

FROM THE ARCHIVES THE PEOPLE OF REFORM



At the 2005 PKAL Seminar on Leadership at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, The keynote speaker was William Pulleybank¹ described his work in orchestrating, in 2004, the development of IBM's Blue Gene super computer, as well as his involvement with the Council on Competitiveness's National Innovation Initiative (NI). The IBM experience was a powerful illustration of a team responding to an urgent, real-world challenge, imagining and achieving something radically different, immediately practical reshaping the future, reshaping the future. His definition of what makes a successful innovator:

- The ability to self-educate
- Problem-definition skills
- Understand of intellectual depth
- Ability to handle criticism, no matter how it is intended
- Communication skills—ability to lead
- Willingness to take on risk and the ability to manage it.

Based on his NII involvement, Pulleyblank explored deeply into the new shape of innovation—that it is multidisciplinary, technologically complex, as well as collaborative with workers and consumers embracing new ideas, demanding more creativity.

“Expertise” used to mean in-depth knowledge of a particular discipline, but not it much be multidisciplinary, since innovation occurs at the intersections of disciplines...between research and its end-use applications.

His remarks catalyzed conversations among seminar participants about how leadership works at the campus level, how mobilize campus teams to accomplish something ambitious, something sustainable. They also interpreted his remarks as a new way to articulate learning goals that would shape the on-campus change initiatives they were considering—focusing on building institutional cultures in which students were willing to take risks.

His report on the work of the Council of Competitiveness was also of great value to participants, specifically because of the elegant language in which members of the Council of Competitiveness speak about what learners should become, be able to do in the world beyond the campus.

For the future, the nation will need a workforce equipped with more than literacy in reading, math and science. We need a whole generation with the capacities for creative thinking and for thriving in a collaborative culture. We need a class of workers who see problems as opportunities and understand that solutions are built from a range of ideas, skills and resources.



¹ Then Vice President, Center for Business Optimization. IBM Consulting Services



People are not born with inherent innovation skills, but they can learn them. They can acquire the social skills to work in diverse, multidisciplinary teams, and learn adaptability and leadership. They can develop communication skills to describe their innovations. They can learn to be comfortable with ambiguity, to recognize new patterns within disparate data, and to be inquisitive and analytical. They can learn to translate challenges into opportunities and understand how to complete solutions from a range of resources. These skills are best acquired by experiencing innovation first-hand, building the confidence that underpins future success. To quote Benjamin Franklin: “You tell me, I forget; you teach me, I remember; you involve me, I learn.”

— Council on Competitiveness. National Innovation Initiative Summit and Report: Thriving in a World of Challenge and Change. 2005.
https://www.compete.org/storage/images/uploads/File/PDF%20Files/NII_Innovate_America.pdf

