

*Seminar*

# The Spirit of Innovation

Prof Benoît Godin (INRS, Montreal)

## ABSTRACT

Today, innovation is an injunction. Everyone should innovate. Innovation is also a panacea. It is discussed ad nauseam in utilitarian terms. Where does the concept come from? The historiography of innovation attributes the scholarly origin and study of the concept to the economist Joseph Schumpeter. This is mythic history or rationalization. Schumpeter simply used a concept that was becoming popular, as many others did in the first half of the twentieth century. This talk offers a different story. It discusses a key moment in the use and diffusion of the term: the Reformation. As an injunction (not to innovate), the concept served to enforce conformity. The talk will unearth the spirit of innovation that was so feared at the time of the Reformation. In addition, the talk will show that residues of past connotations continue to define our contemporary notion of innovation.

## SPEAKER

Benoît Godin is professor at Institut National de la Recherche Scientifique, Montreal, Canada. He got his DPhil from Sussex University, England, in 1992. He then worked for several years on the history of statistics on science, technology and innovation, documenting the roots of these statistics back to the nineteenth century and the context of eugenics. Thereafter, he devoted his time to intellectual history. In the course of this project, he studies the concept of innovation, broadly defined, from Antiquity to the present. Currently, he develops a project on the use of the concept during the Reformation period. Recent publications: B. Godin (2017), *Models of Innovation. The History of an Idea*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. B. Godin (2015), *Innovation Contested: The Idea of Innovation Over the Centuries*, London: Routledge. B. Godin and D. Vinck (eds.) (2017), *Critical Studies of Innovation: Alternative Approaches to the Pro-Innovation Bias*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

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