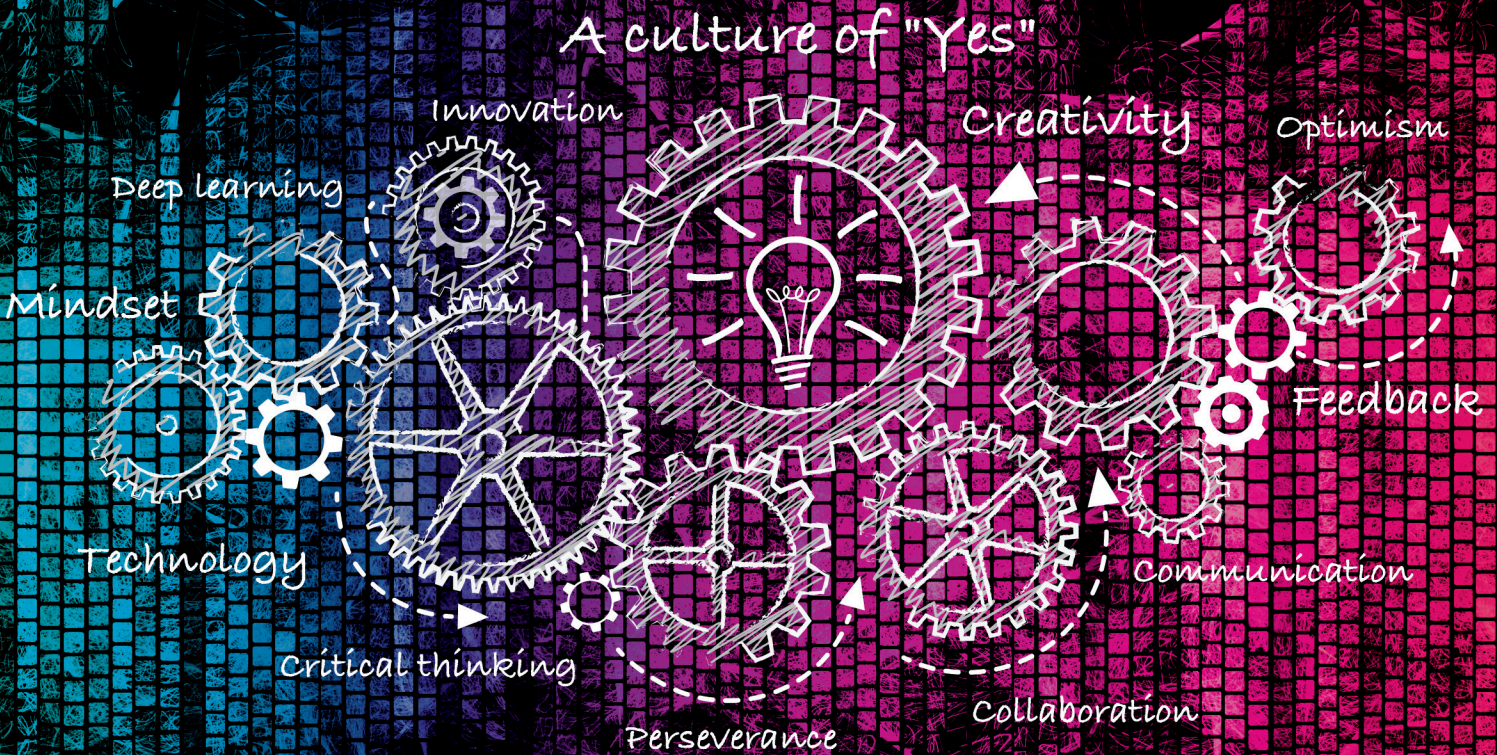




PRINCIPAL CONNECTIONS

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TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP



INTEGRATIVE THINKING

Creating Better Solutions

by **Nogah Kornberg**

Schools are among the most challenging leadership environments to work in – the stakes are high, resources are limited and the results are always on display. What's more, school leadership challenges are diverse and wide-ranging, from student enrolment, to parental engagement to instructional leadership.

Traditional management approaches don't always apply and increasingly, leaders are being asked to shift from traditional top-down approaches to models that are collaborative, transparent and geared toward developing the leaders around them.

At the I-Think Initiative, we work with leaders in education to cultivate this new approach to leadership. Through the use of Integrative Thinking – our unique approach to problem solving – we've seen these leaders carve a path forward through some of education's most difficult challenges.

All of us face tough choices every day: for example, when it comes to professional learning, do you focus on the educators who are most keen, or do you seek to

involve the entire staff? On one hand, a small group of engaged teachers have the potential to go deep into the learning and to bring it to life in the classroom; on the other, you have the potential to create a shared learning community with meaningful scale and internal supports. Both options have real benefits and some significant drawbacks.

With limited resources, we often accept that we have to make a trade-off and simply choose between the models. In Integrative Thinking, we challenge the trade-off and instead seek to explore the tension between the possibilities, working to create a better answer that gives us the best of both worlds.

Initially developed at University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management, Integrative Thinking was designed to help business leaders make better choices, more of the time. Over the last 10 years, we've taken the concept from the boardroom into the school. Through professional learning programs, we've introduced Integrative Thinking to over a thousand educators across Ontario.

Integrative Thinking: An Opportunity for Co-Leadership

The Integrative Thinking Process:

- 1. Articulating Two Opposing Models:** In this step we seek to understand what works about each of the opposing models by looking at the benefits of each model from multiple stakeholder perspectives.
- 2. Examine the Models:** Here we make sense of the benefits and gain insights that can move us on to the third stage. We ask questions and challenge assumptions as we purposefully experience the tension between options.
- 3. Explore the Possibilities:** We move from understanding our existing models to imagining several new, integrative answers to the challenge. We leverage the tools of design thinking, such as ideation and prototyping, to build out the solutions.
- 4. Assessing the Prototypes:** We must understand the conditions that would have to exist for our solutions to thrive. We ask, "What would have to be true?" from the perspective of the multiple stakeholders.

Integrative Thinking provides both a process and set of tools to help leaders engage with their colleagues and teams in a new way – one closer to the collaborative, transparent and development models. Using Integrative Thinking, leaders design experiences that position the leader, not as the “knower” with the right answer, but as co-learner and facilitator towards new possibilities.

Case Study – Integrative Thinking in Action

When vice-principal Audrey Hensen moved to a new school as acting principal, she encountered a concerned team; the school schedule was the issue. The school had been moving away from a full-rotary schedule, despite strong opposition from the bulk of the teaching staff. Increasingly, students were staying with a single teacher for multiple periods at a time.

As a proponent of working shoulder-to-shoulder with staff to solve problems, Audrey worked with a team of teachers on the school schedule, using the Integrative Thinking process. She hoped to make progress on the issue, while at the same time shift the school’s culture.

To start the Integrative Thinking process, the team identified two opposing models: a full rotary model where students moved to a new classroom with a different teacher for every subject; and the single-teacher model, where one teacher would teach all subjects to the same group of students. Each model represented an extreme way to approach scheduling. While neither of these extremes was realistic, the goal was to learn from the extremes and identify the value of each model.

Many teachers firmly believing that the rotary model was the right answer. They began with identifying the benefits of that model before turning to the single-teacher model. This approach helped keep the energy up and ensured that the participants felt that their favoured model was being seriously considered. By the time they turned to the single-teacher model, the group was able to keep an open mind and began to see potential benefits to this least-preferred choice.


After looking at the benefits of each model from the perspective of students, teachers and the community, the group began to see shifts in understanding. The team saw, for instance, the longer-term impact on the community and that deep relationships with students could be developed in both models, something they didn’t previously believe to be true.

Rather than immediately deciding on the right answer, the team transitioned into a space of dialogue and exploration. Instead of choosing between benefits, the team sought to re-imagine how they might organize the school schedule to drive both student engagement and teacher expertise.

As the team’s leader, Audrey Hensen did not begin the process with one right answer in mind. Instead, she used Integrative Thinking to honour her teachers by drawing from their experiences and knowledge. She also deepened her leadership by co-learning alongside them.

Conclusion

Integrative Thinking was born out of the understanding that it is not what we do, but how we think, that leads to innovative solutions. A new way of leading is not about copying others, crossing our fingers and hoping it

works out. Rather, leadership is about a new way of thinking — thinking through tensions. In living our leadership, simply holding the intention to embody a new model of leadership isn’t always enough. Instead, we need tools to enable experiences in creative problem solving. 



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A special thank you to Audrey Hensen, for sharing her experiences in Hamilton-Wentworth DSB in the case study.



Learn More

Nogah Kornberg and Josie Fung lead the I-Think Initiative at the Rotman School of Management. I-Think brings the creative problem solving tools of Integrative Thinking and Business Design to students, teachers and leaders in K-12 education.

Email us at I-Think@rotman.utoronto.ca
Check out our website at www.rotman.utoronto.ca/i-think



TWO WAY RAD

Thank you to everyone who participated in our free draw at the CPCO Conference. The winner of 3 Motorola DTR410 two way radios valued up to \$1050.00 is Liz MacIntyre from St. Gabriel Catholic School from Halton Catholic District School Board.

Congratulations Liz!

Motorola’s current promotion is “Buy 6 radios Get 1 Free Multi-unit Charger”. Please visit us at www.twowayradio.ca and see what other school principals are saving about these “license free” radios!

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