

# Strategies that Trigger Innovative Thinking

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Whether we are reading applications for our [Wharton Summer High School Programs](#) or interviewing teen entrepreneurs on our [Future of the Business World podcast](#), our team at the Wharton Global Youth Program can't escape a powerful trend: high school students across the globe are embracing the start-up culture. You are launching businesses, nonprofits, online platforms and community activism projects with a pervasive drive to start something new.

Our most recent podcast guest, 16-year-old racial justice activist and software developer [Moniola Odunsi](#), said, "I think a common misperception is that change happens when you're a certain age, typically an adult age. I completely disagree with this. I sincerely believe that my generation has debunked this theory... A lot of people say we are the future change makers and the future leaders. I would say that we can be and are those people right now."

Gen Z is a generation of innovators, a core value that will serve you well in all aspects of the business world. Innovation, by definition a new match between a solution and a need, is critical to any corporation's survival. Embracing experimentation — key to innovation — is not just for entrepreneurs who want to start their own companies, but also those with an entrepreneurial mindset who will use innovation to inspire change in big companies and entire industries.

It's therefore important to understand what sparks innovation and develop tactics to generate compelling new ideas.

## Innovation's Power in a Pandemic



On May 9, Serguei Netessine, the Dhirubhai Ambani Professor of Entrepreneurship and Innovation at the Wharton School and Wharton's vice dean of global initiatives, published an article in the *Financial Times* titled "What Covid Teaches Us About Innovating Fast." A key takeaway? "The pandemic has provided an object lesson in business model innovation. Businesses often change their approaches only when faced with disaster. But unless they are well prepared to begin with, they may find themselves too far behind to compete successfully when a crisis hits. They need a process to regularly re-evaluate their current approach, to protect against vulnerabilities and gaps, and to establish a corporate culture of experimentation." Be sure to check out the full article for great insight about how innovation helped companies survive the Covid-19 crisis!

Read Professor Netessine's article [HERE](#).

[Serguei Netessine](#), the Dhirubhai Ambani Professor of Entrepreneurship and Innovation at the Wharton School and Wharton's vice dean of global initiatives, spends a lot of his time thinking about innovation. Recently during the virtual

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[Whitney M. Young Jr. Memorial Conference](#), put on annually by the Wharton School's African American MBA Association, Dr. Netessine presented on "Innovating by Design: Developing the Next Big Idea."

"The field of innovation is very wide and deep," noted Netessine, who delivered his conference session with the help of innovation consultant Elsie Iwase. "The only thing that you can do to maximize your chances and increase your odds for finding the great innovation...is to keep generating ideas. You need thousands of ideas to find a few exceptional ideas."

Netessine highlighted three strategies that he calls "innovation triggers" to help you generate that vast sea of ideas. His three idea triggers are:

1. **Discover inspiration in existing innovations.** "I was in the U.K. and noticed caffeine strips," said Netessine. "You put the strip in your mouth, it melts, and it gives you a boost of caffeine... How can we take inspiration from this existing innovation and come up with some other innovation? We can decompose it into a need and a solution. The need here is clearly caffeine delivery into the human body. The solution is a dissolvable caffeine strip. Let's decompose it and take just the need and generate a new solution for the need and take the solution and apply this solution to other needs." Some possible new product innovations? A caffeine patch, caffeine chewing gum and caffeine-infused lotion. On the flip side, dissolvable strips may also deliver vitamins, electrolytes and medicines to the body. ?
2. **Consider socioeconomic, geographical and geopolitical trends.** "You can base a startup or innovative idea on a trend," suggested Netessine, pointing to current movements like *Black Lives Matter*, living healthy, climate change, COVID-19 and cybersecurity. "You might base a supermarket idea like Whole Foods on the trend that people want to live healthy. Think about the trend, forecast it, and see that it is going to be a bigger trend. As the trend becomes bigger, your idea and startup will also become bigger." ?
3. **Follow the market for technological innovation.** Virtual reality, drones, artificial intelligence, even Tik Tok – these are all hot technologies right now. "Just as you can look at socioeconomic trends, you can look at new technologies and say, 'Okay, let's think about a new technology that is coming to the market and just becoming big,'" said Netessine. "If I can think of an idea or a startup that is based on this technology, as this technology matures and becomes bigger, I will be first to the market and will capitalize on this technology before others come. Think how you can use this technology to make an existing business model better." ?

How will you use idea triggers to think about innovations that could become marketable companies, products or services?