

# INNOVATION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

HOW WILDLY SUCCESSFUL NONPROFITS INSPIRE  
AND DELIVER RESULTS



## BOOK CLUB AND CLASSROOM DISCUSSION GUIDE

LEAH KRAL

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“Nonprofit innovation matters because the stakes are high, the needs are many, and the world's needs keep changing.”

LEAH KRAL





# Preface to Book Club and Classroom Discussion Guide

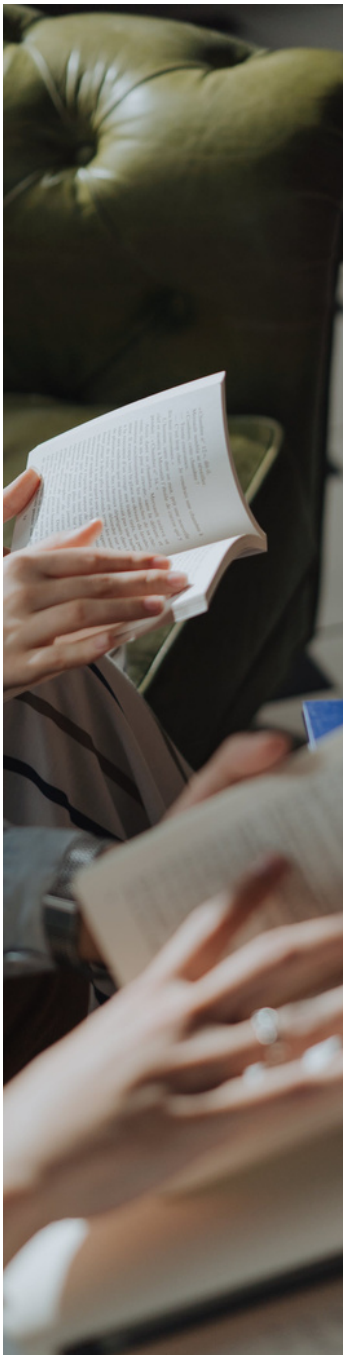
*Innovation for Social Change* was written as a roadmap for nonprofit leaders to empower their organizations to transform aspirations into impact. In the book I showcase the importance of creative thinking and strategic planning for nonprofit success. Real-world stories include insights from social entrepreneurs and influential nonprofits that boldly challenge the status quo. I hope the book can be a vital resource for empowering organizations to become effective change agents.

While *Innovation for Social Change* was primarily written for those working in nonprofits, it also can help those working in philanthropy. The book can help develop a common language between donors and people working on the front lines of nonprofits. It can help foundation grants officers and donors to better understand the management challenges that nonprofits are grappling with as they strive to be more innovative and effective.

In response to requests from readers, I have written this guide for discussing the book in book club or classrooms settings. The book club discussion guide comprises questions and discussion prompts for every chapter of the book. The classroom discussion guide includes exercises and assignments based on the book. Teachers using the classroom discussion guide, however, should feel free to borrow from the book club discussion guide; likewise with book club discussion group leaders. The book is available at all major book retailers. For more information visit <https://leahkral.com/>

# DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR BOOK CLUBS

## IMAGINATION SPARKERS!



### GENERAL QUESTIONS

- What did you like the most about this book?
- What did you like the least about this book?
- What surprised you?
- Are there any actions you are thinking about taking after reading it? What are they?

### INTRODUCTION: INNOVATION AND NONPROFITS

- Why do nonprofits matter?
- Has a nonprofit touched your life, or the life of someone you care about?
- What does “nonprofit innovation” mean to you?
- What are examples of massive changes or disruption for society that will affect how philanthropy or nonprofits approach their work?
- How are nonprofits different than government or for-profit businesses?
- Does a nonprofit need a big budget and staff to be innovative?
- Why is burnout so common in the nonprofit sector?
- In your experience, what gets in the way of nonprofit innovation? Can those obstacles be overcome? How?

### CHAPTER 1. A STORY OF TRANSFORMATIVE INNOVATION

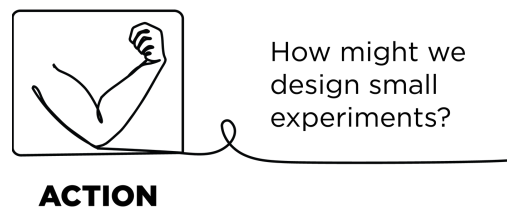
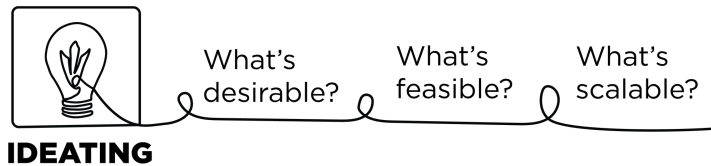
- Considering the innovations of St. Benedict’s Prep School, what are practices or lessons that you might try at your workplace?
- What is an innovation organization that impresses you? What makes the organization so good at innovation?





# PART 1. TOOLS FOR SPARKING INNOVATIVE IDEAS

A tool for sparking innovative ideas: design thinking for nonprofits



## CHAPTER 2. SURFACING UNMET NEEDS

- Considering the creative methods to learn about hidden needs described in the chapter, such as revealing customer experience with a hidden camera, interviews, or immersion experiences, how might you try this at your workplace?
- Have you ever deliberately tried to get outside of your own “bubble” or walk in someone else’s shoes, to see the world through their eyes? What did you learn about their pain points, obstacles, and strengths?
- What is a problem that is often ignored, or non-obvious to most others, that you have noticed?
- Try out the “five why’s” analysis for your workplace. What did you learn?
- What are three “how might we” questions for your workplace?

## CHAPTER 3. STRETCHING THE IMAGINATION

- Consider the stories in the chapter like the 9-1-1 emergency response system, Project Strive, or the Elizabeth River Project. Is your nonprofit part of a mobilized network, and if not, what might that look like?
- Consider the blue ocean example of Recidiviz. Imagine, what would a blue ocean strategy look like in your field of work?



## CHAPTER 4. STRESS-TESTING FOR FEASIBILITY

- What is mission creep?
- Considering the story of the One Laptop Per Child Initiative, have you experienced groundless optimism or a need for a reality check? What happened?
- Considering the teen smoking example, think of your nonprofit. What obstacles, opponents, or vested interests are lined up in opposition to your nonprofit's intended outcomes? How is your nonprofit team thinking about feasibility?
- Like the Upward Bound example, what are difficulties that your team regularly discusses and takes steps to strategically mitigate?

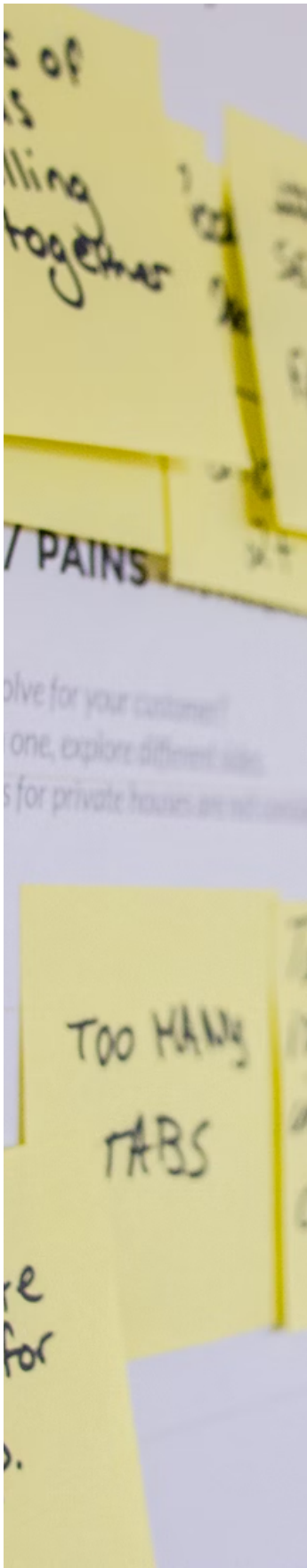
## PART 2. TRANSFORM INNOVATIVE IDEAS INTO ACTION

## CHAPTER 5. DESIGNING SMALL EXPERIMENTS

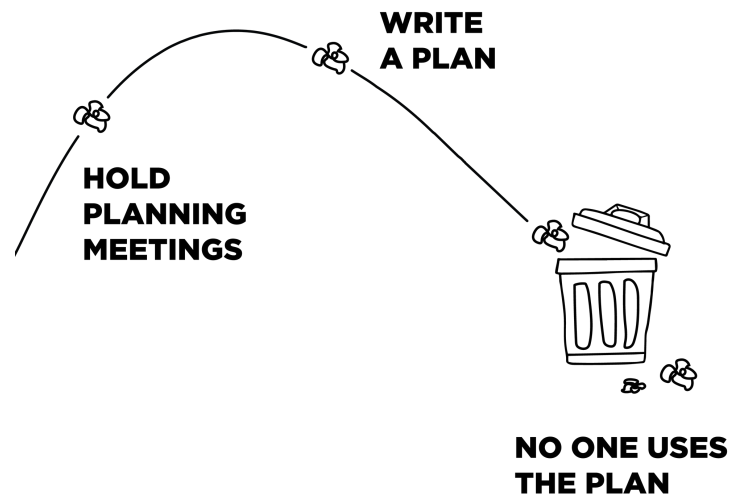
- Considering lessons from the Worldreader example, have you seen an organization invest too big rather than starting with a small experiment?
- Describe a recent experiment at your nonprofit. How was it designed?
- Given the examples of experiments in the chapter, which of them would be most relevant to your nonprofit? Describe an experiment you would like to design.

## CHAPTER 6. FORMING A VISION AND THEORY OF CHANGE

- What is the long-term goal your nonprofit intends to achieve?
- Given the examples of theories of change such as Habitat for Humanity and the Southern Christian Leadership Association, what would a similar if-then sequence look like for your nonprofit or program?
- Is a theory of change helpful? What would be missed if we didn't have one?



Meaningful strategies lead to learning, iterating, and action



## CHAPTER 7. EVALUATING, LEARNING, AND ADJUSTING

- In your experience, what can go wrong with measurement and evaluation?
- Can a nonprofit get away without evaluation and metrics? Why or why not?
- Nonprofits are different from for-profit businesses; they do not have profit and loss signals. So then how do you know if what you are doing is working?
- Describe some best and the worst approaches to evaluation.
- At your nonprofit, what is evidence that your programming is making meaningful improvements in an individual's life? How do you know?
- Discovery is a process of asking questions, testing, learning, adjusting, and iterating. What does discovery look like at your nonprofit?





## PART 3. BUILD INNOVATION INTO OUR ORGANIZATIONAL DNA

### CHAPTER 8. ENCOURAGE CREATIVE COLLABORATION

- What is the organization's role in supporting innovators? What is your personal role in supporting innovators?
- Given the example of Mayo Clinic, are organizational values put into practice at your nonprofit, or empty platitudes? Why?
- "Usually, the best ideas with the biggest impact will not be obvious or come from someone in an executive role." Do you agree?
- Describe a time when you challenged the status quo or engaged in healthy disagreement with a supervisor or executive leadership. What happened?
- What problems would you share candidly in an exit interview or privately with a trusted friend? What would need to change at your organization that would make you more likely to share these concerns with leadership now?
- Thinking of your nonprofit, do team members have high trust and encourage each other to ask uncomfortable questions and push each other higher?

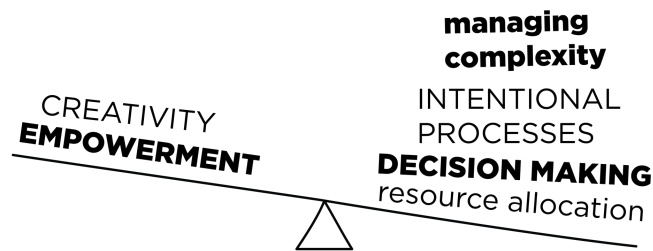
### CHAPTER 9. OPTIMIZE ORGANIZATIONAL DESIGN FOR INNOVATORS

- Under what circumstances is top-down decision making or bottom-up empowerment best?
- Who should be consulted when a decision is being made? And why?
- If the optimal design for an organization is "a judicious blend of bottom-up experimentation and guidance from above" – does your nonprofit strike this balance well? Or if not, what would you change?
- The Hewlett Foundation created a prize for grants officers for "the worst grant from which you learned the most." What are ways that your organization can encourage learning?
- Like the example of the psychiatric hospital, have you seen an example of an organization providing optional guidelines rather than mandates, leaving the door open for new and better ideas?





How do we design systems and processes that encourage rather than stifle innovation?



## CHAPTER 10. ATTRACT DONOR-PARTNERS WHO FUEL SOCIAL CHANGE BREAKTHROUGHS

- What role do donors play related to a nonprofit's ability to innovate? What aspects of the relationship can help or hinder innovation?
- Table 10.1 shares some possible pitfalls of donor-nonprofit relationships. Have you experienced any of these? What would have made the situation better?
- What will serve as credible evidence that efforts are succeeding, failing, or lukewarm, that can give donors confidence about investing in your organization?
- Describe "public goods" and why is it an important term for nonprofits and philanthropy?
- What are examples of de-risking, from your own experience?
- Should your nonprofit consider applying for prizes, or partnering with donors to offer philanthropic prizes to others? What are the pros and cons?

## PART 4. BRING YOUR INNOVATION A-GAME

### CHAPTER 11. DISCOVER YOUR SUPERPOWER

- What are key traits of people who inspire you? Of social entrepreneurs?
- If someone asked you to describe your secret superpower, what would you say? What are your gifts? Your strengths? What puts the fire in your belly?





- Are you a guardian of your time and talents in the same way you protect your bank account? What are you confidently saying no to?
- Think of Fred Rogers and his unusual mix of skills and interests that led him to create groundbreaking programming. What are your weird or quirky interests?
- If you weren't in your current role and instead were an independent consultant, what would you be doing? How would you describe your dream role?
- Think about some of your biggest life trials. How has that shaped and formed your inner motivations?
- What are some of the best interview questions you have heard? How would you answer them about yourself?
- Taking the time to think about your talents and skills can benefit the rest of us. How do you think about your personal brand? Are you a visible expert to your community and stakeholders?

## CHAPTER 12. CHALLENGE THE STATUS QUO

- "If we aren't curious, if we aren't raising contrarian questions, then we are not learning or even doing our jobs." Do you agree?
- How do you tinker or experiment, ask, "what could be better" or challenge the opposite of business as usual?
- When was the last time you asked a colleague, what is my weakest argument? Or how can I make this proposal/idea stronger?
- When did you adjust your own mental models based on new information?
- Try the pre-mortem exercise at your nonprofit. What did you learn?
- When was the last time you shared an example of something you'd like to do differently in the future with your work colleagues? Did it build trust?
- Considering the intellectual Turing test, have you ever tried it? Can you argue your opponent's side so convincingly that an observer would not realize you are an opponent? How did it work out?



## CHAPTER 13. WIN OTHERS OVER TO YOUR CAUSE

- We must persuade all the time in nonprofits. “Don’t raise your voice, improve your argument” (Archbishop Desmond Tutu). How would you go about this?
- Considering the value proposition examples, what is the promise of value that your team or nonprofit delivers? How do you communicate it?
- What is your 2-minute elevator pitch for your team’s work or for your nonprofit? Does it communicate your vision, why us, and what is at stake if we don’t act?



# DISCUSSION & TEACHING GUIDE FOR CLASSROOMS

## IMAGINATION SPARKERS!



In addition to the material that follows, classroom instructors may also choose to assign any of the questions in the preceding section on book club discussion as individual writing prompts or group discussion questions.

### 1. Write a two-page reflection paper...

- answering, why do we have nonprofit organizations? Do nonprofits serve the public good? What competitive advantages and disadvantages might this form have over the for-profit or public firm and under what circumstances might this matter? See Introduction and Chapter 3 for inspiration.

### 2. Pick four people you know...

- (family, friends, coworkers, etc.) and ask them what motivates them to engage in philanthropy? Whether donating or volunteering. Record their answers and reflect on the variety of reasons. Are some of the reasons political? Social? Religious? Cultural? Another reason? A combination of reasons? Optionally, in addition, you may reflect on your own giving or volunteering.

### 3. If you were to establish your own family foundation, how would you provide guidance on the types of grants you would issue?

- Describe the specific social problem(s) that your foundation would give to. What criteria would you use to assess which organizations receive grants, or not. What guidance would you provide to potential grantee applicants? See Chapter 10 for an example.

## 4. Provide two examples where social activism played a primary role...

in the change of policy and the establishment of new legislation. What examples of social activism helped lead to that legislation? Who participated in it? As an example, see the Southern Christian Leadership Association story in chapter six.

## 5. Partner with a nonprofit organization.

Your partner nonprofit may be an organization that you already have a good relationship with (e-mail your professor in the beginning of the semester) or select it from a list of organizations interested in working with our students (your professor will circulate the list). Prepare a three-page case study on one of the following topics:

- Assess any potential risk and how your partner nonprofit will mitigate it.
- Explain output, outcome, and/or social impact that your partner nonprofit intends to realize. Why and how are they significant for society? Consider both short- and long-term results, and qualitative and quantitative results.
- Propose indicators to measure the output, outcome, and social impact, and explain how they may collect data (from whom, when, where, etc.).
- Discuss any opportunity for collaboration that may help your partner nonprofit to maximize its social impact.
- Write a 3-minute elevator pitch for this nonprofit. See the example of Upward Bound in chapter four.
- Based on the creative funding approaches in chapter ten, discuss if any of these strategies are appropriate for your nonprofit.
- Choose one article from a nonprofit research journal, such as *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, and *Voluntas*, or from practitioner-oriented publications like *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, *Nonprofit Quarterly*, *Nonprofit Times*, and *The Stanford Social Innovation Review*. Write a one page reflection on how the ideas could be applied to your nonprofit.
- Conduct a SWOT analysis for your nonprofit.
- Conduct a competitive analysis for your nonprofit. What criteria would you use?

## 6. **Identify a network approach for solving a social problem.**

For examples, see section, “Mobilization of a Network” in chapter three and stories of the Elizabeth River Project and the Broadmore Neighborhood Association. Compare and contrast the pros and cons of partners from different sectors working together, such as government, for-profits or nonprofits.

## 7. **Prepare a two-page case study providing at least four performance measures...**

- that are currently used by three different nonprofit organizations. If they do not have (good) measures, please suggest and develop them. See Chapter 7 for inspiration.

## 8. **Interview two nonprofit leaders...**

- to learn about their organizations. All interview choices should be cleared with your professor before interviews are requested. Choose one of the situations to present to the class. In the presentation, ask the class what they think should have been done and why. Then present what happened along with your own and the leader’s analysis of the situation. Your goal is to help the class learn. Total presentation and discussion time fifteen minutes. Sample interview questions (not limited to these):
  - Please provide a brief background of the nonprofit. What factors, which may include economic, political, historic, cultural, institutional conditions and changes, contributed to the creation and growth (decline) of the organization?
  - What is the mission of the organization? Has it changed over time? How? Why?
  - What’s unique about the mission?
  - Why should it be done by a non-profit organization?
  - What market do they serve?
  - What is the strategy for carrying out this mission?
  - Is the organization effective?
  - What metrics would you look at to answer this, and how does the organization itself judge its effectiveness?
  - How is the organization funded? Then evaluate whether the organization should primarily seek foundation funding, raise their own funds from private sources, or seek government grants. Be sensitive to the costs and benefits of each approach. See Chapter 10 for ideas.
  - Where does their budget come from?



- What does the management structure look like?
- Describe a crisis the organization faced, and how it was handled.
- How would you describe the culture of the organization, and how is it developed and maintained?
- What is the human resources strategy? Who do they hire, and how long do employees stay?
- What operational impediments do you see in reaching the mission of the organization?
- What are the prospects of scaling up the services provided?
- What opportunities do you see for expanding the scope of the organization, if any? How could an increase in scale and/or scope be achieved?

## 9. **Design a business plan for a start-up nonprofit.**

In a 15-page plan, identify “unmet social needs” (i.e., a societal need not currently being well met by existing nonprofits), see chapter 2 for examples, and discuss how your nonprofit will fill these needs and how it would be different from already existing nonprofits. The plan should include an executive summary, market analysis, a vision statement, a mission statement, a description of programming, a marketing plan, an outline of management and personnel, a projection of funds required, and any supporting appendices needed. Prepare a presentation of the plan for the class. Your goal is to convince the class to endorse the creation of your nonprofit. One subgroup will “pitch” the idea and explain why it should be funded/adopted and why it is likely to succeed. The other subgroup will analyze the proposal and offer constructive ideas for improvement of the project. Presentations should total 8 minutes for the pitchers and 8 minutes for the respondents.

## 10. **Identify a nonprofit that has failed and analyze reasons for why it failed.**

If you were a consultant to this nonprofit three years prior, what would you have advised them to think about? See section “Evaluation as a whole” in Chapter 7 for inspiration.

**11. Choose an area of nonprofit work or a nonprofit organization engaged in that work and propose a new actual or potential innovation, expansion, or initiative in that area or for that organization.**

Describe the innovation, discuss in detail how project evaluation should take place, and analyze any impediments to its adoption. Prepare a 12-minute presentation. See Chapter 1 and Chapter 6 for inspiration.

**12. Examine and consider when it would make sense for a nonprofit to merge with another nonprofit, or to dissolve or exit the area.**

When and under what circumstances should this occur? See Chapter 9 for inspiration.

**13. Identify an example of a nonprofit where there was scope creep/mission creep.**

Provide analysis for how the creep occurred, and what might have been done to prevent it. See Chapter 7 for inspiration.

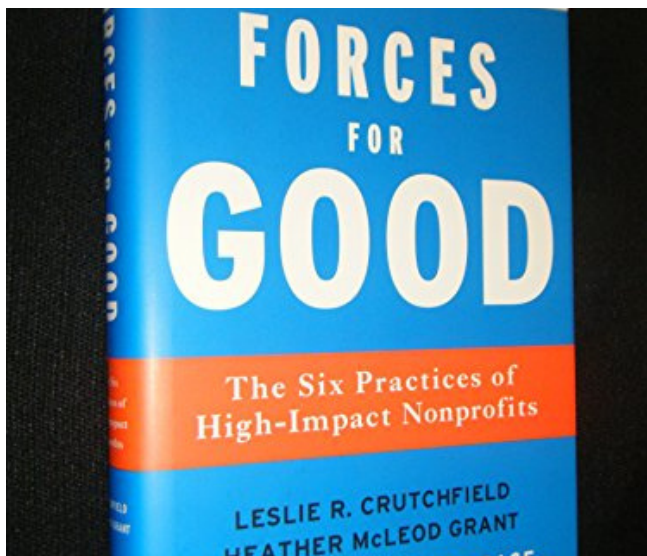
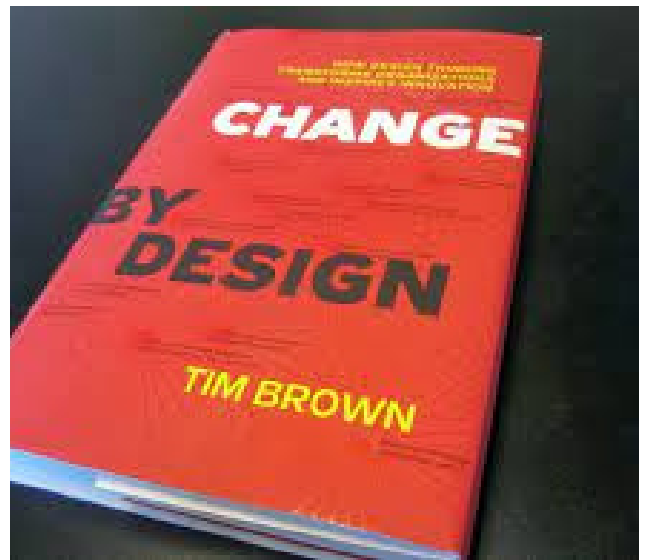


# RECOMMENDED READINGS TO ASSIGN WITH INNOVATION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Brest, Paul, and Hal Harvey. *Money Well Spent: A Strategic Plan for Smart Philanthropy*. Redwood City, CA: Stanford Business Books, 2018.

Brown, Tim. *Change by Design: How Design Thinking Transforms Organizations and Inspires Innovation*. New York: Harper Business, 2019.

Christensen, Clayton, Jeff Dyer, and Hal Gregersen. *The Innovator's DNA: Mastering the Five Skills of Disruptive Innovators*. Brighton, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2011.



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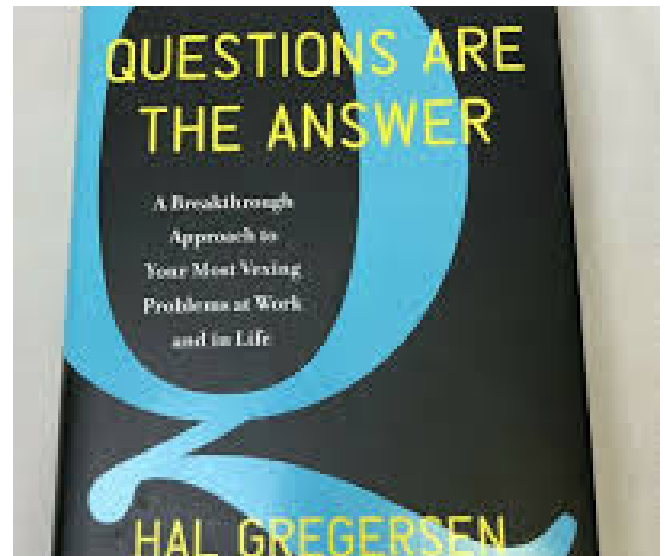
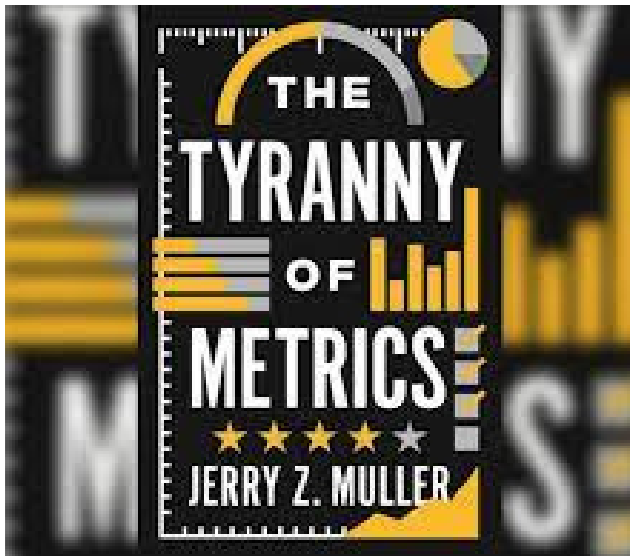
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Gregersen, Hal B. *Questions Are the Answer: A Breakthrough Approach to Your Most Vexing Problems at Work and in Life*. New York: Harper Business, 2018.

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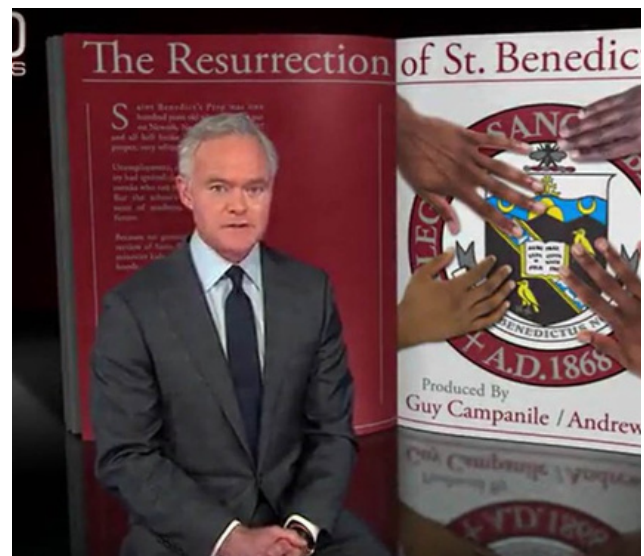
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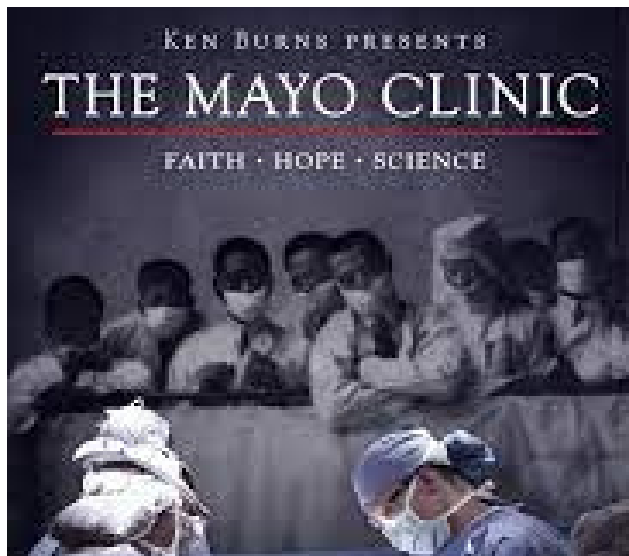
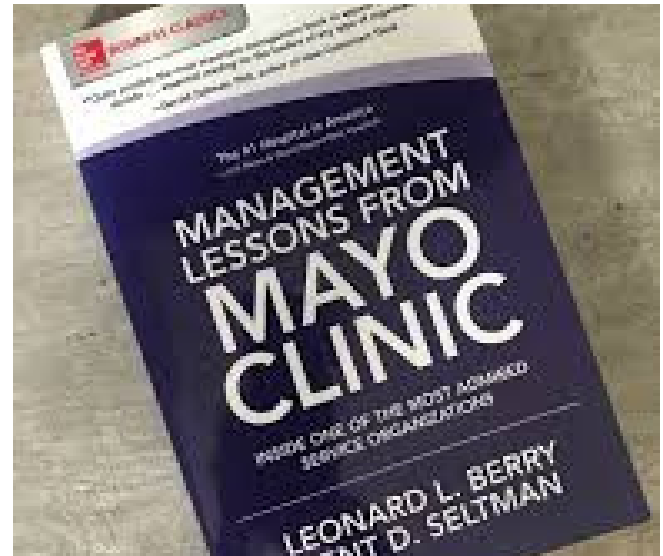
Ridley, Matt. *How Innovation Works: And Why It Flourishes in Freedom*. New York: Harper, 2020.



Seltman, Kent D. and Leonard Berry, *Management Lessons from Mayo Clinic: Inside One of the World's Most Admired Service Organizations*. New York: McGraw Hill, 2008.

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“Innovation is not just for commercial businesses. This fascinating book tells stories from innovative nonprofits, deriving vital lessons for how social entrepreneurs can and do turn new ideas into affordable, reliable and available improvements in people's lives.”

**MATT RIDLEY**

AUTHOR OF HOW INNOVATION WORKS