

Innovations in Thinking and Learning

Roger Martin – The Innovation Challenge

ROGER: If we look historically, Canada has an innovation challenge. And the innovation challenge comes from having said in 1878 that we need to protect our infant industries from American competition. So we put up a giant tariff wall to protect infant industries, and that tariff wall lasted for 111 years.

And what that created is a sense that the way you can operate is to wait until somebody does it somewhere else in the world, and then copy that and do it behind the tariff wall. So we have that as an economic backdrop. What that means is, we've got to essentially gear up dramatically, the degree to which the average Canadian, or the average Ontarian, thinks that their new job is to create newer, better ways of doing things. First, not later, not down the line. And the "I think" methodology is about saying, if there are two ways of doing something now, and it seems as though the only choice is to do one or the other, don't think of that as the choice. Your job is to create a better answer. So I think of this as the best way I know to spur -- the very fundamental foundational level -- spur the level of innovation, and in particular the increase in innovation that Canada has to undergo in order to be as prosperous a nation as we want to be in over the next 10, 20, 50 years.

Innovation is this lynchpin to economic growth, and lots of people will admonish their workers, be more innovative. We'll have politicians admonishing the country to be more innovative. Admonishment doesn't do the trick. What does the trick is education. Teaching young people methods for doing things differently, better. So I think we've got to go away from simply admonishing people to be more innovative, to educating them to be more innovative, and I think the investment in educating kids to understand integrative thinking with the "I Think" program is going to pay off for innovation in this province and in this country.

So when I was first doing the work on integrative thinking, I came to the conclusion that integrative thinkers find a creative resolution of a tension, rather than choosing an either-or, they find a creative resolution. Because I'm a very practical, action-oriented guy, I said I need to make sure that we have great theory, and teachable theory, on how you make that creative leap; we just say, "Be creative," my view is, good luck. You might and you might not. So designed thinking was a way of thinking that helps somebody be more systematically creative, to deeply understand the users, who is going to benefit from whatever you're trying to innovate, to have a creative way, creative paths of imagining. It would be one way, here's another way, here's another way to solve that. And then to have to practice of trying them, prototyping them, testing them out and

improving whatever solution you come up with. So designed thinking is a way of helping somebody who wants to do integrative thinking, to come up with that resolution.