



# Driving European Innovation

## *Innovation by the Silent Majority*

Summary of an international leadership forum on the role and future of innovation in advancing Europe's economic agenda

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**Börje Ehrstrand**  
Headmaster of the Rinkeby and the  
Askeby Schools in  
Stockholm, Sweden

### **Beyond Technology**

Session led by Paul Beckett, London Bureau Chief, The Wall Street Journal Europe, with Martin Hayward, Director of Consumer Strategy and Futures, dunnhumby Hermann Simon, Chief Executive Officer, Simon Kucher & Partners, Börje Ehrstrand, Headmaster and Educational Innovator, Rinkeby

**Börje Ehrstrand** leads outside school programs for the suburb of Rinkeby as Head of the Community Centres dedicated youth and Head of the Culture School activities (music, dance, drama). Mr. Ehrstrand also leads the Rinkeby Centre for Education and Advice to adults/parents.

The Rinkeby School (compulsory school for children aged 13-16 years) has 360 students from 63 countries, speaking 30 different languages. When Börje Ehrstrand took over the school in 1989 it was the most run down school in Stockholm. Since then, the school and Mr. Ehrstrand have received several awards and recognitions, such as LABEL European Quality Award for Language Education, The European Crime Prevention Award, The Nordic School Leader Award, and Queen Silvia's "Allmänna Barnhusets Stora Pris" (for improved conditions for the school children of Rinkeby). The school's students are national champions in maths for the fifth year in a row.

The Rinkeby School has a holistic view on pedagogy (teaching philosophy) and creative use of resources. They work with external partners to ensure that they learn from the best. Examples of these partnerships are: formalized collaboration with 14 universities and 300 companies; Stockholm School of Economics runs the "Rinkeby Business Lab", a diversity program; and the winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature visits the school every year.

# EU Lisbon Accord 2000

“To make the EU the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world...”

## Overview

Innovation, in all of its forms, is the engine that drives the European economy and it therefore needs to be a higher priority for European countries. Even more important, putting the customer at the center of this effort is the critical ingredient for success. This consensus emerged during an international forum entitled *Driving European Innovation: Innovation by the Silent Majority* (7th June 2005). Designed to broaden how Europe thinks about innovation, the role that innovation plays in advancing Europe’s economic agenda, and how people from all sectors of our society can contribute, the event was supported by London Business School (LBS), Procter & Gamble (P&G) and The Wall Street Journal Europe.



Börje Ehrstrand, Headmaster and Educational Innovator, Rinkeby, Sweden  
Hans Snook, Chairman, The Carphone Warehouse, UK

Forum participants represented diverse sectors of Europe’s economy, from business leaders and educators to entrepreneurs and the media. Through case studies and presentations of new research, the event brought to life stories of how to create a culture of innovation.

Leading marketing expert Professor Patrick Barwise of LBS chaired the forum. Other presenters who helped communicate the transformative power of innovation ranged from entrepreneur Hans Snook, founder and former CEO of telecom giant Orange, to Börje Ehrstrand, the headmaster of a Stockholm school that used innovation to turn around its fortunes to become an educational model for Sweden (see ‘Innovation Goes Back to School’ section).

“What is most encouraging to me is to see someone who manages a billion dollar organization and a teacher both discussing ways to solve very different problems through innovation,” said Dr. Manual Katz of the European Pediatric Association, one of the event’s participants.

The desire to know how to harness the power of innovation seems to transcend the private and public sector, challenging organizations of all shapes and sizes.

Recognizing that Europe has lost momentum and Europeans are more fearful, *Driving European Innovation* set out to restore momentum and encourage a more confident outlook by identifying the actions every European can take within their respective sector of the economy to enhance the competitiveness that will take Europe to the next level of prosperity. This executive briefing captures the major themes and key findings from this unique and thought-provoking event.

## Innovation Goes Back to School

If business leaders are looking for a lesson on the potential of innovation, then perhaps a school in the suburbs of Stockholm may be a great place to start. Back in the early 1990s, Rinkeby School resembled a war zone. Plagued by rampant truancy, graffiti-riddled hallways and children in perpetual fear, the school ranked near the bottom of all education benchmarks. It was not a place where adults felt safe, let alone providing an environment for learning. Traditional solutions had tried and failed to rectify the situation.

In Sweden, where parents have the right to choose which school their children attend, Rinkeby found itself with little demand for its services and was fast heading towards being closed down by politicians.

That's when Börje Ehrstrand stepped in. Mr. Ehrstrand, the new Headmaster and 'Educational Innovator,' quickly realised that one man alone could not reverse the fortunes of an entire school and community. Seeing that the school had hit rock bottom, Ehrstrand's first move was to call a meeting of all parents to determine what future they wanted for their children. He found that, far from ambivalence, parents had a clear desire for a better life for their children and genuinely valued education.

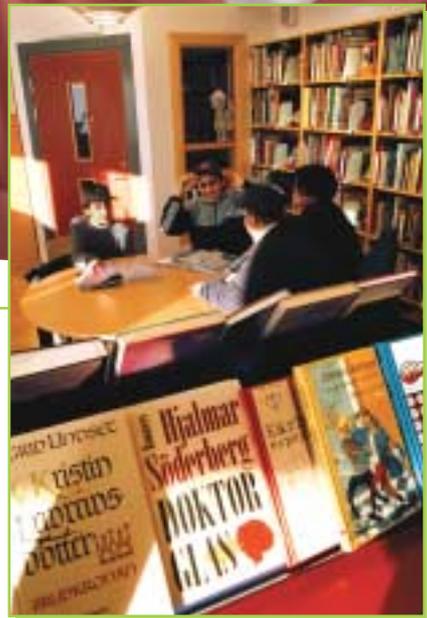
“Parents and students were tasked with cleaning up graffiti and improving the school environment to instil a sense of pride and personal responsibility”

If they wanted a better future, Ehrstrand announced, they would have to be prepared for a change in the way things were done and, most importantly, to put in hard work to produce results. So, parents and students were tasked with cleaning up graffiti and improving the school environment to instil a sense of pride and personal responsibility. The money saved on janitors and technicians needed to clean and repair was then channelled into the services that parents wanted most for their children.

The school is located in one of the poorest areas of Stockholm and home to a melting pot of cultures. More than 80% of students at Rinkeby come from immigrant families representing some 110 nationalities.

Rather than see the plethora of languages as an obstacle to learning, Ehrstrand saw the cultural diversity as a means to expand the learning potential. Children are expected to be fluent in at least three languages not just to succeed in the multi-cultural community and build relationships, but also to better prepare them for the world that awaits once they graduate.

The Rinkeby School has a holistic view on teaching and a creative use of the available resources. The librarian, for instance, uses computer technology to track reading trends and progress of all students. In addition, Ehrstrand has involved the local community as well including visits to businesses and organizations where students can learn and make connections with others in society. Partnerships have been established with 300 companies as well as formalised collaboration with 14 universities.



The goal is to motivate students towards higher aspirations. Today, some students as young as 15 years old are starting and managing their own successful businesses, motivated by the newfound aspirations provided by the school. These young entrepreneurs are helped by the Rinkeby Business Lab, which is run as part of the Stockholm School of Economics.

In addition, the winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature makes a special visit to Rinkeby each year to help excite and motivate the children to pursue their studies in this area.

Through these innovative practices, Rinkeby has gone from 'worst to first' in a number of study areas, such as math, and is considered a destination school in the country's largest city. While the awards he has won both on a national and international level are impressive, Ehrstrand is clearly more interested in the achievements of each student who has gone on to greater things thanks to this creative teaching environment.

For a school that was once on the brink of closure, Rinkeby's innovative attitude and use of resources may just be an important lesson for all of us.