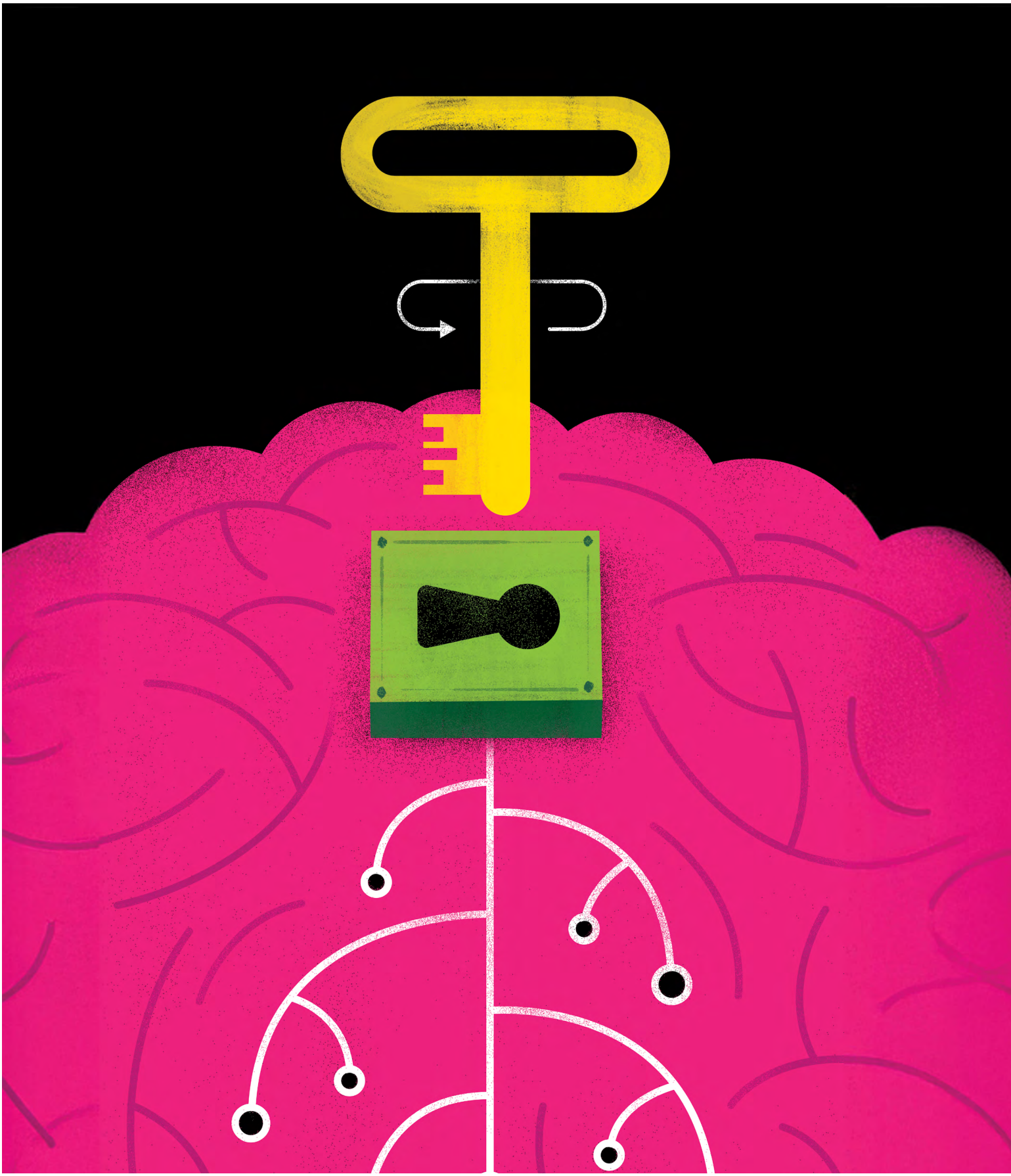


THE VISIONARY'S MAP

A Brain-Based Guide to Unlocking Creativity and Driving Innovation

BY SUSAN ROBERTSON

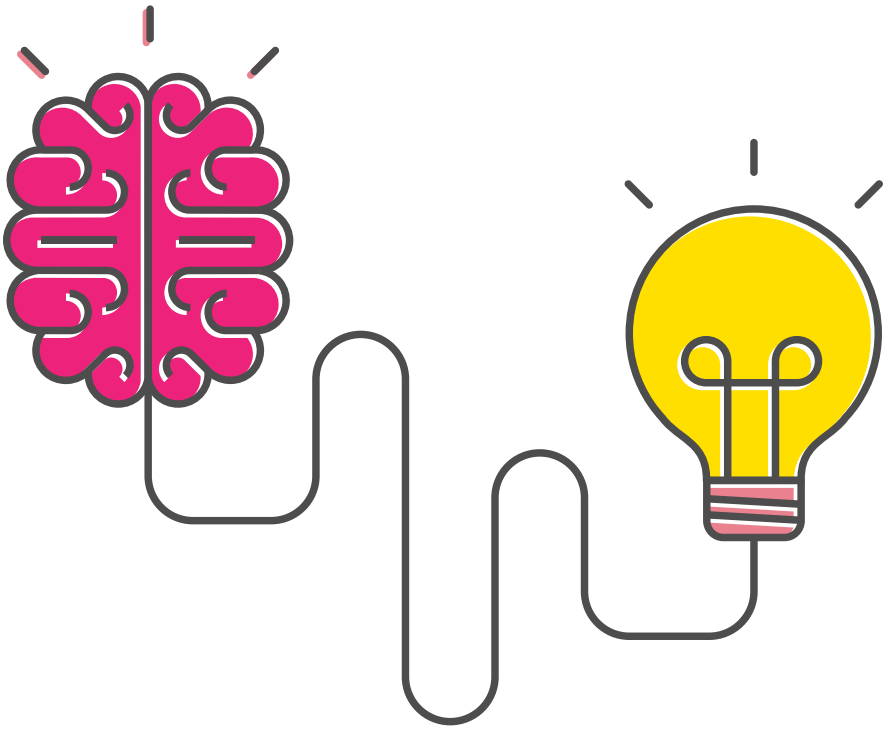
Despite the energy and effort you and your team pour into trying to innovate, it often feels like there's no real progress. When new challenges and opportunities arise, you aspire to chart a bold new course—yet time and time again, you find yourself stuck relying on an outdated map. Perhaps your government has created brainstorming spaces, hired external creative talent, or made innovation a core value. But still, creativity stagnates, and innovation remains a buzzword instead of a breakthrough.

Why does this happen? Because it's not about the spaces or the speeches. These are surface-level solutions that only address symptoms. The real obstacle is the way we think. And it's no one's fault—it's neuroscience.

The GPS system: Navigating creativity

Our brains are wired with a negativity bias—a subconscious focus on potential risks and problems before anything else. When confronted with a new idea, the knee-jerk reaction is "Yes, but..." followed by an avalanche of reasons why it won't work. This instinctive reflex isn't a flaw in your team, nor is it a lack of ambition or ability. It's neuroscience at play. But you *can* override this instinct and reframe the ways in which your team engages with new ideas.

What you might be looking for is great problem solving (GPS). GPS is both a structured tool and a mindset that can transform the ways in which teams generate, evaluate, and refine ideas, guiding you toward innovative solutions and keeping your brain from automatically setting up roadblocks. It works by rewiring subconscious, instant rejection into a deliberate process that uncovers hidden opportunities and drives creative thinking. Instead of shutting down new thinking, it keeps the doors to innovation open. Here's how it works.



G = GREAT

Identify what's good.

Any time an idea is proposed, start by identifying everything that *could* be great about it before identifying the challenges. This is the part your brain will naturally skip, if you allow it, so you must make the conscious choice to turn off the "yes, but" reaction. Remember that you *will* deal with the problems, in a moment—but first we're going to identify what might be good about the idea. Even if the idea isn't fully formed, there are always elements that hold potential. The goal is to make a long and diverse list of those elements. Consider questions like:

- *What might be beneficial for the organization?*
- *What might create value for our constituents?*
- *What parts are particularly interesting?*

By beginning with *possibility* rather than *problems*, you set the stage for solutions rather than roadblocks.

P = PROBLEM

Articulate challenges as questions.

Now that the potential of the idea is clear, it's time to address the challenges. But rather than simply listing what's wrong (the typical way we respond), reframe each challenge as a problem-solving question, starting with phrases like "How to...?"

- *How to make this idea more affordable?*
- *What are all the ways we might address this obstacle?*
- *How might we modify this idea to make it faster?*

By shifting from *statements* of limitation ("This won't work because...") to *questions* of possibility, the conversation stays solution-focused rather than dismissive.

S = SOLVING

Adapt and improve.

Finally, identify the most pressing problem and generate solutions. The idea isn't static—it must evolve to be improved.

GPS works by rewiring subconscious, instant rejection into a deliberate process that uncovers hidden opportunities and drives creative thinking.

A PRACTICAL EXAMPLE:

Rethinking the zoo experience

To see GPS in action, consider this thought experiment. Imagine you're part of a team designing new exhibits for a zoo. Someone suggests an idea called "Suddenly Bears!"—as you walk through the zoo, a bear suddenly appears, just mingling among the people.

Rather than instantly dismissing this seemingly dangerous idea (as most teams might), applying GPS thinking would look like this:

G (GREAT): It's surprising and exciting. It would create a memorable, shareable experience for visitors. It might increase engagement and ticket sales. It could provide new opportunities for education about bears.

P (PROBLEM): Instead of saying, "That's dangerous," reframe it: How might we safely create the surprise of suddenly encountering a bear?

S (SOLVING): Potential adaptations emerge: a virtual reality bear experience. Baby bear encounters. Visitors walk through a glass tunnel in the bear enclosure. A safari-style ride through a bear habitat. The original idea may shift, but some great elements of it remain, leading to truly innovative solutions.

Modify it, tweak it, or even let it simply inspire an entirely new concept—while retaining elements of what made it valuable. The key is to keep *something* from the Great list while adapting the idea to solve the challenges in the first draft.

Why GPS works

The way our brains naturally respond to new ideas—by first identifying the problems—shuts down unconventional ideas before they have a chance to develop. The GPS system ensures that great ideas aren't dismissed prematurely. Here's why it's so effective:

- **Preserves innovation.** By starting with the potential, it prevents great ideas from being discarded too soon.
- **Promotes practicality.** It encourages refining ideas to make them possible.
- **Builds collaboration.** Every idea becomes a shared team effort, fostering buy-in and ownership.
- **Increases efficiency.** It keeps discussions focused and productive, allowing for rapid iteration and problem-solving.
- **Encourages psychological safety.** People feel more comfortable sharing unique ideas when they know the discussion will focus on building rather than breaking.

Charting a new course for innovation

Innovation isn't about isolated genius or waiting for inspiration to strike—it's about systematically creating an environment where new ideas can thrive. The GPS system provides a structured yet flexible approach to navigating challenges and unlocking creativity.

By shifting from a reflexive "Yes, but…" to an intentional "How might we…?" you transform your team into a powerhouse of creative problem-solving. This treasure trove of creativity isn't buried—it's hidden in plain sight, just waiting to be uncovered, so you can stop saying "yes, but…" and start mapping out "what's next!"

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