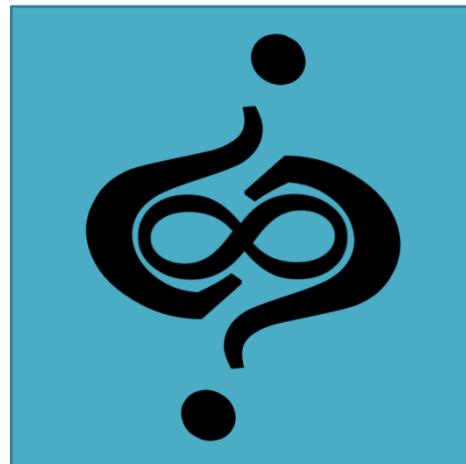


# INNOVATION AND THE INFINITE 'WHY?'

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## Conceptual Innovation

- ❖ Conceptual innovation is about creating **new ideas** and **new ways of thinking**. As future leaders you must learn to **be great conceptual innovators**, and to **inspire** great conceptual innovation in others.
- ❖ Philosophers specialise in conceptual innovation. Looking at the great philosophers, we can learn **three simple things** about how to become better conceptual innovators:
  - 1) **Ask Why**
  - 2) **Ask it of Anything**
  - 3) **Keep on Asking**

### 1) Ask Why

- ❖ Conceptual innovation requires us to **challenge our assumptions**. When our assumptions turn out to be mistaken, we have an opportunity to develop **better** ways of thinking.
- ❖ You could do worse than following the example of **Socrates**:
  - ❖ He challenged the assumptions of the **future leaders of Athens**. Revealing their mistakes allowed him to innovate new ways of thinking that were way ahead of his time.
  - ❖ He inspired conceptual innovations in **his pupils**. He didn't do this by preaching to them. He did it by questioning them.
  - ❖ He questioned **his own assumptions** and concluded 'The only thing I know is that I know nothing'. This humility opened him up for great innovations.

### 2) Ask it of Anything

- ❖ Some of our assumptions are more **deeply held** than others. The deeper our assumptions, the more **uncomfortable** they are to question. But **dramatic innovation** requires us to do just that.
- ❖ We can learn from the successes and failures of **Friedrich Nietzsche**:
  - ❖ Nietzsche was able to achieve radical conceptual innovations because he challenged the authority of the establishment. For him, **no question was taboo**.
  - ❖ Nietzsche was **ignored in his time** because he challenged people so provocatively that nobody wanted to listen to him.
- ❖ Sometimes you need to challenge the deeply held assumptions of your colleagues and your clients. Think of **the demise of Blockbuster Video**. They weren't prepared to question deeply-held assumptions about the kind of service they offered. If they'd had Nietzsche as a consultant they might have survived!
- ❖ Your challenge is to develop the skill of asking **uncomfortable questions** in a **comfortable** way.

### 3) Keep on Asking

- ❖ Businesses only succeed if they **keep on innovating**, and business leaders only succeed if they keep on encouraging such innovation. There's no end-point to questioning your assumptions: you have to embrace **the infinite 'why?'**
- ❖ Elon Musk says that he achieves his innovations by applying the method of physics, which is to strip away your assumptions until you get to **first principles**, then to build everything up from there.
- ❖ But **why stop at first principles?** What if your so-called 'first principles' are mistaken? What if challenging those principles is what's needed to open up the next big conceptual innovation? By embracing the infinite why, you open the way to radical innovation.
- ❖ Consider the innovations of Netflix. When they started up, one of their first principles would probably have been that they're in the business of acting as an **intermediary** between those who produce media and those who consume it. But **by questioning that first principle**, they realised there was nothing to stop them making their own films and TV shows. And that radical innovation is crucial to the success of the business.

### The Why-Friendly Environment

- ❖ If you apply those three lessons, you'll **become a better conceptual innovator**. But as future leaders, you also need to **inspire innovation in others**. To do that, you need to foster a **why-friendly** environment in your team, in your organisation and in your client's organisation.
- ❖ This is quite a challenge, but the first step is make sure that **you're a why-friendly individual**. How open are you to having your assumptions questioned? Could you be more open?
- ❖ When you were **3-years-old** you reached a crucial milestone of cognitive development: you began to ask '**why?**'. Somewhere along the line we lose that tendency, probably because we spend so much time in **why-resistant environments**. To foster why-friendly environments, we need to return to that **inquisitive mind-set**.

### REMEMBER...

*The lesson from philosophy is that if you foster in yourselves the **curiosity to ask 'why'**, the **bravery to ask it of anything**, and the **tenacity to keep on asking**, you can be tomorrow's **pioneers of conceptual innovation**.*