

What Drives Innovative Behavior?

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Related to the process of problem solving is the question “What drives innovative behavior?”

Humans in general, are very curious creatures. Curiosity leads to the basic investigation needed for formulating the questions asked during problem solving. Being able to solve complex problems has allowed man to survive and evolve. So it is natural that curiosity is an advantageous trait. Innovation seems to be directly related to one's ability to gather, analyze and organize all the facts associated with a given problem. Those with the ability to formulate many solutions and then pick the best solution out of that pool of potential solutions can be considered innovative.

One must also realize that having broad domain knowledge of a subject will also allow an individual to formulate more possible solutions than someone with a limited knowledge of the topic. How does one gain broad domain knowledge? It comes back to that trait that helps us ask all the right questions – curiosity. A person that is curious about: how, why, when, or where of a subject will undoubtedly learn and gain a great depth of knowledge about that subject. Having such knowledge will allow an individual to formulate many more potential hypothetical solutions in one's mind.

Having domain knowledge beyond what most people in a field possess often allows an individual to formulate potential solutions which are considered “out of the box” or “coloring outside the lines.” There is an interesting human element to this as well. The human element is a learned trait. It is the man made rules we learn at a young age. In general it is taught to us in a negative fashion. And the word we are taught with is “No.” No, you can't color outside the lines. No, you can't talk out of turn. No, you can't build a house that isn't square. No, you can't jay walk. No, you can't wear white after Labor Day. Some things that we learn are well founded and are for our own well being. Others are simply socially enforced rules and have nothing to do with being good or bad. There are other environmental factors as well. A person that is not stressed by a time constraint will have more time to exercise their curiosity. As I discussed previously, this will lead to more knowledge. The increased domain knowledge will once again lead to the formulation of potential valid solutions in one's mind.

To be innovative simply means that you are a very curious person that likes to learn and you know how to utilize the knowledge gained from that curiosity to be a good problem solver. Everything comes down to problem solving. We problem solve to survive. It is as simple as that. Yet there are many environmental and self imposed factors which affect the way we learn, gather data, and apply that data to problem solving in our everyday lives. To help yourself become more innovative, try becoming more curious about your environment and ask yourself every possible question you can think of when collecting data during any problem solving exercise.