

## Curiosity and competence to excel in science

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The advancement of science has enabled the societies that live on this planet to develop material wealth.

In the present days of economic uncertainty, the question on what to economise is never far away. The scientific community and the science funding bodies quickly raise the issue that there is a clear relationship between the size of an economy or other development indices (such as Human Development Index ) and the amount of spending by society (public and private). This is indeed quite true. On the other hand, there is the danger that in times of recession, the mere thought of absence of funding leads to apathy.

So one could argue : is the story truly that one sided ? The chief of the Manhattan project during WWII is believed to have said that *“by making 2 women pregnant, you do not get a baby in 4 ½ months”* . Spending more money at science does not automatically lead to success.

So, what is it then that creates success in science ? If we would know, then we might be able to influence it. In fact, not only at the macro level (EU funding, national funding ...), but also at the micro level, in our own laboratory.

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Surely there are various sociological, educational, cultural factors that have a pronounced effect of which we might not always be fully aware. How different is this from country to country ? Curiosity and competence definitely are key ingredients. A reflection to make in 2009, the European Year of Creativity and Innovation 2009.

A talk intending to provoke thinking and maybe a way to avoid the pitfall of acquiescence *when the going is tough*. As Hilary Clinton recently said, *never waste a good crisis*.