



## Principled Innovation in a Public University: Challenges and Opportunities

**Cristy A. Guleserian**

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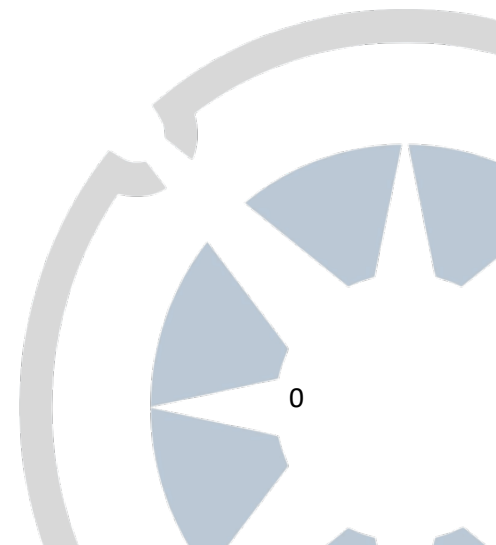
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Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues

University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 2TT United Kingdom

T: +44 (0) 121 414 3602 F: +44 (0) 121 414 4875

E: [jubileecentre@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:jubileecentre@contacts.bham.ac.uk) W: [www.jubileecentre.ac.uk](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk)



**Principled Innovation in a public university: Challenges and opportunities**

**Cristy A. Guleserian, Arizona State University**

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## *Abstract*

An institutional commitment to character as a core value opens possibilities to create conditions conducive to a principled approach to innovation. With this in mind, Arizona State University has identified Principled Innovation as its newest design aspiration, solidifying the university's commitment to innovating with character and values at the forefront of its decisions and actions. This paper proposes intentional strategies for authentic integration of a virtues based framework at a public institution that leverage existing assets while navigating and mitigating the possible individual, organizational, and systemic challenges that might otherwise become barriers to Principled Innovation.

## *Introduction*

In an ever-evolving, complex and divided world, it is crucial that future generations are prepared with the capacities and dispositions to make moral and ethical decisions as they address mounting systemic challenges facing global society. Every decision and action taken by individuals and collectives has far-reaching consequences. Whether driven by evidence based resources, self-interest, compassion, or emotion, choices shape the course of lives and impact society at large. However, the challenges faced today—economic disparities, climate change, rapidly evolving technologies, healthcare crises, and shifting demographics—have exposed the limitations of traditional approaches to innovation.

Intentionally cultivating decision-making capacities and the dispositions one brings into those decisions in the context of innovation, creates new possibilities for both individual and societal flourishing. Preparing those who will mold and model these capacities and dispositions for the rising generation and across all sectors of society now becomes an imperative for human, societal, and planetary wellbeing, as does cultivating the conditions within the environments where this preparation occurs. It is time to reimagine the role higher education plays in cultivating the conditions and capacities necessary to make decisions and take actions that are centered in character and values. Whether innovating to address large systemic challenges or considering innovative ways to respond to everyday interactions that shape individual lives, the ultimate goal is to prepare professionals and citizens who are intentional with moral and ethical decision making as they collaboratively innovate to address the complexities of an evolving world.

Driven by the commitment to equity, civic, and economic imperatives, Arizona State University has embarked on a commitment to cultivating character in decision-making within the university context. Drawing from diverse fields such as education, philosophy, psychology, and organizational change, university faculty, staff, and students, beginning with the college of education, have collectively constructed a comprehensive framework for character driven decision-making called [Principled Innovation \(PI\)](#) (MLFIC, 2019). This framework, as an approach to decision-making in innovation, is in the nascent stages of integration across the university.

The pluralistic nature of a large, global institution has posed opportunities and challenges from the conception of this work. Questions arose from the beginning about whose values and

virtues would take priority and how that would translate to organizational values that foster conditions within the institution to both develop and demonstrate character. This paper will explore some of the opportunities and challenges that are emerging as Principled Innovation is advancing from initial creation and implementation in a college of education to scaling across multiple university systems. Personal reflections and recommendations of next steps to navigate such hurdles and mitigate the intended and unintended consequences will be offered.

### *The Foundations of Principled Innovation*

The impetus to develop a character-based framework for decision-making originated in the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College (MLF<sup>TC</sup>) at Arizona State University. Leadership at MLF<sup>TC</sup> recognized the need to prepare future educators and leaders to make the kinds of innovative and ethical decisions that lead to equitable solutions. Recognizing that every decision made by educators has the potential to affect the lives and learning of students, educators, families and communities, it was necessary to explore a way of making decisions worthy of the confidence of those affected by them.

The values and ethics that drive individual and organizational decision-making are not always transparent, so it was imperative to create a clear, intentional, and shared process for how character could inform decision-making at MLF<sup>TC</sup>, as well as be developed in those entering the field of education. This led to a conversation about what it could mean to integrate a focus on character development in the systems of educator and leader preparation. Valid resistance quickly emerged. Challenging questions were posed around whose morals and virtues would be prioritized, who would be the focus of the initiative, and what would be the desired outcomes. Through a multi-year process, faculty, staff, students, and community partners examined frameworks, such as The Jubilee Centre's Framework for Character Education in Schools (Jubilee, 2017), along with other artifacts and literature from the fields of education, moral and character development, innovation, and intrapreneurship. This initial discovery process surfaced the importance of context and alignment with the university's charter, brand and priorities. The learning community proposed a process where learners actively pursue character development through practice and action. It became clear during this early phase of development that the college must tie the notion of character - what it is and why it matters — to ASU's defining characteristic of innovation.

Principled Innovation emerged as both a practice and a process in which individuals and collectives imagine new concepts, catalyze ideas, and form new solutions, guided by four domains of character — moral, civic, intellectual and performance (MLF<sup>TC</sup>, 2019). PI was identified as the core value of MLF<sup>TC</sup> and continues to be explored and iterated through practice and application. The work of formally codifying and evolving PI was collaborative, intentional, complex, uncertain and evolutionary. The framework is intended to be a guide to demonstrating and developing character within the systems of teacher and leader preparation, with a flexible approach to application. One of the key points of success at this stage of the process was the collective nature of the development of the framework, ensuring that those who would be asked to implement it were also invited to contribute to the development of the shared language and practices.

### *Operationalizing Principled Innovation*

With an initial framework in place, the question arose of how to operationalize PI in culture, curriculum, pedagogy, and communications within the college of education. Drawing from multiple approaches outlined in the character education, virtue development, and organizational change literature, the PI leadership team strategically designed learning experiences that supported the cultivation of knowledge, reflection, and practice of PI (Poole & Van de Ven, 2004; Berkowitz & Bier, 2005; Jubilee, 2020; Lamb et al., 2021; Brant et. al, 2022).

In this early phase, the first priority was to focus on faculty and staff development. Two consistent and counterintuitive challenges to implementing Principled Innovation arose: 1) competing priorities and 2) the speed at which the college and university operate. One approach to navigate these tensions was to integrate faculty and staff professional learning into existing responsibilities and priorities.

Educators frequently engage in collaborative ways of learning and growing together to improve organizational and learner outcomes, and to sustain organizational change (Blankenship & Ruona, 2007). Building on this existing practice, early PI learning opportunities included weekly lunch and learns, book studies, workshops, and long term immersive learning experiences. Efforts were customized to meet the needs of various audiences. Each collaborative learning experience brought opportunities for iteration. Recognizing the value of remaining nimble throughout the process, the practices of PI were used to guide next steps based on the needs of the learning community and the examination of experiences through continual reflection (MLFTC, 2018; MLFTC, 2019; MLFTC, 2020, MLFTC, 2023).

Another example of learning through doing centered on the redesign of educator and leader preparation programs that was happening concurrently with the college's development of the PI framework. Many challenges arose with the rapid pace of design and the expectation to include explicit PI content in the redesigned curriculum. Finding ways to ensure faculty tasked with the redesign were knowledgeable about PI became a priority for college and division leadership. Aligning the redesign activities with active exploration of PI presented an opportunity for both faculty and staff development in conjunction with the process. Participants grappled with their own understanding and practice of PI in the context of the redesign work. The PI team participated alongside faculty and staff throughout the process by supporting professional development, engaging in review, revision, and creation of curriculum, and contributing to the planning of design sessions.

In-depth facilitated experiences were created to enhance this process for key faculty and staff. These learning communities were known as the Faculty Fellows and Staff Catalysts. Both experiences were designed to cultivate knowledge and practice of PI through the process of engaging in innovative design that was already within the scope of faculty and staff responsibilities. These experiences were early iterations of the PI Community of Practice approach that is currently

used both at MLFTC and across ASU as a vehicle for the cultivation of knowledge and practice of PI.

### *Principled Innovation Communities of Practice*

The evolution of the faculty fellows and staff catalysts led to a third iteration of collaborative learning in the form of *Communities of Practice* (CoP). A CoP is a group of people who come together around a topic, problem, initiative, or opportunity to learn, grow, and improve through regular interaction. Three characteristics define CoPs: domain, community, and practice (Wenger & Snyder, 2000; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2000; Wenger, 2018). The domain of the CoP is a shared area of interest in which the members have a commitment to further learning to grow their expertise and impact. The community is the social structure in which members share information, engage in discussion, and learn from each other related to their domain of interest. The third characteristic is practice - the members of a CoP are practitioners who develop shared resources through stories, experiences, processes, and tools that influence their practice (Wenger, 2015).

Principled Innovation CoPs engage a spiraled approach to learning and growing through application of the PI framework and process coupled with the use of the Principled Innovation guiding questions, and the PI CoP guide and supporting resources. Through CoPs faculty and staff collaboratively explore character in the context of decision-making and innovation, and in turn carry their knowledge, skills, and dispositions to their students and colleagues through implicit and explicit activities in their various contexts (Guleserian & Conner, 2022). This approach has become a vehicle for both developing and demonstrating character collaboratively through shared learning and navigation of problems of practices, addressing topics such as systemic equity, continuous improvement, curriculum development, and faculty professional learning. Multiple CoPs have formed across MLFTC, and the organizing structure has now been adopted as one approach to advancing PI across the University.

### *Institutionalizing Principled Innovation*

Like character development, institutionalizing PI at ASU is a continual process of becoming. Understanding how a focus on character development through the practice of Principled Innovation will impact long term outcomes for individuals, organizations, and systems in education is still in its nascent stage. Early observations of change at MLFTC have been positive to the extent that ASU leadership has identified *Practice Principled Innovation* as a design aspiration that prompts the university community to place character and values at the center of decisions and actions (ASU, 2023). The possibilities of positive change are hopeful when considering the impact this commitment from a university of ASU's size and scale could have on innovation, emerging technologies, political and societal climate, and interactions as a pluralistic and global community.

Evaluation projects are currently underway to assess the work that is taking place at MLFTC. More on the outcomes and insights from this evaluation will become available in the coming years and will guide the continual iteration of both the PI framework and the CoP approach to cultivating

knowledge, reflection, and practice of PI. As these findings become available, they will guide the continued implementation of Principled Innovation across the university.

### *Early advancement of PI at ASU*

ASU's charter and design *imperatives* were born in 2002 out of a transition of leadership and an imperative to redesign the American research university. They communicate the institution's commitments to inclusion, advancing research of public value, and assuming fundamental responsibility for the overall wellbeing of the communities it serves (ASU, 2002). The eight *imperatives*, now referred to as *aspirations* to reflect continual pursuit of the identified ideals, have remained unchanged for twenty years. These aspirations act as core values that steer the ASU community towards achieving excellence, access, and impact.

In January 2023, ASU leadership announced that *Practice Principled Innovation* would become the ninth design aspiration of the university, advancing the commitment to prioritizing character and values in decisions and actions. This was announced through multiple channels of communication including videos, news articles, presentations to the Arizona Board of Regents, and a large-scale event for select ASU faculty, staff, leadership and community partners (Crow, 2023; Fuller, 2023).

Commitments have been made to demonstrate PI through various projects in ten colleges across the university, as well as specific initiatives in several non-academic units that reach students, faculty, staff, and communities. The momentum for the work will be animated by PI Catalysts and program managers who participate in CoPs, are champions in their respective colleges and units, and who are tasked with sharing leadership of PI as it is introduced to the ASU community.

In March 2023, the catalysts and program managers began cultivating knowledge and practice of PI through participation in PI CoPs. The CoPs meet biweekly, are organized and facilitated initially by the core PI team, with a graduated move towards shared leadership and use of the evolving Guide for PI CoPs (MLFTC, 2023) and the Seven Strategies for Virtue Development (Lamb et. al, 2021). Through engagement with the CoP, the catalysts engage in reciprocal sensemaking and sensegiving while grappling with big questions about what PI means to them as individuals, how they might habituate PI practices and work with their respective communities to contextualize PI (Nagashima & Gibbs, 2022). They've also addressed what many have described as the "tension" between PI and the way innovation has historically been practiced in various contexts within the university.

In a pluralistic university in both scope and scale, implicit and explicit differences in understanding and practice of PI are likely to be revealed as stakeholders grapple with the interface of PI concepts within existing university structures. Documenting this diversity of thought and action and the way the community navigates the uncertainty and divergent perspectives will be imperative and compelling to those guiding the efforts and others who are seeking to learn from the work. Plans are currently evolving to document the implementation process through multiple *modes*



of storytelling that allow for exploration of the individual demonstrations of PI, the relational connections between evolving and existing projects, the way people are learning about, using, and contributing to the resources, and everyday intersections of character and innovation that happen in conversations, meetings, projects, culture, and engagements. The latter has the capacity to highlight the dynamics of the spaces where people grapple with and make meaning of PI concepts through their individual and collective experiences. The various modes will be documented on a *living* website slated for release in 2024 where those interested can follow the evolutionary process and learn from these experiences.

#### *Implementation of PI and potential challenges*

While there has been an overwhelming demonstration of support for the new design aspiration from across university contexts, critiques and concerns about PI have also been raised since it was identified as a design aspiration by ASU President, Michael Crow. The conversations have extended beyond the historical preconceptions of character education that were posed by MLFTC faculty and staff and addressed through the co-creation of a shared language in phase one. Other wonders have now been raised around idealism, the individualistic nature of a virtue-ethics approach in a pluralistic university, and concerns that the time and attention necessary to authentically practice PI might be considered impractical and contradictory when considering the prevailing systems within the diverse environments and current culture of the university.

An institutional commitment to character informed decisions and actions in the process of innovation invites creation of conditions and capacities conducive to Principled Innovation. The intentional creation of such conditions, while not easy, is more manageable at the college level. It requires a reflective, intentional, and consistent approach to implementation and engagement across the entire organization, along with leadership that is fully committed to both implicit and explicit demonstrations of PI. Each participating college and unit has commitment from leadership to engage in demonstration projects that integrate PI in some sustainable way. The question now turns to the plausibility of fidelity in implementing an existing framework designed for a specific context, and the possible hindrances to the authentic integration of PI in other contexts.

#### *Navigating Uncertainty and Mitigating Challenges*

An official evaluation of the use of Communities of Practice as a vehicle for the cultivation of knowledge and practice of PI at MLFTC began in Fall of 2022 (JTF, 2023). While comprehensive findings from this evaluation are not yet available to share publicly, there have been early informal reports and observations that have alluded to possible hindrances to scaling PI both at MLFTC and the University. These challenges align with questions surfaced during nascent stages of phase one, anecdotal evidence gathered through observations and conversations, and reflections provided by ASU community members during a March 2023 event (Nagashima & Gibbs, 2022; Adelman & Borman, 2023). A thematic analysis of the above suggest at least four opportunities for growth as efforts to scale PI across the university proceed.



### Opportunity #1: *Individual Mindsets*

The complexity of practicing PI in a public and diverse learning community requires intentionality from individuals across the institution. Authentic leadership, a culture of psychological safety, and a spirit of intellectual humility are essential for individuals to feel comfortable with the discomfort of behavior and organizational change (Argandona, 2014; Edmonson & Lei, 2014; Ilies, Morgeson, & Nahrgang, 2005; Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Implementation takes time, care, and commitment from both individuals and the organization to cultivate the conditions and capacities for character and creativity to emerge through the pluralistic tension. When the conditions of the environment are transforming, individuals might better navigate the experience by reflecting on their own responsibility in the process of systemic change.

The vices that shadow the character assets in the PI framework might be considered as possible individual dispositions capable of contributing to the constraints of PI at any level. Apathy stands in opposition to empathy, deceit to honesty, arrogance to humility, and bias to fairness. All humans possess a tendency towards each of these vices at various times, and they might arise in situations where an individual is experiencing a limited mindset driven by power or fear (DesAutels, 2016; DePaul, 2000). While vices might contribute to the antithesis of PI, they are inherent in the human experience and might be looked at as opportunities for reflection and catalysts for understanding when there exists a willingness to examine their underlying cause.

The true challenge here is a limited mindset that allows these vices to hinder the practice of PI, rather than explore the wisdom within the challenge. This however begs the question that has been a plague throughout engagement with this work: “How might willingness be cultivated in others to examine the demonstration of individual and organizational virtue and vice in service of authentically cultivating the dispositions and practices of PI?”. The willingness to accept that current situations, thinking, or behaviors might be improved, and old ideas might be examined or abandoned is inherent to the practice of PI. The stimulus for intrinsic willingness will likely differ for each individual, therefore require various approaches for cultivation. This also begs the question as to the moral and ethical nature of attempting to cultivate intrinsic individual willingness, which could be explored as this work continues.

Individual resistance to change might limit the adoption of PI practices. Stakeholders may be reluctant to explore and embrace new ideas, processes, power structures and systems. The nature of PI is spiraled between the capacities of individuals and the conditions of the organization. These two elements influence each other. As one develops or regresses the other is informed and responds. This is an expected part of the change process. When navigated with intentional reflection and willingness to learn and grow, the capacity exists for deeper understanding and practice of PI. In contrast, resistance and power structures, dynamics or ideologies designed to marginalize or stifle divergent thinking, can potentially stall or redirect momentum away from the practices of PI (DesAutels, 2016, Poole et. al, 2004 ).

Managing leadership expectations of the speed and scope of PI implementation and practice will be essential, as organizational and behavior change is complex and slow work. Suggestions to address the mindset challenge include identifying those who already exhibit an intrinsic motivation to engage in this work and who also demonstrate the dispositions to authentically model PI. If these catalysts are in leadership positions at various levels within the organization, their explicit practice of PI will become both examples and permission for the university community to engage, possibly providing compelling evidence as to the benefits of personal and organizational change and trust that it's safe to explore new and divergent practices.

#### *Opportunity # 2: Institutional Culture*

There seems to be a common tension identified between the current culture of the university and a PI approach to innovation. Faculty and staff in multiple contexts have expressed concerns about the fast-paced nature of the university, the expectations of faculty and staff to adhere to the expedient pace of doing and being, and the divergent nature of the high intensity culture with the practices of PI and the conditions they require. There are simultaneous initiatives creating competition for time and attention. The time to thoughtfully and intentionally incorporate PI is perceived to be non-existent when faculty, staff, and students feel they are overwhelmed with extraneous deadlines, meeting structures, and competing obligations.

This concern around the speed of innovation at the university, which is routinely referred to as “simultaneously designing, building and flying the airplane”, begs the question of the feasibility of developing the capacities and conditions necessary for the practice of PI in such an environment. As mentioned above, there is a spiraled nature to the cultivation of PI capacities of individuals and the PI conditions of the University. Influential individuals who embody and demonstrate PI are needed to affect the culture and conditions of the university and its systems. Those same individuals must feel that the university conditions bolster their engagement in the complex and uncertain work of character development and systems change. Questions have been posed about institutional policies that are ill-suited or misaligned with PI decision-making. Faculty and staff have expressed that they feel the time, opportunities and incentives to engage in the practices of PI is unsupported by the current conditions of the university, and often in direct opposition to communications by various leadership.

This current tension between the speed and scale in which the university and its stakeholders are expected to operate and the time necessary to provide the due diligence for intentional practice of PI creates confusion and requires authentic leadership to address the issue. Many faculty and staff have expressed the need for time to grapple with their own understanding, reasoning, and practice of PI, and feel that the lightning speed in which they are expected to operate and innovate does not allow for this space. There have been concerns raised about the role of leadership at multiple levels, which will be discussed further below, in this type of change initiative and their willingness to nurture the necessary conditions and capacities. These institutional hurdles are likely more prevalent

in some areas of the university than in others, but they are real and seem to be experienced and acknowledged by those operating in the middle and lower levels of the institutional hierarchy.

Recommendations to navigate this challenge include affecting change where one has control. If faculty and staff model the practices of PI in the spaces where they have autonomy, over time it creates possibilities for collective impact on the overall culture of the university. Finding the small environmental pockets that are conducive to the practice of PI might allow for a seed to be planted and nurtured. One individual committed to the practice and implementation of PI could lead to one team or community of practice that might work collectively to create change within systems and structures. Strategically identifying that entry point using evidence based resources, staying focused on what can be controlled and changed, and what cannot, reflecting on the outcomes of actions, and doing the best next indicated action might evolve towards long term sustainable change.

Additional suggestions to address this concern might also be drawn from the character education and social emotional learning literature that suggest integrating and aligning PI reflective practices into existing activities and structures (Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Berkowitz & Bier, 2005). This shifts the perspective from “adding more to the plate towards making it the plate from which the individual and organization might be fed” (unknown).

#### *Opportunity #3: Multi-Directional Initiative*

Strong leadership commitment is essential for the success of organizational implementation of a virtues based framework. Organizational change initiatives require both direction and support if they are to have sustainable impact and success. Commitment to clarity of purpose and the goals of PI will help to avoid confusion or inconsistency in its implementation. What and how leadership communicates about PI, and how they live and model the framework will have an impact on the university community and the authenticity of the proposed aspiration .

Divergence between communicated commitment and perceived individual demonstrations pose a barrier to the authentic integration of PI. Without congruence between what a leader *says* and what a leader *does*, employees may not perceive PI as an authentic priority within the organization. This can lead to a lack of engagement and participation from employees, hindering the adoption and integration of PI practices into everyday work (Byrtek & Dickerson, 2014).

Strong leadership commitment and modeling is crucial for establishing a culture that values and prioritizes PI. It provides the necessary guidance, motivation, and resources to ensure that PI initiatives are properly implemented and sustained over time. This can be demonstrated not just in personal actions, but also in how funds are allocated, through the people who surround, advise, and carry out the commitments of a leader, and through the collaborations and partnerships cultivated and embraced by the leader and the organization.

Conversations within multiple CoPs have referenced questions and concerns about the top down nature of the university's commitment to PI. Questions of motivation have surfaced and concerns have been expressed that the adoption and announcement of the new design aspiration seemed to happen without involvement from the broader ASU community. The introduction by university leadership created an initial perception of a top down initiative, while inconsistency between outward public messaging and internally communicated expectations created confusion. While it is imperative for leadership to explicitly communicate the organizational commitment to the charter and PI as a design aspiration, a more powerful demonstration of commitment is through authentic modeling of PI and PI leadership. When a leader transparently demonstrates the PI practices in everything they do - in the way they communicate, their demonstrations of intentional practice, and their outward demonstrations of the character assets, the university community can begin to trust that what they hear and what they experience is aligned.

The complex position of the leader forces consideration of decisions that might seem to be in conflict with PI. In these cases, opportunities for faculty and staff to engage in dialogue about their points of resistance and concerns, as well as to receive transparent communications could provide a foundation for trust. A leadership practice of humility and transparency through explicit communications that both motivate and connect with the community are key to a successful initiative that not only embraces a common language of PI, but also demonstrates an authentic commitment.

Some recommendations for how to navigate the perception of a top down approach include: hosting community design sessions about how to contextualize and approach the integration of PI in various environments across the organization, creating more casual spaces for participation and contribution in PI projects and initiatives, hosting town hall conversations with leadership where the university community can ask questions about decisions that were made and leadership can share how they applied the PI framework to those decisions, establishing and participating in CoPs that embody shared leadership, inclusive practices, and horizontal and collaborative structures, being intentional about word choice in multiple contexts and considerate about how it might be received in the context of PI, and seek opportunities to continually and consistently communicate the institutional commitment to PI both in words, speech, and actions that demonstrate a desire for participatory decision making and contributions to the advancement of PI (Adelman & Boreman, 2023).

#### *Opportunity #4: Clarity and Understanding*

Stakeholders across the university have expressed a need to clarify what PI *looks like* and *feels like* in practice. There have been questions raised about how to recognize when it is happening, how to incorporate it into individual practice, how to communicate about it with community partners and others, and how to integrate it into curriculum and pedagogy. As was the case in the nascent days of this work, many feel they are already *doing* PI, but they are unsure how and if what they are doing is truly an example of the *right* way to demonstrate it. This is a consistent theme that could lead to

apathy and disengagement if not addressed. Clarity and consistency is needed in communication and illustrations of PI, along with the opportunities to grapple with the big questions and concepts without repercussions or expectations that any one individual is responsible for the success or stalling of the initiative.

Recommendations in this area include expansion, organization, and communication about the toolkit of resources designed for cultivating knowledge and practice of PI. Creating bite-sized learning opportunities, sharing resources when the opportunity arises, remaining open to listening to the needs of stakeholders and following through on meeting those needs, and pairing resources with opportunities for both asynchronous and synchronous exploration of the PI concepts will all serve as pathways towards greater understanding and clarity

Then, there's the ever popular question of how to measure it, which leans into the idea that what is measured is what is valued. This indicates the necessity for illustrating the practice of PI in various contexts, identifying what is valuable about PI, then considering how to measure what is valuable. This might be done through storytelling, modeling, and examples of PI. Cultivating clear and practical examples and suggestions for how to embody PI in multiple arenas will address the uncertainty and resistance of individuals who would like to practice PI in their personal and professional experiences, yet are unaware of how to begin the practice, or where to identify how their current practices might already align with PI. Supporting the understanding of PI through demonstrations, storytelling and explicit examples will contribute to the comfort of faculty and staff in bolstering and applying these practices in their own teaching, reflection, pedagogy, and interactions.

### *Reflection and Conclusion*

In the seven years of engagement in this work, three big take-aways have become apparent and need to remain top-of-mind as the complexities of scaling PI across the university are navigated. Character is personal. Being considerate of the experiences of others and curious about why they might be responding to situations in certain ways is essential when discussing character. Meet them where they are and don't take the responses of others personally. Individual character development will happen whether or not there's intention about how it occurs. The key to intentionality is cultivating a willingness to grow and develop as a human, which includes being honest with oneself and engaging the humility to be open-minded to new perspectives. This takes a tremendous amount of self-awareness that can occur through reflection on decisions and actions and the results of both. Engaging in self-reflection and introspection allows one to evaluate their thoughts, actions, values, and beliefs while experiencing the complexity of innovation and organizational change. By examining individual beliefs and behaviors, one can consciously work on personal growth, self-improvement, and the development of individual character (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003; Lapsley & Narvaez, 2004).

Clearly acknowledging and understanding one's core values is one place to begin the process. Habituating reflective practices such as meditation, journaling, and reflective questioning can help one to become more self-aware and intentional about cultivating the character assets and dispositions that will serve them well as they engage in systems change. While the tools, resources, and communities of practice are a starting point for character development, they are limited by the willingness of the individual to engage with them and commit to their own personal growth.

Character is contextual. The wider university context is very different from a college of education. Recognizing that MLFTC is a sub-culture of the university, and the same conditions might not yet exist, or exist in a different form, within the university culture is essential for those who have been working in the context of MLFTC and now shifting to the context of the university. This could mean that some individual and organizational practices and capacities that have been cultivated in MLFTC in the name of PI might not land the same in other colleges or the university as a whole. Understanding the context and landscape of the various environments within the university, and the differing dynamics present in colleges and units across the institution will significantly support the willingness of individuals to engage with the concepts of PI. Because the work was experienced a certain way at MLFTC does not mean the framework will be a fit for other environments across the university. There will be many variables that make phase two a different experience which necessitates open-mindedness and suspension of expectations for consistent outcomes.

Character is also relational. Creating spaces where individuals feel they have the permission to be human and bring their whole selves into the environment supports the development of character relationships. Marrying the practices of PI with the structure of a CoP nurtures environments where intentional connections through a shared purpose can support the development of authentic relationships. Small and intentional changes, such as creating space at the beginning of meetings for people to share what's on their hearts and minds, incorporating PI reflective questions into coaching and performance development, and planning activities during the work day where faculty and staff can gather, be creative, and have fun has helped to build connection and compassion in an environment that has often felt as if humanity and personal lives needed to be left at the institution's door. Continuing to engage the practices of PI in navigating the evolving human landscape of this work will be imperative. New relationships mean new perspectives, which will always hold the power to impact the understanding, development, and practice of Principled Innovation.

It's idealistic to believe that all individuals will embrace the practice of PI and apply it to their decision-making, but it's a lovely thought to consider how doing so in various contexts across a large public university might provide an opportunity to create significant and sustainable change that leads to equitable systems, individual and collective wellbeing and a flourishing society. At the very least, the university community might begin to slow down and reflect when making even the smallest decisions and consider how that action might affect the wellbeing of others.



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I utilized <https://chat.openai.com/> an AI-based language model for editing and proofreading assistance during the revision of this paper.

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