

BIG IDEA

Innovation

There is nothing new under the sun, said Ecclesiastes. False, of course, although innovation is not the same as invention. Many of the greatest upheavals in thought and practice are the result of old ideas migrating to new places. Most of the important innovations in business, science, the arts, indeed society in general, come when someone traverses a boundary, bringing their familiar ideas and practices into a new context. Steve Jobs's genius was the union of arts and technology, fuelled by his exploratory lifestyle. Breakthroughs in business come when a clever newcomer boldly asks: why do we do it this way? This – plus the burning motivation to survive in a new culture – is why entrepreneurs are so often immigrants. It is also why big corporations become stagnant. Cultures are self-reproducing – until they get a shock. And it is curious and lamentable how strong the barriers to the mobility of ideas are, when the most creative careers spiral through non-adjacent worlds.

➔ To see Nigel Nicholson's book, *The 'I' of Leadership: Strategies for seeing, being and doing* (Jossey-Bass, £18.99), go to iofleadership.com

