Innovative Blueprint for Professional and Personal Growth (BPPG)

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WMBA 5020: Fostering a Culture of Innovation

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Part 1: Course Executive Summary

Increasing the success and profitability of a business without any cost or change in personnel? If it sounds impossible or too good to be true, then the reader need not look any further than the concepts of fostering a corporate culture of innovation, as set forth herein. Fostering a Culture of Innovation at Walden University is the second of four courses in the WMBA, Walden Masters of Business Administration's Accelerate Into Masters program. The course reinforces the importance of innovation to achieving business success. Further principles are instilled, including those necessary to become an effective creative leader utilizing imagination to resolve all manner of problems. The concepts herein laid flourish when an environment which is conducive to creative thinking is pursued, implemented, and maintained.

Innovation is key to achieving success in business. Many of us have been taught and perhaps even still have a belief that only certain people gifted in the arts or music are "creative" and are thus further deceived into believing, falsely, that creativity is something which cannot be taught and that those who will ever have "it" must thus have been born with "it", or even the other myth; that children are more creative than adults (Laureate Education, 2012). I too had previous misconceptions on these realities and am now a convert to the principles taught herein; and this has changed what I think of the role of innovation and the ways to engage in the creative process. In fact, creativity and innovative thinking can be taught if the proper methods are used. To exemplify this, I proffer that just working through thought problems and then envisioning limitations on the options to solve them to force innovative resolutions, just like learning the game of Chess, can lead them to see the problem in a manner in which they have never seen it before. From this point forward, decision making ability is expanded (Linkner, 2015). More concepts and principles were revealed with the focus on becoming leaders effective in creativity, including learning about the four creative styles, to wit; clarifiers, ideators, developers, and implementers (Grivas & Puccio, 2012).

Beginning with the renewed understanding that creativity can be taught and innovation can be instilled, this course equips the students of today to be the leaders of tomorrow through the aforementioned methods of recognizing the team members' individual creative style and inspiring innovation within the team through the creation of a strong and positive corporate culture. Positive social change is the mission of Walden University. I have become endeared to this mission statement and have fallen into line with this corporate mission in adopting it as my own. The mission has shaped my goals, both personally and professionally. This course is in alignment with the corporate goals for positive social change. The individual reflections in the weekly assignments were particularly helpful as they shaped my goals while encouraging personal application of the principles taught, to wit; mind mapping, ideation, divergent- and convergent- thinking (Puccio et al, 2012). The weekly discussions encouraged a similar purpose through the promotion of peer-review and in offering a sounding board for discussing and sharing concepts (Dyer et al, 2009). My course experiences and insights have begun to mix in with my own personal and professional development goals and I, daily, seek to be that scholar-practitioner that Walden University desires be manifest in me.

Part 2: Strategy for My Personal and Professional Life

Strategies in the Pursuit of Becoming an Innovative Leader

In synthesizing De Jong & Den Hartog (2007, p. 1) I assert that there are specific leadership behaviors which are relevant to influencing innovative behavior in employees when they are first implemented and displayed by leaders. A key strategy eulogized in De Jong & Den Hartog (2007, p. 1) teaches that there is a fundamental difference between employees who require a leader's instruction to know the action to take and an employee who knows the organizational mission so well that they are capable of adapting and improvising to take the best action at the required time. In this course I learned about these nine dimensions that promote breakthroughs in creative thinking (Dyer et al, 2009). The first five are discovery skills, to wit; associating, questioning, observing, experimenting, and networking. The remaining four are patterns of action, namely; cultivating new thinking, comfort with change, risk tolerance, and collaboration. Each pattern of action is critical to achieving success as an innovative leader and when applied in unison help with the *association* discovery skill, which is the ability to connect seemingly unrelated ideas and scenarios. I did a self-assessment of these dimensions which foster creativity and have begun to implement them into my personal and professional life. Specifically, in my personal and professional life I have set my focus on improving my abilities to cultivate new thinking, beginning with discovering new and innovative ways to view my personal and professional problems (Porter, 2014, para. 10). In improving this one dimension, four other dimensions are getting thrust into action and are equally and incrementally improved, to wit; associating, questioning, observing, and experimenting. I chose this to target first because

of my existing abilities in analysis and since seeing that these discovery skills will improve

alongside cultivating new thinking and that they contribute greatly to innovative leadership.

Three Ways to Focus on Innovative Strategy in the Workplace

In review of the course content on fostering an innovative culture, I have identified three

areas in which I could apply the principles that I've learned. First, a dimension which is essential

to innovative leadership is the cultivation of new thinking. This is about desiring and acting on

new approaches to solving problems as they come up (Porter, 2014, para. 10). The course has

advised me to avoid falling into the rut of merely maintaining the status quo and the way things

have "always" been done (Dyer et al, 2009). Second, to overcome tendencies to become

stagnant, I will focus on becoming increasingly more comfortable with change. Change is

inevitable and mandatory for growth and innovation. If I stood in my own way, I would be

standing in the way of opportunities for growth. Third, great leaders all have a modicum of

tolerance and assumption for risk. Appropriate toleration for risk can be manifest in taking a

chance on hiring a new employee, or trying a new organizational or production method, and also

extends into risks taken when leading others (Rampton, 2018, para. 20). The course has

prompted me to focus on innovative strategy, and leading and taking on more risk starts with

anticipating the effects of the team's proposed actions and making adjustments to overcome

foreseen obstacles, whether they be in my personal or professional life (Dyer et al, 2009).

Measuring My Progress Towards Success

To me, attaining success in my goal of fully becoming an innovative leader will have

been reached when I am consistently inspiring creativity and innovation in others. In this respect,

progress can be measured through individuals reaching milestones in their personal growth and can be seen in the success of colleagues as well as in those under my sphere of influence. Once a level of saturation has been reached with regard to colleagues' individual creativity, then progress can be seen where collaboration in my organization is mutually beneficial. It is commonly known that an under-performing team member can become a weakness and a liability for the team, itself. A phenomenon is seen however where collaboration takes place between thriving, creative, and innovative individuals. Out of collaboration in this circumstance comes a synergistic effect, where the effect of the whole is greater than the sum of its parts (Galli, 2021). For there is a cap which is reached when someone performs work alone; this same cap has the capacity to be overcome through effective collaboration, and that is what I seek (Galli, 2021).

Fostering Positive Social Change

The agenda of Walden University and principal to their mission is the promotion of positive social change. This mission has positively shaped my personal goals and goals for my professional development. This course on fostering a culture of innovation went beyond the tenets of scholarship and fulfills the Walden University goal to transform students to become scholar-practitioners wherein they put into practice all of the techniques which have been learned. Innovation and creativity both influence positive social change within the principal organization and largely overflows to the local community by equipping the team to be agents of change and to challenge the status quo and apply new perspectives to existing problems and barriers to progress. Being an innovative leader enables me to foster positive social change when I am promoting growth in others and inspiring them. Innovative leadership is mutually beneficial; as I encourage and strengthen others, they in-turn do likewise to their fellow

colleagues and ultimately the team and the organization as-a-whole receive benefit and these same co-workers become more effective in helping me meet personal and organizational goals.

Part 3: Action Plan Towards Professional and Personal Development

Plan to Harness My Team's Creativity

It has been established that the goals and views of this course, and that of my own professional life, include promoting positive social change through inspiring creativity and innovation in others. Consistent with this goal, and presented herein, is my action plan to harness the creativity of my team. A major accomplishment achieved in becoming an innovative leader is successfully inspiring innovation and creativity in my colleagues and team members. Logically the next step is to rein in the team's creativity, harness it, and direct it in a coordinated fashion. This, I believe is the hallmark of an innovative leader, who not only inspires, but directs. Out of observing the team, individuals' association with specific creative styles will become known. There are four distinct creative styles, to wit; clarifiers, ideators, developers, and implementers (Grivas & Puccio, 2012). For an organization to reach its full potential, it must utilize this diversity, a tenet of inclusive leadership (Lussier & Hendon, 2017, p. 69). And thus, my colleagues will exemplify certain traits: The ideators will have visions for the company's future, the clarifiers will seek answers to all variables in production, the developers will come up with plans to implement aspects of the ideators' visions, and the individuals with the implementer creative style will be the first to pursue execution of a given plan of the organization (Grivas & Puccio, 2012). What would make me most effective would be to correctly identify the creative style of each individual on my team and position them appropriately, such that they will use their creative style to the fullest.

In pursuit of this goal, I will employ specific techniques gleaned from the course. In the course I learned about a method entitled *design thinking*. Design thinking is effective because it

employs both divergent and convergent thinking practices (Choudhary, 2019). During the course I learned a lot about divergent thinking. I have almost always been effective at convergent thinking wherein ideas are evaluated in an effort to discern the potential success of each. However it was the divergent process which I had been missing. Commonly, I would begin ideating and would cease future consideration of any idea which did not seem plausible. It was during my studies of divergent thinking that I learned the importance of brainstorming merely for the purpose of generating solutions without taking that opportunity to evaluate them. You see, as it turns out, a group does better when they can converge on a completely assembled list of ideas to which everyone has contributed. During this time, potential solutions are exchanged and no hindrances exist in the absence of criticism or critique. After brainstorming is complete, then the convergent thinking process begins and will serve to filter the proposed ideas. The combination of the two methods is design thinking and I have learned that it has useful application in empathizing, defining, ideating, prototyping, and testing (Dam & Siang, 2020). In fact, it is an iterative process where ideas are constantly refined by the team.

At this juncture, I will come full-circle back to Walden University's principal mission: To promote positive social change and make scholar-practitioners. As aforementioned, this mission has positively shaped both my personal and professional goals and this course on fostering a culture of innovation has fulfilled the aforestated Walden University mission and I seek to put into practice all of the techniques which I have learned.

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