now imagine if...'

The wrong way to think about it: I must be a genius in an attic dreaming up something completely new.

The right way to think about it: The world is fascinating! And you know what would be even more awesome...?

ABOUT DOUGLAS KRUGER

Douglas Kruger is the bestselling author of nine business books with Penguin, including the global release: *Virus-Proof Your Small Business*. Meet him at www.douglaskruger.com or email info@douglaskrugerspeaker.com

■ *GOT surprise-factor?* - 28 Sep 2017

■ The growth mindset: Four ingredients for creating a high-performance culture - 6 Jul 2017

■ Lessons in agile culture from French bikinis and ritualistic shrines - 29 Jun 2017

■ Banking the win of simple business innovation - 22 Jun 2017

■ [Relentlessly Relevant] 7. To innovate, train yourself to think: 'That's awesome! Now imagine if ...' - 27 Nov 2015

[View my profile and articles...](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>