



Creative Thinking – Creative Acting

This is the first issue of a newsletter that aims to summarise the academic research on creativity and provide implications for creative practise. If your work requires you to help others produce novel and useful solutions to complex questions, I hope this will give you insights on how to do this, and stimulate your thinking.

It's not intended to be a comprehensive review of research – there's simply too much! It is selective, based primarily on what might help guide practice, but also, and bluntly, on what interests me. I hope it interests you.

Each issue will focus on a problem relating to creative thinking and acting. This first one:

How to...enable creative thinking in yourself and others?

This has several elements, with the focus being on the person/team and the situation in which it finds itself...

1. How to...foster a climate for creativity?

In this research (1) the authors found that ..."The organizational climate that stimulates creativity and innovation has been the object of three large research programs during the 1980s and 1990s, two in the United States and one in Europe...The pictures of the creative climate that have emanated from the three programs are converging on main points:"

- The members of the organization feel challenge with the goals, operations, and tasks. The work is meaningful and the development and survival of the organization is important to them.
- The members feel free to take initiatives, collect information, and interact with others, inside and outside the organization, without being restricted by formal communication rules; and they do so.
- New ideas and change initiatives are met with support. People listen to each other and encourage initiatives.
- People dare to put forward ideas and opinions because they have trust in each other. Initiatives can be taken without fear of reprisal and ridicule in case of failure.
- There is much debating going on in an open and prestige-free atmosphere. The debates are not tainted by personal conflicts and animosity.
- A tolerance of uncertainty is prevailing, which makes people prepared to take risks. Arising opportunities are taken, and concrete experimentation is preferred to detailed investigation and analysis.

Interpretation: there is considerable agreement on what makes for a positive climate for creativity: there is transparent, not contrived, need for change; people's efforts are aligned with organisational priorities, and they have sufficient freedom to act; there is a high degree of interpersonal collaboration, support and mutual respect.

In this research (2) the authors found that ... "Evidently, reward increases creativity whenever an individual expects that creativity will produce reward. Establishing purpose and intention to be creative seems to be important for translating intrinsic interest into creative accomplishment."

Interpretation: Are you really rewarding for 'creative performance, or more conventional performance criteria? If you want radical ideas, say so, say why, and say how!

2. How to... maximize the chances of successful creative problem solving?

In this research (3) the authors found that ..."creativity and group researchers alike seem to agree that heterogeneity is the key to any group potential on a complex task..."

In the same research (3) the authors found that...large amounts of cognitive diversity in a team can inspire...bad feelings as well as a lack of feelings of creativity. Interestingly, this is consistent with what Kirton (1989) would likely have predicted based on the theory behind the KAI scale. A larger range of scores indicates that individuals will approach problems from very different perspectives, and the further apart the scores are on a given team, the more frustrating it may be for individuals to work together.

Interpretation: When we have a complex task, where creative thinking is needed, team diversity, potentially, gets better results. But, diverse teams are trickier to lead and co-ordinate because of members' differences in views. Select and train leaders and facilitators who are skilled in helping people respect the differences, and make use of them.

In this research (4) the authors found that ..."Becoming a process leader allows you to involve others in the creative process using their content expertise. The ability to work within interdisciplinary teams becomes increasingly necessary as problem solving becomes ever more complex and as the time available for solving those problems continues to shrink.

Interpretation: For a leader, it is becoming more important to develop skills needed to engage people from different backgrounds, to contribute their expertise on complex tasks.

In this research (5) the authors found that..."problem construction matters...it is more important than verbal reasoning and divergent thinking ability tests, in predicting creative achievement."

Interpretation: Constructing what the problem is contributes significantly to the quality of the eventual creative outcome.

In this research (6) the authors found that "...flexibility- being prepared to seek new ways/approaches to generating solutions - is aided by anonymity – people worry less about their ideas being evaluated, and pressures to conform are lowered."

Interpretation: you may get people more prepared to try novel approaches if they can put their thoughts forward anonymously.

In this research (7) the authors found that..."time and effort are important for this process (solution generation)...studies have found that original ideas tend to be identified later in the process of idea generation. The first ideas generated tend to be routine and less creative,"

Interpretation: Don't rush it. Don't close down idea generation too quickly. Give enough time to accommodate surprise. Think about balancing the emotional safety that helps us say 'silly' ideas with the challenge of adopting riskier approaches. Minimize undue time pressures that cramp more radical ideas.

3. How to...improve creative thinking?

In this research (8) the authors found that..."Perhaps the most clear-cut conclusion to emerge from this study is that creativity training is effective... Creativity training contributed to divergent thinking, problem solving, performance, and attitudes and behavior for younger and older students and working adults, and for high achieving and more "run of the mill" students."

Interpretation: It works! (Not all the time, but) for lots of different types of groups, using different measurement criteria.

So, how was it? Useful, interesting, informative, or...? I'd appreciate your views on this first issue. Click and send:

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Thanks!

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Sources:

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