



Keynote Speech

AI, Systematic Innovation and the Coming Trough of Disillusionment

Speaker

Professor Darrell Mann,



Speaker Biography:

Over the course of the last 30 years, TRIZ Master, Darrell has helped deliver over \$6B in new value to clients across the world, and has served as the spark behind a dozen spin-out companies. He is the author of over 1200 innovation related papers and articles and a dozen TRIZ/SI-related books, the latest pair focusing on “1%er” innovators and innovation ethics. He is the chief architect and irritant at the Systematic Innovation Network.

Abstract/Outline

Artificial Intelligence currently occupies the highest point on the technology hype cycle. Simultaneously, organisations everywhere are looking to AI to transform their innovation capability. Yet, despite extraordinary advances in generative AI, there is remarkably little evidence that innovation outcomes are improving. Indeed, there is a strong argument that, in the short term at least, AI may actually be making innovation harder rather than easier. This keynote argues that the apparent paradox is both real and temporary.

The central problem is that AI optimises for plausibility, whereas breakthrough innovation requires improbability. Today's AI systems are extraordinarily effective at exploring vast possibility spaces, but they explore far too much of the wrong space because they cannot reliably distinguish evolutionary dead ends from evolutionary breakthroughs. Systematic Innovation exists precisely because, over the past seventy years, TRIZ and its successors have sought to curate humanity's accumulated innovation experience, separating the enduring DNA of successful evolution from the overwhelming noise of failed attempts.

The keynote develops this argument in five acts. It begins by examining why current expectations surrounding AI and innovation are simultaneously understandable and unrealistic. It then explores why innovation has never been fundamentally constrained by access to knowledge, but by the quality of judgement. The third act considers how AI is making knowledge increasingly abundant, and therefore increasingly commoditised, while making wisdom correspondingly more valuable. The fourth argues that Systematic Innovation should be understood not as a knowledge technology, but as a wisdom technology: a disciplined means of navigating complexity by identifying which possibilities genuinely deserve attention. Finally, the keynote looks beyond today's inevitable period of disillusionment towards a future in which AI and Systematic Innovation become complementary partners rather than competing approaches – AI generating possibilities at unprecedented scale, Systematic Innovation determining which of those possibilities are most likely to shape the future.

The conclusion is optimistic. AI will undoubtedly transform innovation, but not in the way many currently expect. As knowledge becomes effectively free, wisdom becomes increasingly expensive. The fundamental challenge is no longer generating more ideas. The bottleneck has moved to deciding what not to do.