

3M Company

3M is a global innovation company that over the years have improved daily life for hundreds of millions of people all over the world through new, innovative products. They have made driving at night easier, made buildings safer, and made consumer electronics lighter, less energy-intensive and less harmful to the environment. According to their website, innovation is a way of life at 3M, and ideas are constantly in motion. Every day, 3M employees work to solve problems by applying creativity and ingenuity to make life easier.

In 1948 3M, out of a core belief that creativity needs freedom, began to encourage employees to spend 15% of their working time on their own projects. Leaders at 3M said, take our resources, build up a unique team, and follow your own insights to solve a problem. 3M believes that if you give talented people the time and resources to prove the worth of their ideas, you will come out ahead.

Even when new ideas lead to mistakes, they are seen as positives. According to former President and Chairman of the Board, William McKnight, "Management that is destructively critical when mistakes are made kills initiative. And it's essential that we have many people with initiative if we are to continue to grow." McKnight believed that you hire good people and leave them alone.

3M believes that the freedom to explore is critical to developing new ideas and solving problems that will make a difference for everyone. Out of this 15% time, what McKnight dubbed, experimental doodling, came such well known inventions as Post It Notes, and the company states that most of the inventions today emerged from these periods of autonomy.

Geoff Nicholson, 3M ambassador, and former vice president for international technical operations, widely regarded as the "father" of the Post-It note initiative, outlined pitfalls companies should avoid in order not to stifle creativity:

- Asking for a 5-year plan
- Insisting people go through all levels with a new idea
- Being control-conscious
- Expressing criticism and withholding praise
- Being suspicious of every idea that originates below you
- Making a decision to reorganize in secret and maximize surprise

Directions:

Read and review the case studies of the business.

Questions:

Based on what you have discovered about Montessori's principles of autonomy, purpose, and mastery, can this model be replicated in business?

What elements have been attempted in the business case?

How has this element affected the autonomy, purpose, and/or mastery of employees of the business?

Can it be duplicated in the business of education?