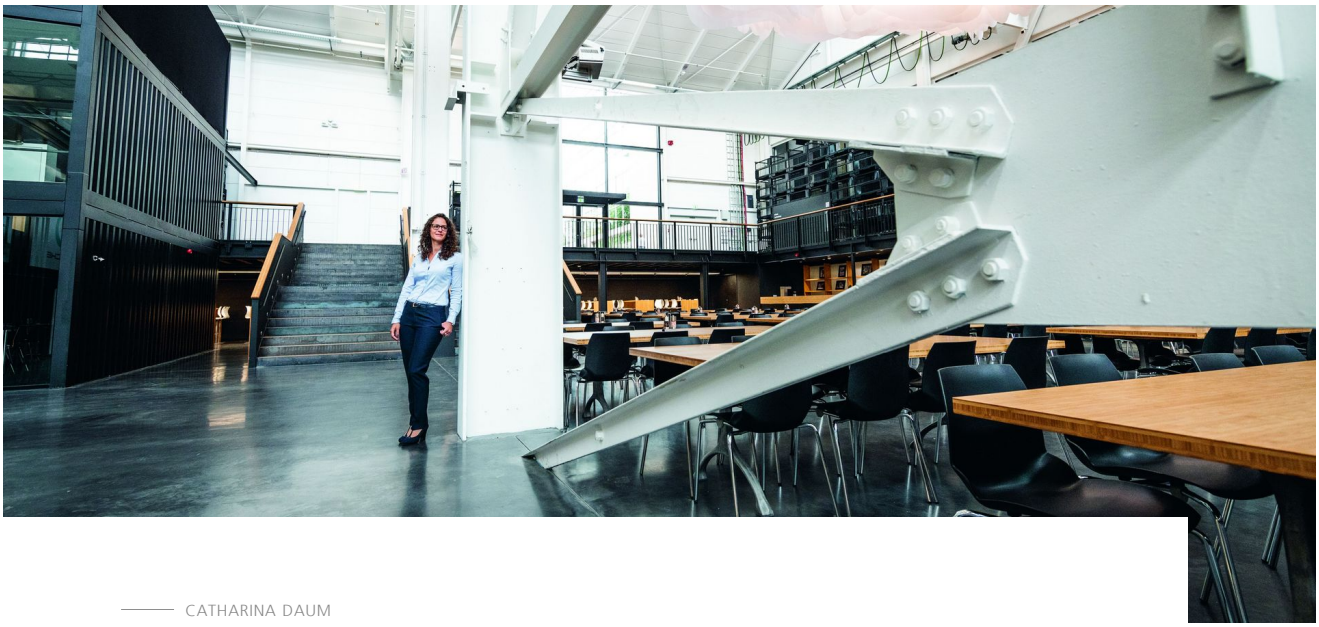


CATHARINA DAUM

The TRUMPF ideas factory

The concept of start-ups battling for investors' money has long been an integral part of TV programs in various countries, including "Lions' Den" in Germany, "Shark Tank" in the US, and "Dragons' Den" in Japan. But the idea of pitching for capital, time and support is now even emerging at more traditional companies – and TRUMPF is no exception. Ann-Sophie Reinelt has been running the Internehmertum initiative for the past 12 months, helping her colleagues put their innovative ideas into practice.

Ann-Sophie Reinelt turned down two other job offers to take the helm of TRUMPF's intrapreneurship program "Internehmertum". "The idea struck me as exciting and interesting right from the start," says the 30-year-old innovation manager. Today, one year after the project started, she is more convinced than ever of its merits, and she clearly enjoys her benevolent role heading up the initiative. The TRUMPF intrapreneurship program helps employees develop their own ideas into business models. "The basic goal is to give employees the time and space they need to pursue and validate new ideas that have real potential. What matters to TRUMPF is that they look at the big picture and take a holistic, entrepreneurial approach that goes well beyond their normal job," says Ann-Sophie Reinelt. The first round kicked off in October 2017. Reinelt is now getting ready for the third phase of the project, which begins this October.



Project participants offer mutual feedback on each other's ideas. Sometimes they manage to say a lot in few words. – Kai R. Joachim



The project participants receive 50 percent of their working time and a budget with which they can advance their project. – Kai R. Joachim



The offices in the "urbanharbor" create the necessary distance to the normal workplaces in Ditzingen. – Kai R. Joachim

The Internehmertum initiative is open to all TRUMPF employees. It starts with a call for proposals on the intranet, which is when potential candidates are free to submit their ideas. An interdisciplinary committee then selects the teams that will form part of the next round of Internehmertum. "Each round involves approximately three to five teams each comprising at least two members. They are given 30 days within an overall period of three months to get their project off the ground," says Reinelt. The innovators are allowed to use 50 percent of their working hours and are given a budget which they can decide how to spend: "That's something I see as very important. I argued from the start that every participant should be able to make their own decisions on how to invest their budget. The only approval they need is from the other members of the team – so that means they can act like a real start-up," says Reinelt. The "intrepreneurs" can basically buy whatever they want and need: from a TV set for a presentation to tools, market studies and indeed anything else that makes their work easier.

Loosen your tie and get creative

Every project is different, but the underlying structure of the individual project cycles remains the same. Ann-Sophie Reinelt explains how it works: "We kick off with an intensive week that is designed to help the participants engage with the project. That's important, because the Internehmertum initiative is quite different from other types of work at TRUMPF. To really get into that start-up mood, you often get people switching from a shirt to a T-shirt," says Reinelt with a smile. The teams attend additional one-week intensive stages before their interim and final presentations, says Reinelt: "And for the rest of the time the participants spend two days a week with me in Ludwigsburg. Those are the days on which we run coaching sessions and offer the participants whatever support they need. We made a conscious decision to rent offices at the urbanharbor facility to give people the distance they need from their normal jobs in Ditzingen.

» The basic goal is to give employees the time and space they need to pursue and validate new ideas that have real potential.

Ann-Sophie Reinelt, TRUMPF innovation manager

The participants can use the spaces at urbanharbor any time they want. I make sure they can focus entirely on their project by shielding them from red tape and any other hassles."

Succeeding by taking risks

The projects up to now have been highly diverse, ranging from digitalization and services to Industry 4.0. One successful spin-off has already emerged from the first round of Internehmertum, says Reinelt: "It's a start-up based around quantum technology. The employees are now the managing directors, so they can keep pursuing their original idea. TRUMPF is also in the process of examining an additional project from the second round to see if it, too, merits a spin-off." Just like any other start-up, there is no guarantee of success in an Internehmertum project. "Obviously things can go wrong. But it's a risk worth taking. It's fantastic to see TRUMPF becoming more and more courageous, because that inspires the participants all the more!"



CATHARINA DAUM