

# John-Kao-on The Innovative Mindset Podcast

[00:00:00] **John Kao:** [00:00:00] The need for innovation and the need to practice innovation never go away. It's kind of the long March. If you will.

[00:00:13] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [00:00:13] Hi and welcome to the innovative mindset podcast. I'm your host. Izolda Trakhtenberg on the show. You get my conversations with peak performing thought leaders, creatives, and entrepreneurs. We explore how you can innovate through creativity, compassion, and collaboration. I believe that innovation combined with compassion and creative thinking can save the world and I aim to bring you ways.

[00:00:35] You can do it too. If you're enjoying the show, I'd be super grateful. If you could support it by buying me a cup of coffee, you can buy me a cup@buymeacoffee.com slash Izolda tea. And now let's get on with the show.

[00:00:57] Hey there and welcome to the innovative mindset [00:01:00] podcast. My name is Izolda Trakhtenberg. I'm so happy that you're here and I am ridiculously happy and honored to have today's guest on the show. The man's name is John Kao, and you've got to hear this, the economist tag, John with the nicknames, Mr.

[00:01:15] Creativity, and a serial innovator. So you know how close this is to my heart. He is a thought leader, practitioner and activist who has played a leading role in the fields of innovation and business creativity. For over 30 years, his knowledge is eclectic and blends the perspectives of former Harvard business school professors, serial entrepreneur, musician, master facilitator, former CEO, Harvard trained psychiatrist, bestselling author, and Tony nominated producer of film and stage.

[00:01:45] Wow, Yamaha music corporation named him their first innovation artist. He's a trusted advisor to leaders of companies, startups, and nations that are on the hot seat to deliver meaningful innovation strategies and action agendas. [00:02:00] Wow, John, thank you so much for being on the show. I'm so honored and thrilled and I'm tripping over my words, but I just want to say thank you for being here and welcome.

[00:02:09] **John Kao:** [00:02:09] Well, the honors online. I'm happy to be here.

[00:02:12] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [00:02:12] Oh, this is so there are so many things about what you do and have done that every time I read more or learn more, I, I giggle like I'm, I ha I'm a school girl with a crush. I'm going to say that right now, because so much of the work that you're doing is, is it's crucial as we move forward.

[00:02:32] And especially this last year has been so much disruption. And you say, you talk about leading in a time of disruption and that you are looking for new and innovative ways to do that. And I would love it. If you would talk about that a minute, just as we get started, what, what does that mean to you? That we are now in this eighth time of disruption and what makes this disruption different than the disruptions we've had in the past?

[00:03:00] [00:03:00] **John Kao:** [00:03:00] Well, I'm glad you asked that because it's a great way to frame our conversation. And I think we need to be a bit critical not in a negative critical sense, but in a thoughtful sense about the word disruption, because it's kind of a word that carries some assumptions that once disruption has passed, things will return to a steady state or to a normal.

[00:03:20] I actually did a article recently in my forbes.com column where I compared the word disruption to the word, this continuity. And I actually think discontinuity is almost a better way of describing our situation, which is to say we're like sailors that have set forth like Magellan in the great age of sail with maps that were incomplete because in the middle of the ocean the often the legend would be, you know, beyond here, like lie monsters.

[00:03:47] And Magellan Vasco, da Gama and others set forth on faith that they would find India or they would find spices. And we are, I think, in an era of discontinuity in the sense that our. Existing [00:04:00] maps no longer suffice for helping us to navigate forward. And, and we're not in a way able to fall back on this idea that things will get back to normal or that a disruption will subside like a storm at sea that gradually gives way to calm waters.

[00:04:16] You know, if we think about what we as global civil society are faced with in terms of issues of climate war and peace social inequity et cetera, et cetera, these are mammoth wicked complex problems that can only be resolved by innovation. And that leads to the second point you mentioned in the opening, which is the need for a fresh viewpoint on.

[00:04:42] Innovation, as I like to say, we need to innovate innovation. Because innovation has been out there for a long time. It's like, Haley's comment. It comes and goes Praxis and wanes in terms of popularity and being in Vogue with management pundits and with business leaders. [00:05:00] But and, and the importance of innovation continues to be recognized in the C-suite in the you know, at the high levels of companies, CEOs recently polled said that innovation was one of their top priorities, but I would wager that a large percentage of them Can't even define the word meaningfully, let alone point to the practical expression.

[00:05:22] You know, the innovation as a discipline, as opposed to innovation as a mood or culture building effort, or as my friend, Rita McGrath likes to call it innovation theater, we're going to be very innovative and we're going to let our hair down and come up with wacky ideas and we'll do that for, you know, the duration of a corporate retreat.

[00:05:44] And then we'll go back to business as usual. So I think innovation Marvin Minsky who was one of the fathers of artificial intelligence once said that there were certain words that were like suitcases because you really needed to unpack them to get the full meaning. And innovation is [00:06:00] definitely one of those words.

[00:06:01] And because it's so overused in a way we have this phenomenon, I see a lot of innovation, fatigue, or innovation, cynicism, or innovation complacency where people say, oh yeah, you know, we've done innovation. In fact, one person who is a Washington

government official once amazingly told me that in his department they had tried innovation and it didn't work.

[00:06:25] So now they were doing other things. Oh no, not to, not to turn government into any kind of a cliché, but I, I, what I find often is that there's innovation, cynicism. It's kind of like we did it, you know, it kind of worked but. It was, it was time limited, you know, there was a beginning, middle and end to it.

[00:06:43] And in fact, innovation, the need for innovation and the need to practice innovation never go away. It's, it's kind of a, the long March, if you will. So we're in an, a era of discontinuity. We need to, re-imagine what the maps look like. And [00:07:00] innovation is more important than ever, but we need to have a fresh point of view about how to do it, and not just at the level of companies, but at the level of society.

[00:07:10] And also bringing it down to the, you know, the trees versus the forest for each one of us as individuals in our lives and in our work,

[00:07:21] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [00:07:21] I'm taking all of that in for a second. Wow. Okay. So. I first of all. Yes, absolutely. I agree. You're going to hear me say that a lot during this next few minutes, but, but yes, absolutely.

[00:07:36] The need for reinventing how we innovate and what it actually means to each of us on the individual corporate and even global scale is great. Absolutely. I understand that. And yet, how do we, I mean, I named this podcast, the innovative mindset, how do we as individuals and then companies and organizations and nations [00:08:00] and, and, and the world, how do we get comfortable with innovation?

[00:08:03] And if there's no sense of comfort, you mentioned something that was, that you said innovation as a discipline. What are the steps do you think of becoming disciplined as an innovator? What does that mean? And how do you practice it?

[00:08:19] **John Kao:** [00:08:19] Well, in order to answer that question, we have to agree on a definition of innovation.

[00:08:25] You know, I, I get into conversations about it often and I always have to start the conversation by saying, what do you mean? What do you mean by the word innovation? Because if we don't have alignment around the definition we really cannot have a conversation. So the dictionary defines innovation as if I amalgamate all the dictionary definitions, it goes something like this.

[00:08:48] Innovation is creativity applied to some purpose to realize value. So that's important to keep in mind because you know, creativity is the [00:09:00] human ability to generate new ideas, new insights and. It's something that all humans have, you know, it's the way our brains work. We free associate. We daydream, we dream at night.

[00:09:11] We are able to come up with new things, but it doesn't mean that those new things are valuable. Just like playing random notes on the piano is very creative, but it

doesn't lead to a marketable CD, you know, or composition. So creativity applied to some purpose. It has to be about something.

[00:09:28] You know, this is a problem I run into all the time in companies where they say, well, you know, our, the goal of our creative efforts is to grow our profits by 5% a year, or it's to accomplish some tactical goal. When in fact innovation always has to be the answer to a meaningful question because otherwise why bother, you know, it's why get out of bed earlier in the morning to serve that?

[00:09:51] Cause, and then finally it has to be about creating something of value. And I would argue of enduring a value. It has to [00:10:00] change the existing order of things. They, the, the simple example is Edison who, when he created the first light bulb was an inventor, but he really wasn't an innovator until light bulbs became pervasive and elect, you know, our society became electrified.

[00:10:17] So, you know, this whole notion that innovation is a discipline. You know, if you just take that dictionary definition, you have to be good at ideation, whether it's understanding your individual creativity or understanding how ideas emerge in human interaction collaboration, and then how it emerges in organizations in terms of culture and rewards and talent policies and leadership attention.

[00:10:45] And then how it emerges in societies where. Societal goals and purpose and identity and leadership translate either into a environment that encourages creative expression or, or stifles it. [00:11:00] Right. So then we turn our attention to another definition. So I've spent a lot of time trying to think about how to make innovation more tangible for practitioners.

[00:11:11] And you know, to me, innovation is a set of capabilities, capabilities, being things that require practice to acquire, like playing the piano, a set of capabilities that enables the continuous realization of a desired future. So, what that means is that you have to have some sense of almost moral purpose.

[00:11:35] I don't mean moral enough, a religious sense, but moral in the sense of of what is good, what is virtuous? What is true. And it has to be something that you just don't do episodically, but is part of what you do all the time. And that in order to fully realize innovation, you have to have a vision of the future that you want.

[00:11:55] You know, we, we have a vision of the future of our planet as [00:12:00] being in climate equilibrium and at peace. Well, you know, great. So how do we get there? And then the kippah capabilities break down into literally scores is of specific proficiencies that, you know, we, we, if we had 10 hours, we wouldn't be through that.

[00:12:15] But ultimately have to do with how you. Linked the right kind of human talents to the right kind of resources, to the right kind of ideas blended with the right kind of processes to enable innovation, the flywheel of innovation to begin to turn. And this is, you know, my thing is really about how you do innovation.

[00:12:34] You know, there are plenty of people who can tell you what it is and why it's important, but there are relatively few people out there who are focused on the how, and that's, that's part of my mission statement.

[00:12:48] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [00:12:48] Again, I have to take a couple of seconds and take all of that in it's. It's fascinating to me how this notion of the different areas that [00:13:00] we have to combine the capabilities, the resources, the opportunity for, for innovation. The, the thing that, I'm the thing that I'm struck by though, is something that you said as far as your definition and the, how, I guess the thing that, that makes me go, Hmm.

[00:13:18] I wonder is about creativity. That part of it is so you and I are both creative people and we're both musicians, which I think is fabulous. And one of the things that I do with the clients that I work with when I do speaking engagements, all of that is we talk a lot about thinking creatively, giving yourself permission to do that, to think creatively, because many people are afraid or think that they can't.

[00:13:42] So if I were going to ask you the following, I'm wondering what your answer will be. You might just go, oh, come on is older. But maybe, maybe it won't be, it won't be a silly question to you, but how can we learn from that notion of innovation to think creatively and how can [00:14:00] we think creatively to move forward?

[00:14:04] **John Kao:** [00:14:04] Well, creativity, as I said earlier, is an attribute of the way humans think and experience their environment. So everybody is creative in the literal sense of being creative, but where I think people get a little confused is equating creativity with talent, you know, so, so Mozart was creative, but he was also a musical genius.

[00:14:26] And all of us, you know, in a sense can learn how to find middle C on a piano or learn to listen to our inner monologue in terms of coming up with new things. But creative is not necessarily to be talented or gifted in that, in that sense. So having said that anybody can learn how to be more attentive to their creative output.

[00:14:49] They can be more attentive to. Understanding the conditions under which creativity flows for them and, and how to increase the odds of [00:15:00] generating creative ideas Twyla Tharp the choreographer wrote a great book called the creative habit where you know, she gets into very practical tips about, you know, how to record your ideas.

[00:15:12] One thing that I, I adopted from her book cause I, I found it highly amusing and ultimately very, very useful was every time she has an idea for a new project, the first thing she does is she she purchases a box and labels it with the name of the project and it might be an empty box for a long time, but it becomes a way of making the idea or the impulse tangible often when I start a project I'll, I'll have a loose-leaf binder.

[00:15:38] With nothing in it. I'll put a very nice cover illustration on it and label it with the project name. It's the same idea. And and then ultimately fill it in. But at the beginning it's creating a they're there for the idea to land and to be able to live. So there are there are mountains of of books and a lot of [00:16:00] knowledge about how to enhance ideation.

[00:16:02] I, you know, I, I even in my own small way contributed to that. I wrote a book called jamming, which was really what can leaders learn from jazz musicians because jazz musicians are paid to generate new musical ideas. That sound good. As a capability, you know, they don't wish to be creative or, you know, prayer, rubber chicken bones together.

[00:16:24] They sit down at the piano and play new notes. That sound great. And it's again, and it's not because they got inspired or, you know, they, they participated in innovation theater it's because they spent decades practicing and studying and learning and immersing themselves in a discipline. So that at the moment of inspiration they could generate something new.

[00:16:45] It's

[00:16:45] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [00:16:45] interesting that you said that it's. It's having the skill to back up the talent. It feels like to me, talent feels in Nate, it's something that you are perhaps born with and then need to build on or build the [00:17:00] skills, but skills you can learn, you can teach yourself the piano or you can learn from, from an instructor.

[00:17:06] And, and yet there's a lot of failure in music. I mean, I grew up playing the violin for example. And boy, did I fail a lot because if you're not just right, what was that

[00:17:18] **John Kao:** [00:17:18] takes a while to sound good when you're learning how to play the violin?

[00:17:21] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [00:17:21] Absolutely. It takes a long while. Yeah. Yeah. And yet there, so just a little bit of a background on me, so, so that you can understand the question about to ask better.

[00:17:32] I went to high school with the likes of Andrew LOPA and Jeffrey seller, and you're, you've, you've done work in, in, on Broadway. So you I'm sure you know who they are. And you could tell that they were different. Even in high school, even when we were doing musical theater together, Jeffrey was always going to be a producer of some sort that was his great passion.

[00:17:51] And then, you know, because of his efforts, we have you know, and of course Lin Manuel Miranda, but we have the likes of Hamilton. We have the likes of rent. [00:18:00] Andrew was always different. Also, there was something about both of them that their talent, you could feel it was innate. And yet they, they both went on and just practiced and practiced and practiced.

[00:18:11] And so I wonder for those people who are not perhaps innately talented, what are your thoughts about building those skills? What are your thoughts about saying, okay, this is a muscle that I can exercise and I can improve. As far as being creative, as far as being an innovator. Can you do it just like Malcolm Gladwell says with 10,000 hours or are you sort of out of luck if you don't have that innate talent to begin with?

[00:18:39] **John Kao:** [00:18:39] Well, I think I, my belief is that we all have the innate talent to develop new ideas that could be meaningful. But as you said, and I was going to use the

word muscle, there, there is a need to practice. And I think that innovation in companies especially is, is this kind of mental gymnastic that [00:19:00] says, well, you know, you read this book or hear this speech or learn this set of rules.

[00:19:05] And then you'll, you'll be more innovative when I think. That's that's like, you know, that's like learning how to play jazz by having somebody show you PowerPoint slides of using you on how to play the diminished scale with the proper fingering. But until you actually sit down at the piano and practice, you're nowhere and practice is really the key to gaining proficiency and gaining skillfulness, so to speak.

[00:19:33] So, so the question that I often ask when I'm working with people, whether they're in government or in business is what is your practice model for innovation? What are the things that you feel are most important that contribute to being an innovative organization that you practice on a routine basis.

[00:19:52] So as to, you know, hone that proficiency and usually the answer is you know, we don't really, it's a hard [00:20:00] question to answer. We don't have to really have an answer to that. So training is important. The ability to establish objective processes that can be repeated. And you know, it's like if you facilitate a design thinking session, once you'll be okay at it, if you do it 50 times, you'll feel really, really capable.

[00:20:19] Is the organization able to support that level of practice because, and, and does it have an answer as to why practicing that particular skill is important and how it relates to an overall innovation story for the organization? So it's, you know, once you pull on the thread of innovation, you know, you find that it links to quite a few other considerations, which makes it a complicated affair to manage.

[00:20:48] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [00:20:48] And yet companies who want to, and people who want to and governments that want to become more innovative. And certainly we're seeing [00:21:00] this with the new administration coming in and all of these different things. As far as the climate different initiatives, how, how do we, as, as innovative thinkers, as innovative people or organizations, what's the messaging behind that?

[00:21:17] How do we get other people on board or other organizations or other governments or other nations on board with the innovations for something like climate, for example, we're one country, won't one country doing something won't necessarily make. The entire planet healthy again, but a lot of countries working together will definitely make an impact.

[00:21:39] What would your thoughts be on that? How do we get people and organizations and governments bought in to this new way of thinking?

[00:21:47] **John Kao:** [00:21:47] Well, the first point is that issues like climate, the wicked problems that face the world are not American problems or Chinese problems or Indian problems, they're human or global problems.

[00:21:58] And so they have to be looked at as a [00:22:00] global systems kind of a challenge. Cause you know, America could become net zero carbon, but if the rest of the

world isn't, you know, we have to breathe there that belongs to everybody. So I think a lot of the challenge for making the shift to an innovation.

[00:22:19] Oriented posture, whether it's in a company that's going through a transformation effort or whether it's galvanizing the world around an agenda like climate is, is creating a sense of urgency. Change doesn't happen in less. There is a reason to change. You know, people are busy enough with their day to day.

[00:22:37] And the idea that you get out of bed earlier in the morning to address a challenge, won't really resonate and less. There's a sense that there are real consequences and th th the problem with something like climate change and the environment as. An example is that, you know, people may intellectually understand that it's a problem, but it doesn't show up in your day to day life.

[00:22:58] You know, it's not like I, it gets darker [00:23:00] or you know, you get a bill for your electricity. That's twice as big. And, you know, there's a disconnect in terms of what you, as an individual would do to contribute to the environment. So, you know, you could recycle and, you know, you could try to be conservative about using your water and things like that, but there's no connection between that personal narrative and the collective narrative.

[00:23:23] So instilling a sense of urgency, number one, and then creating a connection between individual action and the collective wellbeing. So, you know, There are attempts. And I think there's going to be a lot more of this coming down the line that almost creates personal dashboards where your activities around consumption and so forth and so on.

[00:23:44] You know, your, your carbon footprint, et cetera, are reflected in recommendations about shifting your behavior. The, the, the, at the national or supernational level, the question is creating buy-in, you know, like if there were some massive disruption [00:24:00] in the global ecosystem that nobody could ignore, then action would be taken just like, you know, the Penn global pandemic has been for all of its unfortunate consequences are real accelerant of national governments taking a global point of view.

[00:24:16] And I'm sure there's going to be a lot of call in the aftermath or even currently for new mechanisms for. Mitigating, if not preventing the next pandemic and figuring out mechanisms of international cooperation that go beyond the really unseemly kind of, you know people elbowing each other out of the way and finding that they weren't prepared.

[00:24:37] And you know, all of the kinds of shifting things that happened around vaccine allocation globally and so on. So I think it's about it's about leadership and it's about the narrative and it's about creating a sense of urgency. And once people understand what is needed, then they can fall in.

[00:24:55] I mean, if there's no alignment around what the problem is and how to address it, then of course nothing's [00:25:00] going to happen.

[00:25:01] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [00:25:01] Oh, you're singing my song. Yeah, absolutely. And it's interesting. And. It's always been fascinating to me as I worked in earth system science at NASA for many years. And this notion of the difference between weather and climate was very it was profound for people because weather is whether or not it's going to rain tomorrow and climate is years and decades.

[00:25:23] And so w the, the issue that we ran into was that people had there's a little bit of a problem. Societaly globally thinking. Long-term that you have to think that, oh, 50 years from now, 40 years from now, the climate will change 20 years from now. The climate will change. And that is important to me now.

[00:25:41] So getting people to address it with that sense of urgency, I agree with you. It's really important that the, the thing that I think a lot of people, certainly a lot of my colleagues at NASA struggle with is how, how to, how to get that sense of urgency in front of people. If, if some people are still, [00:26:00] you know, trumpeting that it doesn't exist, that there is no such thing as human, human caused or human accelerated climate change.

[00:26:07] So do you have thoughts on that? What are your thoughts on. Changing the thinking of people who either deny something like this or, or, or, or refuse to think that it could be important. Now when the consequences might not be felt for decades.

[00:26:27] **John Kao:** [00:26:27] Well, so this is storytelling. I mean, one of the reasons why I delved into the cultures of Hollywood and Broadway is because I was fascinated by people who made a living, telling stories and selling them to hundreds of millions of people.

[00:26:40] So it's one thing, if you publish a white paper or give a speech, it's another thing. If you create a a movie so one of the reasons why an inconvenient truth for its time was such an influential. A piece of media was because it told the story in visual terms and it made [00:27:00] the issues of climate really quite difficult to ignore.

[00:27:03] I mean, you have to be in denial to watch the movie and not come out of it, feeling like there was a real a real problem and often, you know, a sense of urgency isn't felt it has to be created. I did some work for a guy named Jaan Timur when he had just taken over Phillips the big Dutch technology conglomerate.

[00:27:22] And he in his first management meeting put one item on the agenda for discussion, which was a handout and the handout was a newspaper front page. And the headline story in the upper right-hand corner was Phillips goes bankrupt. And it was a well written story with a lot of analysis set in the future about how this great company, you know, sort of a general electric level company had gone bankrupt.

[00:27:49] And that was the only thing that he discussed with his senior people that day. And so in order to take the long view we have to take the idea of [00:28:00] wellbeing, planetary wellbeing down from the level of abstraction, to the level of personal advocacy. You know, we have to be thinking about how it relates to the world that our children are going to be in.

[00:28:10] It has to do with our sense of, you know, generative responsibility, as you know, the, the generation that right now is in the driver's seat to assure the, you know, the future viability of the planet, which right now is in some doubt, I mean, it's not horrible yet, but it's bad and getting worse by the day.

[00:28:27] So this, this is where, what I call moral intelligence or the ability to craft bridges between innovation and purpose become really, really important. And to create that sense of moral activation. And again, not in the religious sense, but in the values based sense of virtue to to, to frame the right kinds of activity.

[00:28:50] And, you know, a sense of urgency comes from understanding the problem, you know, and I have this framework called the second, this intelligence is that I've been sharing with people, which is a refresh view of how innovation [00:29:00] needs and leadership. Need to work. And one of the key intelligences is context intelligence, or the ability to deeply understand the truth of what's going on in your environment and not to be constrained by denial or by your biases or by your inability to do good research or your ability to go outside of your institution or your frame of reference.

[00:29:22] And it's only when you have an accurate point of view, uncontaminated by prejudice or bias that you can then say, oh, we really are in serious trouble. And now we have to really think about the scale at which we operate as innovators, both innovators as individual humans, but also innovators as the institutions of society.

[00:29:44] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [00:29:44] I love that you've mentioned the six intelligences and I love the notion of sort of objective observation instead of, instead of letting your biases. Color what, what you think or what you do. You'll [00:30:00] try to be objective as much as possible. I wonder if you wouldn't mind talking. Cause I, I was, that was actually literally the next question I was going to ask was about the six intelligences.

[00:30:10] What prompted you to develop them? And if you don't mind sharing, what are they

[00:30:16] **John Kao:** [00:30:16] sure. So, you know, I've been exposed to lots of different leadership frameworks over the years, and I felt during the pandemic that at least for me, it would be important to take a fresh look at what you really needed to be good at in a time of of this continuity and, you know, turbulence that we've experienced.

[00:30:33] And that a lot of the old playbooks around leadership weren't really that valuable in this, in this situation. So I took a leave from the. Notion of multiple intelligences, which is actually an education concept developed by Howard Gardner. Who's a former colleague at he's at the school of education at Harvard.

[00:30:52] And you know, he said, well, there's the kind of analytical intelligence that you have when you take sat [00:31:00] tests or math tests, but really there are other intelligences, like kinesthetic intelligence, if you're a great dancer or a auditory intelligence, if you're a great musician or spatial intelligence, if you're a great architect and that we don't test for these are really.

[00:31:15] Pay attention to them or educate for them in the same way we do for that more narrow kind of rational analytical intelligence. And I thought, oh, well, I have always believed that. So let me think about whether I can come up with a framework of archetypes of intelligence that are relevant for today.

[00:31:33] So the, so there are six and the first is context intelligence and, you know, it's, it's, it's what so Bill Bradley was a very famous basketball player in his day. And uh, you know, he was described as always having a sense of where he was, you know, a situational awareness and you know, people like fighter pilots know that they have to be able to not only have 360 degree perspective, but be able to translate that [00:32:00] immediately into a, a decision and an action taking right.

[00:32:04] In order to prevail in fighter pilot combat and things of this kind. So, so there's a whole bunch of knowledge and recommendations around how to create context intelligence, both for individuals and for organizations, moral intelligence, which we've already spoken about is the second, which is the kind of compass of values that basically shape the, the purposeful intention of an organization or of an individual for that matter.

[00:32:29] And, you know, what are the values that undergird your your activities? Then you have human intelligence, which is basically cultivating the sensitivity to others that enables collaboration that enables the, the ability to read the language of people. So that. Culture building organizational transformation, narrative development, resonate with humans because so often management is this human free exercise of applying analytical power to, you know, your marketing strategy or your finance [00:33:00] strategy.

[00:33:00] But people have a vote and increasingly in this kind of, and post pandemic distributed, you know gig economy world sensitivity and to, especially to talent, you know, and to creative process is really important. And then generative intelligence is basically how you generate ideas and realize value from them which is kind of a repackaging of innovation but and applies to individuals organizations, and even to societies as a whole, as a whole, then we have technological intelligence because.

[00:33:32] I argued that many people in positions of leadership don't have a finger feeling for how the development of technology is accelerating and how technologies are beginning to. Blend and, you know, fit together in different ways. You know, the whole merging of the biological and the digital is both confusing and filled with opportunities.

[00:33:55] And also how technology relates to your organization [00:34:00] and to the team that every organization is going to be influenced by artificial intelligence and digital technology, digital transformation and transformation for innovation are increasingly converging as topics of concern. And then finally transformation intelligence, again, borrows from some of what we've already discussed, which is, you know, what's your theory of change and how do you affect that transformation?

[00:34:26] So whether it's transformation at an individual level or transformation at an enterprise level, you know, what are the levers for accomplishing that? What are the metrics? How do you know that you've been successful? What's the role of narrative, a

culture shift, leadership behavior, et cetera. So the feedback that I've gotten and I've turned this into various learning regimes, there's an online course.

[00:34:49] That's going up shortly that I hope will be available to lots and lots of people. The feedback I've gotten is wow. You know, here we are in this era of discontinuity, all of [00:35:00] these matter, these six intelligences they resonate, how do we get more? How do we learn about these? And, you know, I feel like you need all of them at least to a certain extent, cause it's like a wheel, you know, the wheel is missing a segment and it's flat on that segment, the wheels, not going to turn very effectively.

[00:35:19] And it's also a great way of identifying gaps. Both in yourself and also in your organization, because if you have an organization that's not proficient at some of these things it's just, I would argue not going to be as successful in the current environment,

[00:35:36] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [00:35:36] what a wonderful breakdown. And, and I'm so glad that you have a class that you'll be offering. I hope that you'll let me put that in the show notes so that, so that people can, can find it and perhaps take it. I'm interested in. You mentioned something while you were talking about them, about how often these various intelligences relate to each [00:36:00] other, like you said, well, we talked about that when we talked, you know, this is a callback to innovation, this is a callback to this.

[00:36:06] It seems to me that they it's almost like firing synapses in the brain, that they are going to need to use the, all the different intelligences in order to, to, as you said, prevail. And that brings me right back around to music. I feel like when you're playing a musical instrument, in many ways, you need to access all of those intelligences as well in order to be able to Excel at your chosen instrument.

[00:36:32] If it's your voice, your piano, your violin, whatever, what are your thoughts about that relationship? I know that you've used music in the past and probably still do to, to help others innovate and to help yourself innovate. How do you relate music to these intelligences and to innovation as a whole.

[00:36:50] **John Kao:** [00:36:50] Well, it's really a great question.

[00:36:52] And I, I think this is probably an opportunity for me to step out and reflect for a moment on exactly that [00:37:00] question. Cause I, I wouldn't say that I've thought about it in exactly that way before, so well, let's see. I mean, I'll relate this, especially to jazz, right? So in jazz the performer needs to have a multidimensional awareness of what's going on and it's not thinking it's really it's sensory awareness, it's emotional Intel emotional awareness.

[00:37:23] It's it's awareness of the traditions it's awareness of the sweet spot between what's familiar and what is new it's awareness of one's inner emotional state awareness of the performance environment. So there's a number of dimensions of context, intelligence that are required. Then the second moral intelligence well, you know, for, for me and for, I think anyone who.

[00:37:47] You know, it, it takes it seriously. Sitting down at the piano is it's a commitment to purpose and a commitment to authenticity. And, you know, we fall short constantly, or I feel like I fall short constantly, [00:38:00] but the, what matters is picking yourself up and, you know, pursuing the path of virtue to try to create the most beauty and the most authentic way possible.

[00:38:09] So it's purposeful and it's about creating that experience for other other people and then human intelligence. I mean, I, I have found that the most interesting kind of challenges for me have been on the self knowledge and mastery of self side, because you know how willing you are to take risks and how willing you are to be on stage and your anxiety to the extent you have it about performance you know, Kenny Werner, who's a music, music, educator, and jazz performer has this great.

[00:38:40] A book called effortless mastery, which is all about really overcoming the inner voice of doubt and judgment, which is so important in improvisation. And you know, jazz is really a way of learning about yourself. I mean, not that it's about Naval gazing or narcissism, but that to be a good jazz player, you have to be in tune with yourself as well as the music.

[00:39:00] [00:38:59] And then, you know, jazz is inherently about innovation because it's about creating new, new notes that have to sound good and create value. D the technological intelligence, I would say relates in a very literal way to, you know, I, I'm fortunate to have a really good piano and every day I look at it and Marvel at how.

[00:39:20] Humans were able to create something so beautiful and also so functional. So mastering the instrument, but now, you know, we have all of this new technology for music. We have technologies that allow people to jam together at a distance over the internet. We have digital keyboards that include lots of learning, learning software and learning assets.

[00:39:42] We have digital keyboards that can do everything, but stand on their head. There was a lot to know there. And then finally, transformational intelligence. So, you know, this relates partly to the issue of practice. You know, it's partly a division of, you know, what kind of musician are you [00:40:00] heading in the direction of who do you want to be?

[00:40:01] But then also what's the practice model or the steps in the journey that will take you there. What's your theory of change? And, you know, I know for me that you know, my studies of jazz have occurred at two. Times in my life. One of which was when I was a teenager followed by a long hiatus and now I've picked it up again at, with really serious intent.

[00:40:22] And so the issues of how my playing is evolving are very much on my mind. So transformation intelligence is important there as well. So there it works, right?

[00:40:33] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [00:40:33] I, yeah, I had a feeling it would, because I've thought about this a lot on when, you know, they're the relationships, there are so striking and this notion of transformation, it's not specifically in strictly to the intelligences, but I feel like especially jazz, cause I'm a jazz musician as well.

[00:40:50] Jazz singer. You, you have an opportunity to when you're special, when you're playing with other people too, to be in the pocket to really [00:41:00] make something greater than the sum of its parts. When you are all listening to one another and collaborating, and then your audience gets enriched by that collaboration by that jazz collaboration, or even if it's not jazz for me, traditional music in many ways is similar because there's a lot of improv and a lot of feeling out what the other musicians are doing so that you can again, make something greater than the sum of its parts.

[00:41:25] So what role do you think the relationship with an audience has in the six intelligences and also within jazz?

[00:41:37] **John Kao:** [00:41:37] Can you rephrase the question again? Yeah.

[00:41:40] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [00:41:40] I talked so long that you're going, I don't know what's going on anymore. Well, I, the thing that, I'm the thing that I'm asking really is. When you, when you are innovating you're, as you said, it's with a purpose.

[00:41:54] So it's never, well, it's almost been never just for yourself. It's for, for perhaps a greater good or for [00:42:00] bigger group. And the same can be said for when you're playing music, unless you're sitting at home in your bedroom and playing your piano, your guitar, and you never play out there. There is this notion of sharing, sharing the innovation, jazz musicians, who, who will get up in the smallest room and, and play that night, for example.

[00:42:19] So, so how do we relate that? How do we, how do we do that? And what is the relationship there between the innovator, whether it's a musician or somebody in technology or a leader and the audience whose lives and minds and thoughts and hearts that they are, are trying to affect?

[00:42:40] **John Kao:** [00:42:40] Well, What I'm taking from your question is the need to create a bridge between the person who's, let's say emitting the the new innovative experience or idea or musical expression or whatever.

[00:42:55] And, and the audience. And, you know, it's like a sweet spot in, in [00:43:00] jazz. You know, if, if you are if you're. If you're what you're presenting is to cut and dried or elemental, it's not going to land, but if it's to expeditionary or adventurous, it won't land either. And that sweet spot, which you gauge by audience feedback, nonverbal cues the, the vibe in the room and so forth and so on is a moving target.

[00:43:24] And sometimes it evolves in the course of a single interaction with an audience. I mean, being a public speaker as I am from time to time, you know, that reading the audience continuously is one of the key skills of delivering a great presentation over, over, you know, whatever, a 30 to 60 minute timeframe.

[00:43:42] So having also then. The, the inner integrity of what's being offered, not just as a, you know an exercise in, in corporate entertainment. I mean, so, so much of what is going on out there in terms of keynote speaking is about, you know, can you make the audience laugh and [00:44:00] feel as titillated as possible?

[00:44:02] And like they got a free admission to Ted as opposed to really thinking about the inner authenticity of the of what's being communicated and how it's going to land and how it's going to contribute in their own journey of transformation. So, you know, I think these, these elements that we've been talking about provide a really handy framework to be able to evaluate.

[00:44:24]Your work as an innovator, what you're putting out there, how it lands with an audience, et cetera.

[00:44:31] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [00:44:31] And, and yet it's interesting what you just said. It's a, it's a constant, almost on a micro level. It's a constant reinvention of the relationship with your audience. And on a macro level, you can iterate based on the feedback you got and, and how things went each time that you're, you're up in front of an audience.

[00:44:50] And, and that brings me to something that I'm, that I would love it. If you would talk about just a little bit, you, you talked some about [00:45:00] intersections and where, where those connections are made, and I know that you, you have a live stream show called intersections, and I would love it. If you would talk a little bit about the show and what your process is, and also what your goal is for keeping this this live stream show going.

[00:45:16] Sure.

[00:45:17] **John Kao:** [00:45:17] Well, intersections is a livestream show that happens every Thursday, 10 30 Pacific. I do it with a partner named Brian Solis. Who's among other things, the global evangelist for innovation at Salesforce. So we have between us a pretty enormous network of people who are on the edges of their fields.

[00:45:37] And intersections is basically where culture technology and innovation come together with conversations every week with a couple of pioneers. In their field. So it could be a one of the leaders of artificial intelligence research in China, it could be we just had the, the general manager of the San Jose sharks talking about the reinvention of the sports [00:46:00] venue and sports franchise experience and the role of digital in all of that.

[00:46:04]We've had musicians talking about advanced technologies that are going to change the way music learning occurs. We've had military strategists talk about cyber security and the solar winds hack we've had big deal, domain experts in innovation, like read them and the graph. So it, it varies, it partly, it relates to our own interests.

[00:46:26]And, but it, it, it exhibits a principle, which is that combustion in the sense of innovation combustion tends to happen when you bring diverse perspectives together and force them to coexist in a space in this case, say conversational space because it's we we've, we've had 34 shows to date, and each one has been more exciting and more exhilarating than, than the last.

[00:46:50]There's also a website called intersections, live.com where we have the full interviews archive, because they're not. Really time-bound, they're, they're [00:47:00] quite evergreen and we're going to be doing a lot of additional work on the content to make it

more available to others. So, you know, it's just another way for me to stay current and have fun talking with interesting people like you.

[00:47:14] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [00:47:14] I'm so grateful. You said that. Thank you so much. And I'm, I, I have listened to just a couple of the episodes, but I want to make sure that I go and listen to more. I I'm I'm so like, honestly, John, I could keep you here for the next six hours and chat with you, but I know you have a life to get to. So I, I wanted to talk just a little bit if it's okay with you about a couple more things that you and I discussed shortly before we started recording this episode, one of them was John cale.live, and the other one is, and this one is so close to my heart.

[00:47:46] About your thoughts on the need, the urgent need to reinvent music education. I was very lucky. I had incredible music education in the public schools, but I know that [00:48:00] the, the emphasis on it has really died down. And I think it's, it's a floundering in many ways. I teach nothing against teachers. Teachers do as much as they can, but I think we're, we're in an age now where we really do need to revitalize it.

[00:48:16] So I would love it. If you wouldn't mind chatting about both John kao.live for a second, and also this notion that you have about re-inventing music education. I would really love it because both of those fascinate me. Sure.

[00:48:29] **John Kao:** [00:48:29] Happy to do that. So, you know, one of the things that's been going on, especially during the pandemic is not only the need, but the ability of people with some, a bit of expertise to be able to reinvent their connection to their audience using social media.

[00:48:45] Using video and using all of the new tools that are coming on stream the applications that enabled people to establish a fairly sophisticated interface with their audience. So I'm not blind to that either, even though I grew up in kind of like the [00:49:00] analog world where, you know, you would teach at a good business school and people would call you up and that would be it, right?

[00:49:06] I mean, now it's far more complex and also the opportunity to have an impact more broadly is enabled by the technology. So John kao.live is my recent attempt to put my, some of my learning experiences online. To enable people to subscribe to my ongoing generation of content to be able to access me one-on-one under certain circumstances for consultations.

[00:49:32] And we'll see how it goes. It's just in the process of being launched. I'm really excited about it. I mean, during the pandemic, I think even though it's had its own shortcomings and limitations put, has put limitations, it's also been a great enabler of a different form of social interaction. And so I'm, I'm eager to see how that plays out with John Cale live there's music.

[00:49:55] Education is concerned. I have a real, you know, I tend to organize my work work based [00:50:00] on projects or causes, right. And so I've adopted music education as a cause, because I think it's both extremely important from a societal point of view and also

really in need of some radical. Re-invention first of all, just taking a half step back music is to my mind, one of the most important things that humans have.

[00:50:22] And it's one of the most important things that societies have. And, you know, some societies like you know, Finland for instance, has great music education and the highest per capita percentage of trained musicians of any country in the world. You know, China is investing in music education because they believe it contributes to brain development, which is necessary to be competitive in the global economy.

[00:50:45] We in America have been divesting ourselves of music education, cause it's not a high priority relative to other things. And I think that's wrong for a number of reasons. I mean, music humanizes us and develops our brains and [00:51:00] gives us cognitive skills and emotional skills, relational skills that are really, really important.

[00:51:06] But. And, and, you know, we have this social institution of music, educators public school, music teachers music schools, and what's happening. What I see, I recently wrote an article for the national association of teachers of music or music educators called music education in the age of innovation because I became, I gave some talks to music, educator organizations, and did some workshops.

[00:51:32] I I'm, you know, Yamaha made me their first artists and innovation and put me in front of deans of music conservatories and public school music teachers in different ways. And I became aware of the fact that, you know, not to generalize, but that there was a whole world of music. Learning that was growing up around the traditional music institutions that had nothing to do with them.

[00:51:56] You know? So today, if you go to YouTube, YouTube is the new [00:52:00] music conservatory, and there are thousands of citizen teachers out there who are happy to show you how to do, you know, urban, dirty chords, or you know, how to do patterns on you know, modes of the melodic, minor, or what whatnot, or help you learn how to use your, you know, Nord, electric, piano, and that.

[00:52:19] Very often the people who know the most about things that young people are most interested in are not in the academy. You know, they're in this external space, so that music education has turned inside out. And also that there's now technology that enables people to learn without having to have a music teacher in the conventional sense.

[00:52:38] So I believe that, you know, it's the sixth intelligence is music. Education has to know more about what's going on. They have to reaffirm what's important about it. They have to you know, get with the whole technological intelligence piece because there's an ocean of technology out there that most music teachers are, you know, to be Frank, not aware of.

[00:52:59] And [00:53:00] then they have to have a model of how they want to evolve. So they stay relevant and serve these purposes. So it's a, it's a big topic.

[00:53:09] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [00:53:09] Again, you're singing my song. Yeah, it really is. And it's interesting. I'm one of those people on YouTube. I have videos up on how to learn to

sing for example. And so lots of us, I think musicians once you're, once you've, I can't say mastered, I will, I will forever be learning.

[00:53:26] I will never be a master, I don't think. And that's okay. I'm I'm, I'm okay. As a, as a lifetime learner of music. Hm. But yet when we are in the process yes. Of learning, you know, the NIH has done incredible studies on the fact that you use so many parts of your brain when you're learning, when you're playing a musical instrument, but when choir sing together, their heartbeats synchronize.

[00:53:50] I mean, it's, it's just incredible. And yet this, this is something that, like you said, the USA, for example, is divesting itself of music education. When I [00:54:00] think it's one of the most, I agree with you, it's one of the most crucial things. So do we. What do you think is the best way to revitalize it then? Is it to go through the music educators or is it to, like you said, create a sense of urgency in the intended audience, which might not be the music educators themselves, but might instead be the school districts and the governments and the conservatories?

[00:54:26] **John Kao:** [00:54:26] Well, I think it's both in more, I think that, you know, the the move to music learning outside of the music school system is going to continue. And there are going to be new platforms for linking people who know something to people who want to learn something in music, but, you know, you have these, this massive number of music educators out there and.

[00:54:49] I think they want to do the right thing. And I think that what they need basically is a bit more insight into what's going on and what their situation is and what they can do. And, you know, [00:55:00] it's kind of like the innovator's dilemma. If they, they they're locked into an existing model and they are improving that model, but they're not thinking outside that model as much as I think is necessary.

[00:55:11] So I think to put more music into our world is a multi-pronged effort. And I, I chose music educators because, you know, my experience is they're very receptive to this message and making them more aware of the reality of their situation will produce a lot of benefits. I mean, I, you know, I'm, I'm, I'm all over, what's going on in the world of the app developers and YouTube educators but that, that has a momentum of its own.

[00:55:38] Whereas music, education, I think needs a lot of re-imagining.

[00:55:46] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [00:55:46] Yeah, yeah. Again, I you're saying things that I have to sort of take a second and, and let it soak in and really and figure out what my, what my thoughts are on it, because, because it's so rich with with [00:56:00] value and, and I really appreciate you being so incredibly thoughtful in, in, in this conversation, I have just a couple more questions.

[00:56:09] First is what are you most curious about right now?

[00:56:17] **John Kao:** [00:56:17] Well I always have a long list, curiosity, the, you know, kind of theme of my whole life I, you know, I'm, I'm thinking a lot about cryptocurrencies and the whole non fungible token phenomenon. So I'm trying to get my mind more firmly around

that because for all kinds of reasons I'm spending a lot of time thinking about the offshore wind industry and the physics of energy generation from especially all of the huge macro projects that are going on in the ocean.

[00:56:49] And there are a lot of, a lot of reasons for that. And, you know, I'm, I'm curious to know if I'm ever going to master the The the modes of melodic minor to the point where they show up.

[00:57:00] [00:57:00] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [00:57:00] Yeah. I don't know. I, I just, I just go with it because I there's, no, again, you can, you can know the theory, but on some level for me anyway, it's, I've I have to feel it and then maybe it'll happen.

[00:57:15] And maybe it won't. And so a lot of it for me, depends on who I'm working with and who I'm singing and playing with because we play off each other. So good luck with that. I really, I look forward to hearing your pieces. Will you ever record them, do you think, will you ever share them

[00:57:30] **John Kao:** [00:57:30] out? Well, I, you know, I, I think I got to spend a lot more time in the woodshed, but I I've had the entertainment fantasy of doing some some live streaming at some point.

[00:57:39] Fabulous. And I'm always looking for a musical collaborators. So maybe we'll find a couple of pieces and we'll use a friend of mine, just invented some software that will enable. People in Brooklyn and people in San Francisco to play in real time or almost real time. Which has never been possible before.

[00:57:55] So maybe we'll be able to jam on some tunes.

[00:57:59] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [00:57:59] I would love [00:58:00] that. That, that would be my honor. That would be terrific. Yeah. I'll bring my, my fiddle and I'll bring my guitar and my voice and we'll see what we can do. And you know, it is interesting. I lead a holiday Carolyn group and of course I used to be in DC and I moved to New York city and they are still in the DC area.

[00:58:17] So when we, when we have to sing and there were a few live performances this year, there was no way for me to be part of that because I could not, there was no, there was no software. There was no anything that would allow us to sound appropriate if you will, musically appropriate when we were in different, different places.

[00:58:37] It just, so I'm really grateful to your friend for having invented that. That's fabulous. Thank you. Thank your friend for me. And yes, let's jam.

[00:58:46] **John Kao:** [00:58:46] Okay. Great.

[00:58:47] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [00:58:47] And here's the last question, John, and again, thank you so much for being here. I really appreciate you taking the time. It's a, it's a silly question, but I find that it yields some profound answers.

[00:58:57] And the question is this. If you had an [00:59:00] airplane that could sky write anything for the whole world to see, what would you say?

[00:59:05] **John Kao:** [00:59:05] I would say two words remain optimistic.

[00:59:12] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [00:59:12] I love that. I love that, especially right now. Thank you so much for sharing that. That's great. Is there anything else that you would like to say before we close out this fabulous conversation?

[00:59:24] **John Kao:** [00:59:24] No, I think I would just like to thank you for being such a great catalyst and conversational partner and I've enjoyed it.

[00:59:31] It's, you know, it's good to have the opportunity to step back a little bit and review one's thoughts about. Something that you know is almost at the level of an obsession, right? So there's a Parson, there's a tree's level of looking at it. And this got me back to the forest a bit.

[00:59:47] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [00:59:47] Wonderful. Well, thank you so much for saying that.

[00:59:49] I appreciate it. I had a fabulous time as well, and this has been the amazing John Kao on the innovative mindset podcast. I am your host Izolda [01:00:00] Trakhtenberg. If you've enjoyed the episode. Please. Let me know. I'd love to hear it. Go find John kao.live when it airs, go listen to intersections. Obviously, this man is incredible.

[01:00:11] Knows what he's talking about and has ideas. We all need to be paying attention to until next time, this is his old, the Trakhtenberg reminding you to listen, learn, laugh, and love a whole lot.

[01:00:29] so much for joining me today. I really appreciate you being here. Please subscribe to the podcast if you're new and if you like what you're hearing, please review it and rate it and let other people know. And if you'd like to be a sponsor of the show, I'd love to meet you on [patron.com/innovative mindset](https://patron.com/innovative-mindset).

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