

How to access and manage creativity in organisations

a collection of perspectives

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Introduction

Tobin and Shrubshall founded Barrier Breakers with the aim of furthering the universal development of creativity and human potential, facilitating the advancement of creative skills within the business, education and personal development sectors. These skills increase the likelihood that, even during times of rapid change, individuals and organisations will be able to direct the evolving ways they work, live and learn. Rather than merely adapting reactively to new challenges, those with creative skills are equipped to take control of a situation. Practical application of these skills allows access to the whole range of available possibilities, from which the most positive solutions can be extracted.

Barrier Breakers' methodology was formulated to identify, address and overcome barriers to creativity. It was developed by Tobin and Shrubshall as a result of their observations that, in order for creative skills to be effectively learnt, applied and embedded, it is beneficial initially to 'prime the surface'. This preparation decreases the resistance to creativity, which can occur on many levels. It is within the framework of this methodology that *How to access and manage creativity in organisations* is presented.

As part of the RSA report into creativity in organisations, Barrier Breakers undertook research between April 2001 and April 2002. Numerous informal group and one-to-one sessions were conducted with employees at all

levels, from private and public sector organisations, based mainly in the South of England. This allowed comment and contribution from a wide range of individuals, including those in non-managerial positions, to be fed into the in-depth interviews that were concurrently undertaken with 38 middle and senior managers. These interviewees were selected on the basis of their current position and the scope of their past experience, thereby providing a broad spectrum from which to gather and assess managerial perspectives regarding creativity in organisations. The majority of these interviewees were based in London and interviews were held at their workplace.

This collection of perspectives gives an overview of the current status of creativity within organisations, the problems associated with it, and how it could be more effectively accessed and managed. The collection is also intended to be of practical use as a diagnostic tool in assessing an organisation's creative agenda – a method of analysing underlying motivations, identifying barriers, and constructing practical solutions for addressing and overcoming them. The framework of Barrier Breakers' methodology sets the information within a transferable format, which readers can apply to their own circumstances. It is also hoped that the collection will provoke debate and stimulate ideas.

Barrier Breakers' methodology

key points

Barrier Breakers' methodology focuses on **barriers to creativity**. It provides the framework for this collection of perspectives.

To provide a basis for the examination of creativity in organisations, all contributors were encouraged to discuss their complete understanding of creativity and of the barriers to creativity. Therefore the interview route moved through a process, focusing initially on personal creativity, through to inter-personal creativity, and subsequently into organisational creativity.

- The methodology classifies barriers to creativity within four **Barrier focus groups** – inward focus, backward focus, sideways focus, downward focus.
- Each Barrier focus group has a **dominant influence** that draws an organisation's focus.
- The dominant influence forms the organisation's **characteristics**. These are not

necessarily intrinsically negative, but overemphasis causes them to become barriers to creativity.

- The combination of organisational characteristics determines the **resultant culture**.

The four Barrier focus groups are used as a core diagnostic tool in **ease** – the process through which organisations can **expose, assess, shift, eliminate** barriers to creativity.

Having undergone the evaluation of *expose* and *assess*, an organisation is in an informed position, and has begun to *shift* focus away from influences that drain creativity. The process of understanding its creative agenda enables an organisation to develop solutions that access and manage its creativity to maximum advantage – **forward focus**. As this shift takes place, an organisation will automatically *eliminate* barriers to creativity.

Barrier focus groups profiles

Inward focus profile

Dominant influence Self

Characteristics In organisations that display Inward focus there is an implicit demand for employees to toe the company line. If ideas are presented that challenge the status quo there is a punitive response, so self-censorship is widespread. Collaboration and sharing are avoided and information is withheld. Dysfunctional communication channels arrest the flow of ideas, originating with a resistance to external influences and infecting the entire system, through to the communication mainframe.

Resultant culture Introverted

Backward focus profile

Dominant influence Past

Characteristics In organisations that display Backward focus there is conformity to accepted values and traditions. Resistance to change is exacerbated by fixed perceptions from within and outside the organisation. Deeply rooted, intransigent structures control all working practices.

Resultant culture Rigid

Sideways focus profile

Dominant influence Logic

Characteristics In organisations that display Sideways focus decisions are evaluated according to bottom-line criteria, within a bureaucratic framework that lacks any creative agenda. Soft skills are considered non-essential business components, with creativity having low priority and, in all contexts, being regarded with suspicion.

Resultant culture Left-Brain

Downward focus profile

Dominant influence Shadow

Characteristics In organisations that display Downward focus there are unacknowledged anxieties, which result in a dichotomy between opinions expressed and actions taken. While the outward appearance may be healthy, covertly a malaise erodes creative potential and causes inertia. The underlying motivations give rise to risk avoidance and low failure tolerance, which are often further driven by the demands of accountability.

Resultant culture Fear

Inward focus

Profile

Dominant influence Self

Characteristics In organisations that display Inward Focus there is an implicit demand for employees to toe the company line. If ideas are presented that challenge the status quo there is a punitive response, so self-censorship is widespread. Collaboration and sharing are avoided and information is withheld. Dysfunctional communication channels arrest the flow of ideas, originating with a resistance to external influences and infecting the entire system, through to the communication mainframe.

Resultant culture Introverted

Company line

In order to be integral to an organisation's culture, creativity must be encouraged and rewarded. However, in organisations displaying Inward focus, individual creativity is seen as the green light to chaos. There is an implicit attitude that defences need to be maintained against any infiltration that could shake the foundations.

'Thinking outside the box' is a popular term for an approach that is apparently universally welcomed. However, thinking too far outside the box can make an employee unpopular if their ideas are deemed to be pushing the company boundaries too far. Therefore the ideas that are presented will tend to be 'safe', conforming to the company line, so the originator doesn't risk the label of 'outside the mould'.

'I was getting a lot of unpleasantness from the senior guys because anything that was a bit lateral or a bit maverick or a bit challenging was a threat to their security.' Even if an idea is adopted there's no guarantee that the originator will be rewarded or even

acknowledged. If it proves to be successful, senior managers can easily take the credit, sometimes even convincing themselves that they are the source.

'You'll find that the people you've given it to think they've done it. If you don't get recognition in the end that's very problematic for you.'

In many organisations the Human Resource department attempts to support and develop creativity by introducing relevant concepts and techniques. However, these are often not subsequently embedded in the system, denying them the credibility that is essential 'if individuals are to stop feeling silly about doing that kind of stuff'.

'You can have as many management development programmes as you like on creativity, but unless the structures in the organisations are right it won't work.'

These structures contribute to the prevailing atmosphere within an organisation that is ultimately the responsibility of senior management. This atmosphere determines how secure employees feel about expressing their

ideas and thereby becoming vulnerable to colleagues.

'We're all innovative when we get the opportunities but it's hard to unlock in some people ... to make them sufficiently unselfconscious that they're prepared to propose a really stupid idea.'

Employees at all levels want to succeed in their senior's eyes. They don't want to look foolish or out-of-step and so will often settle for the safest option. Self-censorship is widespread and means that brakes are put on ideas before they're even voiced.

'People were frightened to say something because they thought they'd get laughed at. Yet as an organisation, if they could harness that they would be a lot stronger. That's often the case.'

Self-interest

In order to get the best from its workforce an organisation needs to adopt and display an active policy of creative development, in which every employee participates as a matter of course. A climate that includes this assumption of personal responsibility demonstrates that every individual is valued and so gives them a sense of belonging. Without such incentive, individuals tend to make the minimum contribution possible.

'If the organisation doesn't seem to have bothered thinking why should you?'

When employees believe that their function is merely to 'get on with the daily job and get it right' it can make them lacklustre and unmotivated. It then becomes difficult to buy in new ideas, unless they are statutory ones, or to get people freethinking of their own volition. Often through past experience, these employees interpret change as a negative, associated with upheaval, insecurity, more work and less time. Therefore they will resist any new initiatives, seeing them as a potential threat to their status quo.

'A lot of people are quite happy to come in and do what they do and go home again.

And that's it.'

Rather than nurturing individuals' creativity and personal development in ways that would benefit the organisational team, many systems actually encourage aggressive individualism.

'The whole of the incentive structure was entirely focused on individuals – cut throat.'

This culminates in a culture where self-interest is the primary motivation, without consideration for the organisational bigger picture.

Collaboration and sharing are avoided.

Information is withheld and consequently lost when individuals leave the organisation, rather than having become absorbed into the organisation's knowledge bank.

'Some people, although they're meant to be democratic and looking after people are just looking after their own interests.'

Communication channels

In order for an organisation to establish a healthy flow of ideas there are four basic requirements: active examination and adaptation of external ideas; a straightforward structure through which ideas can be effectively presented; facilitation of informal staff interaction; efficient and supportive communication mainframe. In organisations that display Inward focus these elements are lacking, resulting in dysfunctional communication channels.

1 External ideas

A resistance to external influences is generated by a variety of mindsets. In some cases this is 'we know everything, we're great, we don't need any outside inspiration'. When this is an accepted and unchallenged part of the organisation's mentality it spills over into all employee relationships. The result is an introverted culture where people tend to keep everything to themselves. Sharing and

disseminating information is minimal.

In organisations where ideas are the currency, it would be expected that the benefits of actively seeking new input and inspiration were not merely understood, but that action to this end was firmly embedded. However, despite these organisations having an awareness of the benefits, it is surprising how frequently their mindset is one of comfortable insularity.

'We're trying to get out of here and see the world slightly differently. But it's not easy.' Some organisations demonstrate a more ingrained resistance to external influence. If an idea can't be attributed internally then it is felt as a slur on the organisation. Even if ideas overcome this resistance and are successfully instigated, far from being congratulated or consulted, the individual responsible can encounter a detrimental reaction.

'You begin to find that doors have been closed in terms of going into other areas.'

2 Structure

Lack of a formal structure through which to present ideas reflects a lack of commitment to the creative process.

'People often know the ideas themselves, but they have no system, no culture in which they can capture those ideas.'

Under such circumstances an employee will frequently have no option other than to present an idea to their immediate superior. This means that both employee and idea become vulnerable to one individual, which is inevitably a deterrent.

'Even if it produces good business results and we do things better as a result, the reporting system is such that you've got to get credit for that from the person whose ideas you've displaced.'

If structures do exist they are frequently cumbersome and time-consuming, the result of poor design or haphazard evolution. Only ideas that fit the system will be presented in this

climate and the process will probably dissipate them further.

'You've got to do a lot of ducking and diving to get the idea through. There'll be one committee somewhere where someone says, "should we really be encouraging this kind of thing?"'

An unwieldy system is equally ineffective in communicating the intentions of senior management down through the layers. Even in fairly flat organisations problems often arise due to the 'refractive layer' of middle management.

'They're paranoid about people talking about them below and they're paranoid about making the wrong decision so they'll get disapproval from their superior.'

Therefore an organisation's strategic thrust doesn't percolate through. And if top-level messages become convoluted then the ideas that are put forward by lower levels will inevitably be a misinterpretation of what is required.

3 Informal interaction

Organisations need to incorporate the informal process of staff interaction into the culture, in order to encourage and validate employees getting together without an agenda.

'What we don't do enough of is allowing people who have similar experiences and need to share good practice and information across a department enough time and space to talk.'

It is not only people within the same departments or sharing similar experiences who can benefit from this interaction. Without a mechanism that stimulates informal communication between disparate individuals the organisation is missing out on a potential hotbed of ideas.

'The environmental and institutional factors make it really hard for us to talk to each other.'

4 *Communication mainframe*

If an organisation's communication mainframe does not provide a supportive foundation, then all other communication channels essential to the creative process will be blocked. While the development of IT has brought great benefits, there needs to be an awareness of potential pitfalls and their impact upon the flow of ideas.

'We've slipped into this horrendous e-mail culture. People e-mail those sitting next to them.'

Many feel pressurised by the constant onslaught of e-mails that need to be read and responded to, exacerbated by the frustration of irrelevant or junk mail. This task eats into time and causes a persistent distraction. Furthermore it seems to have tapped into an addictive corner of the human psyche, becoming an insatiable temptation.

'People are plugged onto e-mail the whole time. They can't leave it alone.'

Voice mail adds to the frustration. 'How do you get them to answer the blasted phone?' As more people live on voice mail it becomes harder to have a conversation with anyone, to find the relevant person to talk to, to get immediate feedback and to give ideas momentum.

Often management find it hard to function on a day-to-day level due to the number of meetings that are scheduled, many of which they privately admit to finding superfluous and unproductive. While these meetings may generate ideas, there is rarely then time to develop the ideas to a level where their feasibility can be assessed.

Backward focus

Profile

Dominant influence Past

Characteristics In organisations that display Backward Focus there is conformity to accepted values and traditions. Resistance to change is exacerbated by fixed perceptions from within and outside the organisation. Deeply rooted, intransigent structures control all working practices.

Resultant culture Rigid

Historic practice

Individuals within organisations that display Backward focus are not expected nor encouraged to think creatively. A prevailing attitude is 'this is what we've always done so this is what we will do'. Everything is subordinated to the system rather than making the system more flexible in order to address real needs.

Creativity tends to be repressed by convention and legislation and no more so than within the public sector. The complex web of structures and processes within each monumental institution is firmly established and dictates what little creativity there is. This approach reaches into academia and is surprisingly prevalent within business schools. Despite innovation and creativity being recognised within the curriculum, the structures in place for delivering these skills are largely constructs of historic practice.

'If you're trying new ideas or new relationships it's difficult because business school cultures are very conservative.'

Even at the other end of the spectrum one finds problems related to historic practice. In relatively new private sector organisations there

is still a danger of structures not undergoing regular scrutiny and thereby surviving beyond their relevance.

'In some ways it's a deeply conservative organisation despite having an emphasis on innovation and I think it's strange, the dichotomy between the conservatism and the innovativeness.'

The preference for working in familiar ways means new concepts aren't explored and integrated. Often techniques are used uncritically and only understood on the surface, which 'gives poor work and is very boring for everyone concerned'.

'If you've done something else for 10, 20 years it's much easier to fall back on what you're used to.'

Perceptions

Change races ahead with perceptions lagging behind. Often the image held by those outside a profession or organisation is an outdated representation of the reality. Parameters of accepted roles, as perceived by and projected upon individuals and organisations, can set up boundaries that limit forward momentum.

There are widespread problems generated by

societal assumptions about issues such as gender, age and race as well as creativity. When these are combined the individual is frequently ostracised.

'There aren't many women of fifty in these kind of jobs. You are really pioneering new territory just by being here. And you're not listened to.'

If, in addition, creativity is taken as a stance then it's 'very problematic for many people to define exactly who you are and where you're going'.

When an individual does move beyond accepted boundaries they frequently encounter external pressures to conform. Therefore attitudes from all sides contribute to a cycle that perpetuates the stereotype.

'There is a resistance against us being anything other than traditional civil servants.'

A result of these outdated perceptions is that many professions attract individuals who don't include creativity as one of their skills.

Consequently they are unlikely to promote or prioritise it.

'You've got both pushing in the same direction – you've got the culture pushing against innovation and you've got the people themselves not particularly innovative.'

One might not be too surprised to hear opinions such as 'public bodies are only interested in doing things the way public bodies are meant to be doing them' or 'police don't think of themselves as creative'. However, fixed perceptions are also responsible for limiting creativity in the arts. An employee from a major arts funding body asserted that there is a specific group of artists who represent a correct way of doing things in the arts – 'this makes it hard to break through with anything controversial'.

Traditional career paths

If you could map people individually you would discover a wealth of creativity, even in the most

traditional organisations. But the structure of many career paths gives rise to this resource being unrecognised, undervalued or dissipated. Government departments are an example of set-ups where individuals often move from one position to another before they've acquired the foundation of job knowledge that informs the most effective creativity.

'Every year you move to a new post. So by the time you've got to a level and up to speed you're probably moving on.'

Senior civil servants have risen through this 'fast-stream' system, assuming a command and control approach. As happens in other professions, they became managers primarily as a result of their seniority, rather than being assigned this role due to managerial capabilities.

'They don't understand that they're there to project and resource manage and to stimulate innovation and creativity. That's not necessarily their fault.'

This inappropriate positioning is particularly apparent in large public bodies, where the career ladder is based on a hierarchical grading system. Promotion is led by this structure and not necessarily given to those who are best tooled-up for the job. The organisation's store of human resource is diminished when competence in one post is the rationale for re-positioning to another. Unless such decisions are based on a far broader assessment the individual is likely to be left floundering.

'I was given no training and didn't inherit a creative structure. That happens a lot here. It's extremely time wasting. I didn't know where to begin!'

As well as wasting time, these circumstances drain morale, imagination and energy – both organisational and personal.

'I find it tiring because I've not been positioned well.'

Even well positioned managers who are aware that stimulating creativity is their responsibility

have difficulty combining it with their administrative workload. The traditional career ladder is generally constructed in a way that takes you away from creativity, to positions where no provision is made for this activity.

'As you get more senior you are removed from the creative cliff face.'

Environment

Environment is considered to be an important factor in encouraging an organisation's inherent creativity, yet it is sadly neglected by most. In order to be effective in this context, environment as a creative consideration has to be integral to the culture.

The old tradition – cellular office layout – has largely been replaced by a new tradition – open plan. The accepted belief is that this environment is more beneficial in terms of space and money as well as staff relations and communication. However, there are concerns about how this arrangement impacts on these issues in practice, and also about the effect it has on personal work and creativity. The most obvious problems relate to noise and disturbance. Overcoming these has driven individuals to desperate measures such as placing red and green lights on top of their

computer monitor, putting up 'do not disturb' signs, wearing red or green caps, and instigating a flag system.

'It's more and more difficult to have reflective moments, which is what you need for original creativity.'

The creative process can be enhanced by interaction with others, but this needs to be balanced with time to focus and concentrate. Irrespective of preference, in the open plan situation all employees work with a constant background noise of varying degrees.

Lack of space is cited as a major obstacle, with individuals searching for privacy and meeting rooms – 'brainstorming tends to happen in corridors'. However, available space, including communal areas such as canteens and receptions, is frequently not used to its full potential. The problem is further exacerbated by a prevailing attitude of 'if you're not at your desk, you're not working'. There is a resistance from many organisations to the inevitable shift of staff working more frequently outside the office.

'Our policy is that people shouldn't work from home. People will say you can only be innovative if you're in the office. Which is nonsense.'

Sideways focus

Profile

Dominant influence Logic

Characteristics In organisations that display Sideways Focus decisions are evaluated according to bottom-line criteria, within a bureaucratic framework that lacks any creative agenda. Soft skills are considered non-essential business components, with creativity having low priority and, in all contexts, being regarded with suspicion.

Resultant culture Left-brain

Evaluation

The new paradigm of business thinking requires new methods of evaluation. Accepted criteria based on tangible, quantifiable and short-term outcomes are inaccurate when measuring certain current issues of concern, such as creativity. Until there is a convincing system of assessing creativity, organisations that display Sideways focus will remain sceptical as to the benefits versus cost.

'How do you single it out from all the activities that are going on in the organisation? I think it's one of the biggest problems of pinpointing successful creativity, if you look at it not at a project but at a company level.'

The perception that creativity is a drain on resources occurs not only within Sideways focus organisations but also throughout the chain to consumers.

'Really creative stuff takes a lot of time. And the client isn't prepared to pay for that sort of thing because the benefit is very fuzzy.'

Employees within such organisations are expected to assess and present their ideas, irrespective of content, within parameters

where bottom line success can be proven and guaranteed.

'Unless you can show pound shilling and pence benefit it's hard to convince the people at the top with the purse strings that this is a good thing to do.'

Creative capital

Many recent cost-cutting exercises have resulted in the loss of support staff.

Consequently many managers are now forced to spend a disproportionate amount of time dealing with purely administrative tasks. For the individual whose skills, impact and energies are being dissipated this is time-wasting and frustrating.

'I'm hopeless at administrative work. I don't like and I'm not good at and I can't see the sense of and I don't remember what I'm supposed to be doing.'

Such tasks do not require the expertise for which managers are paid. Therefore the organisation is wasting both human and financial resources.

'Everyone does their own typing now. All part of the cost cutting that goes on. It doesn't

make any sense at all the way we're staffed. It's bottom line.'

Short-term decisions such as these drain an organisation of its creative capital. Whilst satisfying the immediacy of bottom line demands, they are liable to have a long-term negative impact.

Soft skills weighting

It is difficult to evaluate the impact of the soft skills associated with 'right-brain' activity in the purely rational terms preferred by organisations that display Sideways focus. Consequently they regard these skills as outside normal business practice. Rather than being considered as an integral element of any action, creativity is classed as one of these non-essential business components. Because it is perceived to be an add-on, the assumption is that creativity requires extra time.

'Almost all the organisations I've talked to have been through some major change, most of them induced by mergers and acquisition activities. So many of them say they haven't got time for innovation or creativity.'

In a climate of change the priority for many is to keep their heads above water. If creativity is not already established as part of the organisation's culture, it will become sidelined when extreme levels of stress and uncertainty sap individuals' time and energy.

'Everyone feels very overworked, under respected, underpaid, trapped between politicians and the public, they feel the job is doing nothing but getting worse.'

When creativity is not embedded it will be viewed as requiring extra time to undertake. Many managers consider that it is not extra time but time itself that is lacking, and that this frustrating situation is a recent phenomenon.

'It's trying to find anyone with any time. I think this has happened over the last 2 or 3 years. I don't think it used to be like this.'

Under these conditions, the initial enthusiasm of younger employees is dampened. Rather than their creative edge being harnessed for the benefit of the organisation, it is soon swamped by the prevailing mindset.

'After a while you get to realise you can't do all that you'd like to. You haven't got the time. And if you look into it you're just creating so much work that you're never going to leave the office. So it does stifle.'

Creativity training

Because organisations displaying Sideways focus are suspicious of creativity they have little interest in stimulating it within the company culture. Therefore they don't encourage employees to develop it through training, or establish processes and structures to support it. This occurs in all sectors.

'One of the odd things about this place is that we are a creative industry but we don't really talk about creativity very much.'

There is a commonly held belief that creativity is a natural ability, which cannot be taught. This perhaps explains why there is a widespread attitude of bewilderment at the concept of creativity training.

'I'm trying to think what that would be. I'm not sure I know what that means.'

HR managers introducing creativity into their training programme encounter suspicion from colleagues who are unsure what they are trying to achieve.

'Colleagues see you as being quite self-indulgent. So there's a quiet but present resistance to it.'

Another deterrent to supplying creativity training is a general problem of attracting attendees to courses with a soft skills bias, where it is hard to demonstrate quantifiable achievement.

'During the takeover there was a course that dealt with managing change for managers. But it was cancelled due to there only being two of us on it.'

Indeed, the benefits of training are questionable and certainly short-lived if the organisation lacks commitment to implementation.

'The effects probably lasted about a month and I went back to my old ways.'

Employees who undertake training of their own volition can meet resistance when bringing new ideas back into their organisation.

'A colleague went on a course and thought it was really good. When he got back he got quite a sharp response from the founder of our company, who said that you cannot use techniques to support innovation.'

Bureaucracy

Many organisations, particularly in the public sector, are structured around a layered bureaucratic system, dominated by committees. Within these cultures there is rarely any creative agenda. Creativity becomes dependent upon determined individuals, looking for chinks in the bureaucratic armour through which to inject their ideas.

'There's a stunning amount of bureaucracy and politics and a lot of energy goes into that.'

When it is necessary to expend so much effort negotiating the system, individuals are deterred at all stages of the creative process – from idea generation, through development, to transformation into value.

'It's totally phenomenal – incredibly bureaucratic and incredibly stifling. The whole process of creativity is stifled. If you have an idea it takes so long to get through the system.'

Individuals manoeuvring through a bureaucratic system will gradually experience a sense of loss of power.

'Everyone connects upwards here which is quite sad in terms of having new ideas. I feel completely powerless in relation to doing anything about that.'

It is particularly enervating for creative people when, without their consultation, superiors make decisions that negatively affect their work. This is exacerbated if an organisation displays a bias in the taking up of ideas.

'Ideas from someone at the top – like the bible. Someone at the bottom, their ideas will clearly not be valued.'

When the structure demands constant reporting to seniors, the amount of space an employee has to take any degree of control is limited. A sense of control is removed even further, along with any creative impetus, due to an overriding awareness that senior managers are monitoring, assessing and reporting on employees' behaviour.

'And that affects your reports, performance, promotion, pay. So a lot of people want to stay in line because that's what gets you on.'

Artistic concerns

Organisations that display Sideways focus are uncomfortable dealing with right brain activity in all forms. While practical concerns are cited to validate this view, there is also an underlying perception of creativity that separates it from business.

'Creativity as a word is in danger of producing a certain image.'

For many the word 'creativity' is intrinsically linked with artists, who are viewed with mixed and often paradoxical feelings.

'Although people glamorise and romanticise artists it's only if they're breakthroughs. If artists were respected then people maybe wouldn't feel the same sort of fear and discouragement.'

These confused images are projected onto the act of creativity itself. Stereotypical attitudes perpetuate a myth that causes suspicion within the business world towards creativity and creative people.

'Creativity is associated with a crazy individual, the lone inventor in the garret.'

These extreme images combine with the inherent unpredictability of creativity to produce a scenario totally at odds with organisations whose operational basis lies in logic, intellect and analysis.

'Many companies don't look at how they can nurture your creativity. They're not looking at how you can improve, challenge.'

Downward focus

Profile

Dominant influence Shadow

Characteristics In organisations that display Downward Focus there are unacknowledged anxieties, which result in a dichotomy between opinions expressed and actions taken. While the outward appearance may be healthy, covertly a malaise erodes creative potential and causes inertia. The underlying motivations give rise to risk avoidance and low failure tolerance, which are often further driven by the demands of accountability.

Resultant culture Fear

Hidden agenda

Organisations that display Downward focus exist in a climate of fear, many elements of which are hidden. These undercurrents contribute to a malaise that eats away at creative potential. One example that is rarely discussed as a business-related issue, but is reported to be rife in both public and private sector organisations, is bullying. Research for the BBC carried out by Charlotte Rayner PhD of Staffordshire University Business School and Prof. Cary Cooper of the Manchester School of Management (UMIST) concluded that in the UK 53% of their sample reported having been bullied at work and 77% of respondents reported having been witnesses to such bullying (*Leadership Organization Development Journal* 1997 pp 211-214).

'The bullying is horrendous. It destroys the organisation in two ways. It encourages a status quo. It encourages good people to go.' Bullying ranges from obvious harassment and threats to more subtle yet invidious manoeuvres. If it is not recognised and eliminated it can become accepted as part of an organisation's culture, particularly if dealt out

by senior management or from a majority group within the workforce.

'If there's one antithesis to creativity it's bullying.'

Another element of the malaise that erodes creative potential is a fear of creativity itself – whether due to a personal lack of confidence in this area, or a dread of unknown and unpredictable consequences. If this underlies the way a senior manager is motivated, it will corrode the organisation's creative advantage. Even in the creative industries a fear of creativity is present, which some feel stems from a more fundamental cause.

'You're managing other people's creativity because you're scared of being creative, because you're scared of failure.'

The malaise caused by hidden agendas has many elements, but the symptom common to all is inertia.

'Invariably what little movement you may have just stops altogether.'

Risk taking

Risk is essential to the creative process yet, in a quest for guaranteed success, organisations that

display Downward focus eliminate all traces of risk wherever possible.

'The culture doesn't encourage risk taking. You're more encouraged to be safe and sure than you are to make a mistake, which you're bound to do if you're trying to do things differently.'

In some organisations the risk element is closed down completely by a constricting definition of success.

'Anything that is not perfect is regarded as a significant failure that should not happen.'

Many managers remarked how this perfectionism is reflected in their own behaviour. They recognise the negative impact that this has over time, contributing to the diminution of their mental horizons. Whereas at a younger age they gave themselves permission to fail, the combination of perfectionism and of becoming increasingly self-conscious had resulted in a limiting self-perception, defining the kind of person they are and the work they do.

'You don't give yourself the opportunities that you used to.'

Against this backdrop it is inevitable that thinking will tend to be done inside the box. The boundaries for creativity are defined by the organisational attitude to risk and the personal attitude to failure.

'But what that has done in the process is that it has stifled people wanting to try things and being allowed to fail.'

However, these entrenched attitudes are rarely apparent to the casual observer. Individuals and organisations become adept at conveying an image that deflects suspicion. Therefore although the ideas they promote might be old, they'll be professionally rehashed and presented with great panache.

'Because they don't want to fail, people pitch ideas that are very similar to ideas that have already been successful.'

Failure tolerance

Despite concerted efforts to avoid it, failure is inevitable to some degree. Each organisation has its own parameters of failure – what defines it and what the response is.

'If it's something that's relatively conventional that fails it's ok. If it's something unconventional however, it's put down to having made the wrong judgement.'

How an individual's work is translated in the terms prescribed by the organisation will determine their level of creativity.

'There's a negative culture in terms of there being very few people looking for how well others have done. They're looking for what's gone wrong. When anyone feels got at and not appreciated it stifles and represses their creativity.'

Employees within every organisation develop an innate understanding as to what treatment is dispensed if ideas are initiated that subsequently fail. In organisations that display Downward focus, failure tolerance is low and the repercussions punitive.

'Failure is seen to be treated quite harshly.

You come up with a series of bad ideas and you're suddenly out of that magic circle.'

In order to survive, individuals conform to the tacit laws established by the organisation with regard to failure. They either adapt to the laws knowingly or adopt them on a more subconscious level.

'I'm at the very low risk. I want to get it completely right and close the whole risk. If it goes wrong it can come back on you.'

Accountability

The necessity for accountability cannot be denied and is a daily consideration throughout every organisation, whether public or private sector. However, the two sectors are influenced in very different ways, reflected in the impact accountability has upon creativity. In the private sector there is clarity in the overriding bottom

line priority of stakeholders' objectives, making accountability relatively straightforward to address.

'We operate in a world where tangible outcomes, or commercial successes are measured in terms of profit. So anything that doesn't present or promise an immediate increase is often rejected.'

In the public sector, bottom line considerations are also crucial in determining operations. However, all decisions are subject to an additional, political scrutiny. Being answerable to current political thinking and public opinion spawns a cautiousness and anxiety that forces creativity into a straightjacket.

'They're scared of their own shadows at the moment. It's not even about stepping out of line – it's about politically stepping out of line.'

At every stage of the creative process an idea will be judged by many sources and subsequently moulded to fit frequently incompatible criteria. While these sources might have conflicting agendas, the demand for the conventional tends to be a feature that is common to all.

'If you do things unconventionally you've got to explain yourself to the powers and nauseam.'

Probably the most vociferous of these powers are the press, always eager to expose anything that could be interpreted as a waste of public funds. Many within the public sector, particularly those operating in a political environment, are very conscious of being an easy target with no right of reply, and are consequently risk-averse.

'We're now at the stage where you can't put anything out there in case it's picked up and we get bad press.'

The sheer degree of accountability demands every move be justified, and in many

organisations is cited as the most inhibiting factor to creativity.

'Our accountability, our financial control, our processes, our procedures, our defending decisions can very easily remove any possibility of creativity.'

Lip service

Current business thinking acknowledges creativity as an important strategic advantage. It is presented as a critical asset, with all organisations endeavouring to access and develop it. However, the rhetoric is contrary to the reality experienced by many.

'I think creativity is considered important but as in lots and lots of organisations I've spoken to I wonder whether it is lip service or real action.'

In spite of the logical arguments in favour of creativity put forward by respected business gurus, there are a multitude of reasons why organisations shy away from it. Rather than having to justify themselves it an easier option to appear to agree.

'For all their talk about encouraging creativity they wanted people who could actually manage the process effectively, whatever they say to the contrary. They said all sorts of things but it was lies, they didn't mean it.'

There is now an ever-expanding media devoted to the topic of creativity in business.

International conferences are dedicated to it. Organisations routinely include it in criteria and assessments. Yet there are many who question whether the words are being transformed into action.

'The word creativity is like motherhood and apple pies – of course it's good! I'm sure creativity was one of the 'tick' boxes. But unfortunately I don't think it meant anything except it's a good word.'

Forward focus solution template

1 Outside in – inside out

Make the most of external influences

2 Same people, same place – new perspectives

Find extra dimensions in pre-existing circumstances

3 Personnel development

Provide a secure foundation combined with challenge

4 Creative communication

Open channels that support ideas

5 Can you afford not to?

Re-consider financial suppositions

6 Assessment – a creative perspective

Embed soft skills evaluation

7 The change process

Direct continuous improvement

8 A creative culture

Maintain an integrated approach

1 Outside in – inside out

Make the most of external influences

- Involve people from outside the organisation to generate new perspectives – bring them in, take employees to them, use management and employee contacts for ad hoc contribution, encourage employees to give external presentations, attend lectures.

Creative intern scheme *For several weeks a year Endemol brings in small groups of students or recent graduates, who are new to their industry, and lets them hothouse ideas.*

'It knocks us off our iron rails that we run on here.'

- Encourage and trust staff to work away from the office.
- When possible, conduct training off-site, to allow full concentration and draw focus away from office activity.
- Have away days structured by facilitators who understand how to generate creative tension, thereby achieving open discussion which results in genuine solutions.

Creative tension *National Foundation for Youth Music ran an away day to develop the relationship between their trustees and the operational group. As well as being considered successful in bringing the groups together, the day generated ideas to which approximately a third of the organisation's budget was subsequently allocated.*

'I think that sort of engagement is beneficial to creativity – different groups of people can understand more what their role is and come up with ideas by talking about issues. Not always agreeing!'

- Ask all employees to bring in unusual stimulus for use in brainstorming, so everyone has access to things outside their everyday experience.
- Collaborate with other professions and the public to train and inform.

External collaborations *To add realism to training situations members of the public are invited to act roles with police officers. DS Dryden suggests an extension of this idea in relation to interviewing witnesses or suspects – adding trainee solicitors into scenarios.*
- Look at arts processes, skills and activities in order to embed them as part of a fundamental level in strategic thinking.
- Develop external relationships through arts projects, establishing a positive image and increased visibility for the organisation within the community – placing company ensembles into outreach situations, sponsoring events, commissioning artists.

Artistic outreach *University for Industry (Ufi) commissioned a digital artist, subsequently securing many showings of the work.*

‘An opportunity for the project and the company to be spoken about in lots of new arenas, raising awareness of the brand name.’
- Employ individuals from the creative industries to inspire idea generation, stimulate interdepartmental communication and improve staff morale – through arts based training, consultancy, brainstorming, exhibitions, ad hoc performances, interactive workshops.

2 Same people, same place – new perspectives

Find extra dimensions in pre-existing circumstances

- Give the young blood of the organisation a voice, responsibility, permission to challenge the rules and the education to do it properly.

- Employ people with fresh perspectives, but balance this with a backdrop of experience for them to work from.
- Find ways of tapping into employees’ experience. Maximise human resource potential by eliciting contributions from all levels regarding organisational development.

Cross-organisational planning *The Dorling Kindersley business plan 2001 was kick-started with a 3-day planning session that involved 120 employees from all levels. This workshop used a creative process, which allowed everyone to communicate effectively, share information and feel comfortable talking with people at all levels.*

‘We created the means of making that fun and enjoyable, tapping into their creativity, because we wanted a business plan that was far better than any before.’

- Consider the physical layout of the organisation and question how it affects communication and team dynamics.
- To make best use of individuals’ talents and interests establish new grades and positions to encourage and promote them.

Realising potential *Laura Sibbons (London Business School, Associate Director, Consultancy) changed the role of her assistant from PA into Workshop and Event Co-ordinator – extending the job spec in order to develop the individual’s skills, while benefiting the organisation as a whole.*

- Make contexts where people from the creative side can interface with others in administrative areas.
- Consider how to introduce organisational development into every employee’s set of responsibilities.

Shared development *In a highly volatile industry, where development is a core issue, Endemol has achieved success with only two employees being ‘pure development and creative’.*

‘We don’t believe in having a vast

department of people doing development. Everyone who is part of the creative process also does other things. And I think that's very important.'

- Rather than the organisation having one rigid environment, have a deliberate strategy to benefit the different ways departments work. Design different environments for energy, contemplation, confidentiality, movement and communication.

3 Personnel development

Provide a secure foundation combined with challenge

- In order to lead by example and to ensure the most beneficial application of creativity, senior management needs to continually update their knowledge of techniques and develop their own abilities.

Creativity techniques *Jeremy Klein (Senior Consultant, Scientific Generics) believes it is vital to frame and analyse business situations and then consciously choose and apply relevant techniques, rather than adopting techniques merely because they are familiar.*

'Maybe that for me is the essence of creativity in what I do.'

- Devote a proportion of the organisation's training budget to programmes dedicated to developing creative potential.
- To maintain a responsive attitude from staff to training and to maximise long-term benefits, ensure that follow-through is an integral part of the training process. Embed new skills and techniques by deliberately integrating them into the job structure.
- Create an environment where employees feel part of a team, where they're not trying to outshine each other, can appreciate their different roles, trust each other, and their development is supported by colleagues and the organisation.

Supporting individuals *London Arts staff support schemes include:*

- a Staff Development Programme – identifying what an individual needs to meet their objectives*
- b Social Committee – providing opportunities to socialise with colleagues*
- c Peer evaluation process – to informally discuss projects*
- d AA (Administrators Anonymous) – to informally discuss ways to support funding programmes.*

- Give employees space, time and confidence to push something as far as it can go. Then throw them in at the deep end!
- Express management appreciation of employees, both publicly as well as directly to the individuals concerned.
- To reduce employee stress levels and to establish a more efficient working environment, promote the benefits of taking time-out and keeping working hours within boundaries. Build renewal time into managerial positions, particularly after intense projects.
- Acknowledge and capture the competitive buzz that is inherent in creativity. Use this energy to stimulate individuals and teams.
- Instigate an exceptional benefits package.

All-round benefit *RDSi have an extensive benefits package, which comprises not only familiar elements such as childcare, maternity/paternity leave and a holiday bonus scheme, but also extras such as reflexology, acupuncture and on-site massage. This encourages staff loyalty, lowering recruitment fees and maintaining long-term client relationships, which brings considerable financial reward for the company.*

'We feel the approach we have is an extremely good one. It makes the organisation feel very settled and secure.'

4 Creative communication

Open channels that support ideas

- When introducing creativity techniques to employees, present them as practical tools. Emphasise their application and benefits. Integrate them into management practice to show by example that they are accessible, user-friendly and time-effective.
- Create channels of communication that allow ideas to be assessed fairly and efficiently.

Conveying ideas *CIPD operate a successful system where ideas that need resources are presented as business cases and undergo straightforward appraisal.*

'Bureaucracy doesn't interfere with the creative process.'

- If an inappropriate idea is presented, rather than dismissing it, give the individual a thought to take away that might feed its development.
- Give immediate feedback whenever possible.
- Instigate systems where everyone can explore ideas openly. Update, maintain and review regularly. Support with appropriate training.

Intra personnel *'Know How at DTI' is an effective cross-departmental channel that offers employees the opportunity to share ideas creatively, communicating their experience, skills, interests, networks and general aspirations.*

'Skills don't get lost and they talk to colleagues about what they know rather than thinking in silo mentalities.'

- Most information is now disseminated in segments, due to the restricted space of a computer screen. Counterbalance this by setting aside a large wall space in a communal area, where project related information can be displayed at once – to give a complete picture and free up different connections and relationships.
- Build in opportunities for informal interaction without an agenda, so people feel

comfortable talking across departments and to all levels.

Food for thought *Sian Eggert (Senior Lecturer in Human Resource Management, Brighton Business School) has regular informal team meetings – 'paper bag lunches'. The team members take their lunches to a screened area, where they can spend time privately together talking and sharing ideas.*

Another interviewee reported having been impressed by the canteen at BP. Because food was free of charge and of good quality, staff from all departments chose to eat there, and were encouraged to mix by the layout of long benches.

'It was like a factory for ideas. Brilliant! We should get something like that in.'

- Before sending e-mail, question whether it is a time waster – is it really necessary or merely contributing to the problem of junk mail? Consider instigating ideas such as an informal one day per week ban on sending internal e-mail throughout the organisation.
- Have consistency in your organisation's 'message' but communicate it in a way that is best understood by the people you are targeting. Talk to economists with graphs. To accountants through numbers. To HR people through words.

5 Can you afford not to?

Re-consider financial suppositions

- Instead of spending time and money devising and implementing more policies, look at the existing ones and improve, simplify or remove them.
- Rather than seeing 'more resources' as the answer to all problems, seek creative solutions to working within the same financial envelope.
- Share budgets between divisions of the organisation to induce engagement between them and improve creativity.

- Put aside budget specifically for risky projects.
Innovative project budget *In 2001 a BBC controller allocated £3 million for daring and innovative programmes, giving producers the opportunity to get out their 'dustbin' of ideas and submit those of merit previously considered too wild.*

'I thought that was a sensible and brave step.'

This initiative resulted in two series that were creatively and financially successful, and is therefore being repeated in 2002.

- View projects from a broader perspective. Focus on the long-term rather than the instant results generally demanded by the bottom line.
- To avoid wasting expenditure by draining managerial skills on routine tasks, maintain sufficient support staff and use them in the most effective ways.
Appropriate support *A simple idea for a more efficient use of secretarial staff in a busy solicitor's office: all tapes that need transcribing are placed on a table in the middle of the office for easy access. Although secretaries have a primary solicitor they work for, they can assist others when a lull occurs by transcribing one of these tapes.*
- Encourage a review of the voluntary sector funding system. Shift emphasis from project funding to core funding, to reduce administration costs, decentralise control, and allow experts within funded organisations to use their knowledge and time more effectively.

6 Assessment – a creative perspective

Embed soft skills evaluation

- Find out what makes individual employees tick. Meet staff individually to generate self-assessment data. Ask:
 - What is your job description?
 - What do you think your job entails?

– What do you think your job should entail? Then ask for a written response to determine what motivates each individual. Use this information to effect harmonious matches between employees and their core tasks.

- Define roles and responsibilities clearly. Reappraise regularly.
- Run workshops for all employees to:
 - generate information about their values and beliefs
 - consider the world outside the organisation – what it wants and needs.
 Use this information to re-evaluate organisational approach.
- Ask employees questions such as:
 - 'Who is responsible for innovation?' Do they point to one person or do they believe they can all contribute?
 - 'What do you feel about change?' Do they throw their hands up in horror, or believe it is a normal part of their daily life?
 Use this information to gauge the organisational message regarding issues surrounding creativity.

Innovation journey *Bettina von Stamm (Innovation Exchange (<http://iexchange.london.edu>), London Business School) has developed a tool for organisational assessment and development of innovation capability. This allows companies to investigate the level of innovation they should aspire to, assess where they are on the 'innovation journey', and consider future steps.*

'To be innovative is considered to be best practice nowadays but more importantly, well managed companies tend to be more innovative than those with obvious signs of mismanagement.'

- In order to benefit the flow of ideas, review and adapt the structures and systems used to assess day-to-day activities.
- Rather than traditional bottom line measurements of success, introduce

evaluation criteria around creativity that are more behaviourally orientated.

- Make creativity a core competence in assessments.

Creative competence *Metropolitan Police: annual reports include an assessment of individuals' creativity and innovation as one of the five professional standards.*

Middlesex University: one of the criteria for a lecturer's promotion is a demonstration of innovation in their teaching.

'So implicit in the criteria for promotion is creativity.'

- Assess management teams in terms of a balanced creative process – recognising the importance of inspirational forces within the company.

7 The change process

Direct continuous improvement

- See potential opportunities for creative approaches during times of change when people are already primed to expect upheaval.

Internal review *'Millennial Challenge' was instigated by the General Secretary of the TUC to review the position of Trade Unions in the 21st century, openly addressing potentially major constitutional issues.*

'So as an organisation that's coming from the very top. We are prepared to face up and do quite different things.'

- Accept that change is generally incremental.
- Adopt an ethos where, in order to improve, change is seen as a constant and failure as part of the learning experience.

Continuous improvement groups *Penguin has been using continuous improvement groups for several years to very positive effect. These start with a 'vision' about how to improve a situation – getting people to think outside the box.*

'Feedback's been very good and it's having a knock-on effect on the work.'

- Continual update and renewal is part of what it is to be professional; influence others by example.

- As an ongoing process, be open to ways that your organisation can take advantage of new opportunities offered by technological advances.

8 A creative culture

Maintain an integrated approach

- Encouragement for creative approaches has to come from the top. Support can be as simple as a letter from the chairman or chief executive stating their backing for a proposed initiative.

- Design ways to get feedback from employees that also stimulate their creativity.

Creating feedback *The Post Office have set-up 'Innovation Lab', a 'pod' where employees can scribble their thoughts on the walls, interact with computers and play.*

Middlesex University Business School has recently allocated a room for professional and personal development sessions where, by using a 'copy board', ideas can be immediately reproduced and distributed. Peter Critten (Principal Lecturer) hopes this will be a resource for generating creative ideas.

'Children are capable of incredible design and innovation at primary school level and then secondary education kills it. So maybe in Higher Education we can try and make a space for it.'

- Make work enjoyable for your employees, or they will go elsewhere. Playfulness is now acknowledged to be an integral part of a Learning Organisation, being effective not only in encouraging creativity but also in other areas such as team building and stress reduction.
- Display an organisational attitude where no idea is a bad idea, and there is no threat of being laughed at, shouted at or sacked.

- Be aware of the many forms of bullying. If it is discovered, be proactive in eliminating it and examine why it exists within the organisation's culture. Ensure that grievance procedures are accessible to all.

'Bad bosses hotline' The TUC ran a hotline so people (not just trade union members) could ring up and divulge their problems at work. It became a big bullying campaign – because that was one of the major issues that came out of it – and was considered an enormous success. The campaign led to a collaboration with the Industrial Society, to produce a training video addressing the problem.

- Design structures that promote collaboration rather than competition.
- Make it accepted policy that at the generation stage no idea is wrong. Once it reaches the development stage, be more rigorous.
- Encourage willingness at each stage of the creative process to listen, revisit, rework or shelve an idea.
- Use a selection of creativity techniques off the shelf. Supplement these with techniques that you develop and hone specifically for the situation.
- Recognise and reward people who can develop realistic concepts – your core competents.
- Give communal spaces strategic purpose beyond their function – canteen, reception etc.

Maximising space Brighton Business School have added value to their Learning Resources area by situating a bookshop and open café outside the library. The bookshop organises activities and invites external booksellers to set up stands. This turns an otherwise dead space into an environment for learning and socialising, with a commercial benefit.

- Effect a balance that allows individuals to think things through on their own and to interact with others.
- Combine different people's skills and experience in unusual ways in order to reach unique outcomes.

Diverse combinations Wolff-Olins began the process of branding a business park by running a series of creativity-driven workshops with those involved – developer, architect, letting agents, landscape architect, financial backers. Robert Jones (Consultant Director) then interpreted these in collaboration with the designer and account manager. Each contributed from their perspective to produce an original result that the client believed in and that was resonant for the market.

'That's one example of how the creativity works here. It is very much a combination of different people making something that none of them could have made on their own.'

Conclusion

The deluge of new challenges produced by the rapid rate of global change necessitates a constant stream of solutions. Individuals and organisations that are equipped to generate, develop and transform ideas into practical, innovative solutions have the advantage in an environment of uncertainty. Government and education policies now reflect a general acceptance that this creative process is essential, and that creativity needs to be woven into the fabric of society. Leading business thinkers promote the same philosophy when advising on how to survive the current turbulence. They recognise that organisations must respond to this unpredictable environment by constantly reinventing themselves, which requires the development and implementation of creative approaches.

So leaders in society are advocates for creativity as a strategic response to the change culture, underpinning their assertions with clear and convincing reasoning. They recognise this resource as a basic human capability, which is therefore freely available to every organisation. Given these factors, one would imagine that organisations would by now have embraced the concept, and be vigorously designing effective ways by which to access and manage creativity. All too frequently, however, this is not the reality.

While evidence points to the logic of adopting a creative agenda, in many organisations there are powerful factors preventing this course of action.

These stem from the fact that, although guided by one vision, an organisation is essentially a group of individuals. Just as an

individual can be motivated by subconscious anxieties, hidden schemata can motivate an organisation, originating both from employees and, more crucially, from top management. These covert influences can be as instrumental in directing action as any rational imperative, consequently shaping strategic decisions. Rather than acknowledging the existence of such irrational forces, many organisations respond by adopting a protective position, where the status quo becomes a defence mechanism and provides a reassuring illusion of security.

Creativity is composed of many elements that are the antithesis to this perceived stability. Maintaining a status quo requires conformity to prescribed organisational and societal values and traditions. This causes a resistance to change and determines the extent to which risk and failure are tolerated, defining the acceptable boundaries within which both employees and organisations can operate. Such boundaries are innately limiting but, because they are often vague and open to interpretation, they suppress creativity even further than might be expected. As a precautionary measure, organisations will therefore select the safest strategic options, and employees will self-censor their ideas in order to toe the company line.

Under conditions such as these, ideas that challenge the status quo are unlikely to find any communication channels designed to support their development. Rather than being treated as an essential business component, creativity is relegated to the position of a non-essential add-on. Giving creativity low priority is justified

by citing its inability to satisfy bottom line criteria. However, this conclusion is invariably reached by using evaluation methods more relevant to the industrial age than the knowledge-based economy.

Underlying all these issues are the paradoxical responses evoked by the idea of creativity. These are generally based on the assumption that creativity and artistry, and creative people and artists are synonymous. Rather than seeing creativity as a basic human capability, it is seen as a talent reserved for the few, namely artists. Rather than being valued and consulted as a source of expertise in creativity in business, artists are regarded as entirely alien to business practice. Creativity is similarly restricted, deemed only appropriate in certain prescribed situations, rather than having potential benefit in any circumstance. While these assumptions remain, creativity will be linked to society's perception of artists in society – either revered or reviled. The former leads to a creative impotence, where employees feel inadequate about their creative ability and will therefore avoid situations that might expose this deficiency. The latter, which is based on the stereotypical image of the profligate artist, produces a fear of the unpredictable force of creativity and a suspicion of all things creative. These extreme perceptions are not only inaccurate with regard to artists, but also polarise creativity and waste its potential. Until it can be viewed as distinct from artistry, and brought centre stage in a business context, creativity will neither be effectively accessed from individuals within an organisation nor from artists outside it.

Organisations are therefore limiting their creative potential, not only as a result of their hidden schemata, but also because of the confusion surrounding the idea of creativity. This generates insecurity as to what exactly creativity is, the extent of its benefit, and how an organisation can effectively access and

manage it. Consequently, many organisations would prefer to sideline the issue of creativity. However, in order to conform to current business thinking they must be seen to endorse it, and are reluctantly impelled to introduce it in some way. When creativity is instigated from this resistant standpoint it will be in the form of disparate initiatives, rather than as an integrated strategy. Inevitably, cohesive structures will not be established to support creativity, systems and techniques will not be embedded, training will be ineffectual, and employees will experience expressions of management commitment as disingenuous, which discourages their engagement. Under such conditions, initiatives will prove to be failures and will be terminated, or else superficially maintained in order to demonstrate to the onlooker that the issue of creativity is being addressed by the organisation.

That the change culture demands creative solutions is the consensus of opinion throughout all levels of organisations – a view that is supported by current government policies and business thinking. Yet, despite leaders and employees expressing support for creativity, the evidence suggests that organisations, as bodies, have fundamental restrictions, which radically reduce their creative potential. Before an organisation can develop its own creative agenda it is these restrictions that need to be assessed and, in the process, dispelled. This 'primes' an organisation, by preparing the foundation for all subsequent creative activity.

At this point an effective strategy for accessing and managing creativity can be planned and implemented. Existing practices can be accurately evaluated and modified, forming a basis for the strategy, and then augmented with planning and integration of new initiatives, tailored to the organisation's specific needs. During strategy design there are

eight points to consider:

- Make the most of external influences
- Find extra dimensions in pre-existing circumstances
- Provide a secure foundation combined with challenge
- Open channels that support ideas
- Re-consider financial suppositions
- Embed soft skills evaluation
- Direct continuous improvement
- Maintain an integrated approach.

When top management designs and adopts a comprehensive strategy from this perspective they are expressing their commitment. This commitment is the essential driving force that motivates employees, giving a powerful signal that creativity is a core competence and that engagement in the creative process is standard practice within the organisation. Consequently, creative output will increase exponentially,

mirrored by a decrease in the input of resources, which are necessarily incurred during implementation of new systems. Employees at all levels become part of a positive cycle, where valuing an individual's contribution means individuals feel valued, and in return unreservedly contribute more. At this point an organisation's investment will reap rewards.

An effective strategy is the mechanism by which an organisation can mine the wealth of creativity that is available. Once this mechanism is rolling, an organisation can reach into a constant supply of ideas, the stockpile from which solutions are sourced. This source is available to every organisation. All that is required is initial groundwork to prepare the foundation, and a subsequent commitment to installing and maintaining a mechanism that allows an organisation to effectively access and manage its creativity.

Credits

Jill Pack *BBC, Education Executive (Documentaries/Factual & Learning)*
Emily Smyth *BBC, Senior Development Executive (Documentaries & Investigations)*
Richard McKerrow *Channel 4, Commissioning Editor, Education*
Nicky Hughes *Endemol, Head of Research & Development*
Nigel Roberts *CNBC, Business Programme Presenter*
Charlie Edelman *Transport for London, General Manager, Marketing Communications & Corporate Design*
Robert Jones *Wolff-Olins Head consultant*
Zoe Fugler *Wolff-Olins Designer*
Ralph Ardill *Imagination, Marketing & Strategic Planning Director*
Martin Hinchcliffe *Ufi, Consumer Brand Manager*
Vicki Raynor *RDSi, Managing Director*
Cathy Pash *Accenture, Project Manager*
Jeremy Klein *Scientific Generics, Senior Consultant*
Andrew Dobbie *DTI, Training & Development Manager (Central Directorate & Departmental Regulatory Impact Unit)*
Clive Margetts *DTI, Head of Futures Team/Future & Innovation Unit*
Cathryn Law *DTI, Policy Advisor / Central Directorate*
Pat Langford *DTI, Head of Knowledge Management*
Hilary Oakley *TUC, Personnel & Training Manager*
Martin Sloman *CIPD Training & Development Advisor*
Marjorie Newton *Dorling Kindersley/Penguin, Head of Training & Development*
Sarah Mycock *Dorling Kindersley/Penguin, Head of Special Markets*
Philip Kogan *Kogan Page, Managing Director*

John Stephens *National Foundation for Youth Music, Education Consultant*
Ed Birch *Arts Council of England, Senior Employment Advisor*
Christina Christou *London Arts, Training & Development Officer*
Jenny Edwards *London Arts, Director of External and Strategic Relations*
Dana Captainino *Haringey Arts Council, Arts Development Manager*
Bettina von Stamm *London Business School, Co-ordinator of the Innovation Exchange*
Laura Sibbons *London Business School, Associate Director, Consulting (Career Management Centre)*
Peter Critten *Middlesex University Business School, Principal Lecturer*
Jolenta Jagellio *Middlesex University Business School, Senior lecturer*
Sue Millar *Greenwich University, Director, Centre for Cultural and Heritage Management*
Sian Eggert *Brighton Business School, Senior Lecturer, Human Resource Management*
Steve Dryden *Metropolitan Police, Detective Sergeant, Haringey Intelligence Unit*
Tony Stern *North Hillingdon Primary Care Trust, Commissioning Lead*
Trevor Garrod *Simmons-Simmons, Solicitor*
John Howkins *Author/consultant*

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