



## The Power of Principles In Innovation

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Organizations are extremely complex systems. Rigid rules will not address the intricacy present during the innovation process. When the variables are few, control is possible and rules can apply. But when the variables are many and uncertainty is widespread, principles can direct decisions and guide behaviors.

Principles are universal laws that govern our lives. Like gravity, principles are true regardless of the circumstances or conditions.

There are three guiding principles that we advocate as being critical to innovation. Each of the principles has major implications for how we pursue innovation and are invaluable guides for bringing about swift and continual innovation. Learning and applying these foundational principles will allow you to work successfully within the high levels of intricacy and uncertainty that are inherent in almost any innovation.

**We do not learn principles; rather we unlearn beliefs that are inconsistent with them.**

### Primary Principle #1: Everything Is Connected To Everything

All parts of the universe are linked together and interchange their influences. Quantum physicists like David Bohm, a contemporary of Einstein, once stated, *"We are all one.... Everything is connected to everything else. We are not sure how this connectedness works, but there is a certainty that there is 'separation without separateness.'" Most physicists today see all matter as being connected and in motion. Thus everything in the universe affects everything else, because all are parts of the same unbroken whole.*

All of our conditioning causes us to see the world as fragmented, as made up of separate "things." We tend to break everything into pieces, like departments, nations and professions and then we continually try to connect these "things" back together again. Rather than "thing-ness," we need to learn to see the world in terms of *related parts of a whole*.

You might doubt that everything in the universe is connected, but in a more pragmatic sense, we think you will agree that everything in an organization is connected. By looking at the organization as a system in which everything is interrelated, we see how all the processes, people, structures, communications, and changes affect one another.

In recent workshops we asked participants to identify how things might be different in their organizations if everyone believed and lived this First Principle that *Everything is Connected*.

**With every innovation, we must ask, "How will this change affect other parts of the organization?"**



Some of their responses:

- Communication would improve.
- Ownership of problems would be expanded.
- People would be more helpful, kind and considerate.
- Individuals would have greater interest in their work and in the work of others.
- Costly mistakes would be avoided more often.

As important as interconnectedness is, we see many examples in business where this truth is ignored: marketing departments that oversell production capability, research and development departments working without first consulting with marketing, and planning departments that don't walk in lock step with finance and other departments. And the list goes on. These actions result in products that are too expensive to produce, or worse, don't even meet customer demand.

With every innovation we consider, we should ask, "*What affect will this change have on other parts of the organization?*" This should be the first acid test for every innovation, large or small and in every walk of life.

### **Primary Principle #2: Thought is Generative**

The greatest discovery of all time might well be that *thought is causal*. Thought is the originator of everything that is brought into existence, the starting point of every new innovation. This is a profound and demonstrable fact.

Thinking causes things to happen. Action, the movement of energy, flows from thoughts. Conditions are the effect of thinking. Thus new thoughts create new conditions. Thought has developed in such a way that it claims not to affect anything but rather relates to us what is real, what is true. But this is not true. Our ideas and our thoughts fashion our conditions.

Consequently, organizations are in large part shaped by the way people think and interact. To make organizations more innovative, we must change how people think and interact.

Understanding that "Thought is Generative" is vital to innovating swiftly, continually and effectively. The primary obstacles to innovation lie in our most basic ways of thinking. If these do not change, any "new input" will end up producing fundamentally the same results. So we must examine our thinking and thought processes from a personal, team and organizational perspective. What is our approach to solving problems? What are our basic beliefs about ourselves, our work, our competitors, our ability to effect change? Realizing that thought is generative can free our thinking, and consequently change our actions and results.

The major problem with most of us is that we most often only think about WHAT we think, rarely HOW we think. The problem is behind us, not in front of us. Many of our old thoughts and perceptions continue to affect our actions even though we are no longer consciously aware of them. By changing our thoughts, we release ourselves from the past.



Again, we asked participants to identify how things would be different in their organizations if everyone believed and lived this Second Principle that *Thought Is Generative*.

Some of their responses:

- There would be less redoing, more thinking up front.
- There would be physical spaces that enhanced thinking.
- People would spend more time on 'how' they are thinking not only 'what' they are thinking.
- We would do more listening and less judging of others.

### **Primary Principle #3: Everyone is Creative and Innovative**

Many of us find it difficult to embrace the principle that says, “*Everyone is Creative and Innovative.*” Society seems determined to “train the creativity out of us.” We are taught in the rigid and unimaginative learning environments found in most schools as well as being subjected to the criticism and judgment of our parents, teachers and peers (often unintentional). Is it any wonder that by the time we reach adulthood, most of us believe and manifest the belief that we are not creative and innovative?

Recently, a group of psychologists determined that out of people over 45 years of age less than 5% are creative. At ages 40, 35, 30, 25 and 20, the percentage was the same—5%. At age 17, the number jumped to 10%. At age 5, however, it was 90%. This shows that we all have creative potential within us, it has just been suppressed, or “trained out of us”. We are all creative.

It was also once thought that creativity and innovation existed only in the research and development or technology departments, or “at the top” of the organization. In fact, it has always been associated with the people who know the most on a subject.

In truth, creativity and innovation is not limited to a chosen few. It is not based on one’s intelligence, and it can be learned and cultivated through our own efforts and the proper environment in the workplace. Every day you are generating new and useful ideas – you are already creative. It is only a matter of increasing your skill at it.

When initiating or participating in an innovative process, we must recognize everyone’s innate creative ability. Anyone can come up with a good idea, a great idea, or an idea that is valuable to the end result we are seeking. We continually have workshop participants who are fervently convinced that they are not creative. Then we watch them participate in some of our exercises and prove themselves wrong. As they absorb and practice the material, their innate creativity begins to flow.

We asked participants to identify how things would be different in their organizations if everyone believed and lived this Third Principle that *Everyone is Creative and Innovative*.

Some of their responses:



- People would share their thoughts more openly.
- People's ideas would be "explored" rather than shot down.
- The whole environment would be more inclusive.
- More ideas would be sought from "outsiders".
- Radical thinkers would be welcomed.

### **Putting the Principles to Work**

Imagine the transformation that would take place in your organization if everyone believed and behaved as though: *Everything is Connected, Thought is Generative and Everyone is Creative and Innovative..*

Think about ways that you can begin to implement these principles into your innovation efforts and discover for yourself the power of these three principles to making innovation a way of life in your organization.

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A 30-year veteran of teaching and promoting innovation, **Andrew Papageorge** is the founder of *GoInnovate! Global* and the developer of the *GoInnovate! System*, a comprehensive systems approach to innovation taught in workshops and on-line. He is the author of the book, *“GoInnovate! A Practical Guide to Swift, Continual and Effective Innovation.”*

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