



Innovation as a Teachable Skill: From Creativity to Market Success

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Abstract: Innovation extends far beyond new products or services; it encompasses how we work, organize, create value, and ultimately shape society. Drawing on fifty years of business experience, this talk challenges the notion that innovation is an innate talent. Instead, it argues that innovation is a teachable, learnable skill - there is no “smart or dumb,” only taught or untaught. Based on this belief, the speaker has developed a practical ten-step journey that transforms inventing from a sporadic act into a systematic and repeatable process. The talk will be structured around three interconnected pillars: creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship. Creativity is the ability to generate new ideas or solutions, something everyone is capable of. Innovation is the disciplined effort required to bring those ideas to life, preventing them from fading into mere conversation. Entrepreneurship completes the journey by translating innovation into market-ready products, services, processes, or models that customers value and are willing to pay for - thereby generating prosperity. At the core of this framework is added value: creating what does not yet exist. Participants will be invited to reflect on their long-term goals, the problems they want to solve, and the legacy they wish to leave behind. These reflections provide direction and momentum for innovation, setting the stage to explore the ten essential steps to success together.

Bio: Ergün Kırlikovalı is a Turkish-American chemist, entrepreneur, and community leader whose career bridges advanced materials science and civic advocacy. Born in 1952 in İzmir, Türkiye, he earned a B.S. in Chemistry from Boğaziçi University in Istanbul in 1974 and an M.S. in Polymer Science from the University of Manchester in England in 1975. After moving to the United States in 1978, Kırlikovalı worked as a polymer chemist in California and New York before founding the Integrated Polymer Industries, Inc. in 1985, a company widely known for developing specialized polymer coatings used in aerospace applications. Since 1998, he has been the inventor and sole supplier of radar-evading polymers for Northrop Grumman B-2 stealth aircraft, and since 2006 for Lockheed Martin’s F-35 fifth-generation aircraft. He has received multiple honors, such as being named “Exemplary Turkish-American Citizen of the Year,” and resides in Southern California with his family.

Hosted by: Prof. Erdem Sasmaz