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Creating Creativity - Part 1 of 2

All people and all organizations possess creative talent. However, the world we live in can actually constrain creativity. This can range from organizational boundaries that limit our freedom to learn and grow to a society that tells us what to wear, what to eat, and what to look like. The real world of creativity has few boundaries, placing a high value on the spirit of new ideas. This invariably requires a large influx of mistakes and failures. Contrast this to the "non-creative" world where success is placed in a huge spotlight and the notion of failure is greeted with great displeasure.

Failure is a pre-requisite for creativity because real learning can only take place through a series of failures. So if you want high levels of creativity, then you must remove yourself from the many distractions that dummmify the creative mind. It's almost like wiping the slate clean and challenging the assumptions that have guided all of your decisions up to this point. You keep asking the question – Why? You never real come to an answer, but you know you have to try just to learn from the experience. And in a few instances, a stroke of luck emerges and you discover something new. Therefore, creativity is very much a persistent pursuit of never being satisfied with the current set of solutions in place.

In his book *Flow – The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi notes that people are most often creative when they enjoy what they are doing, but are challenged at or slightly above their skill level. Csikszentmihalyi says: "The best moments usually occur when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile. Optimal experience is thus something we make happen."

Some of the best lessons regarding creativity come from a study of the most creative people. Sylvia Nasar documented the brilliance of John Nash, a Princeton Nobel laureate, in her book: *A Beautiful Mind*. The contributions that people make are to some extent determined by what we choose to learn vs. what we choose not to learn. Thus, the way people work and live is paramount to one's creativity. Nasar observed that John Nash was compelled to learn through experience. Learning without experience removes the element of failure, giving you a false reading on creativity. Nasar also noticed that Nash pursued those things not solved. Therefore, some of the most creative people have an appetite or thirst for solving things no-one else can solve.

Creative minds and organizations do have certain characteristics worth noting. Moshe F. Robinstein and Iris R. Firstenberg do a good job of documenting these creative attributes in their book *The Minding Organization*:

- Strong capacity for abstract thinking
- High tolerance for complexity
- Respect for facts and the ability to obtain meaning in a higher context
- Not distracted by unplanned events
- Usually possess high confident levels to get through the creative journey
- Embrace the discovery of learning
- Able to assimilate opposites

Finally, creativity is extremely hard work. The most creative people work very hard! It's like trying to squeeze blood out of a turnip – you work with great intensity for that one random spark that can change so much. To ease the creative challenge, it's often best to start with an attempt at building on what's already out there. Innovation and ideas usually originate by looking at something already in place, but not looking at it in the same way. In Part 2 of this article, we will outline the Creativity Model for defining the full range of creative talents.

"Creativity drives growth, and creative people drive every great enterprise. It's not too trite to say that. These days, we're all too easily caught up in the tactics of competition. We can forget that sustainable advantage is ultimately a function of a company's ability to consistently generate, develop, and sell valuable new ideas. Which is to say, creativity is at the heart of work and business."

- John A. Byrne, Editor – *Fast Company Magazine*, December 2004