



ACTION-RESEARCH ROUNDTABLE

Creativity at Work: A Leadership Guide

Success Belongs to Me!

CSPS Action-Research Roundtable on Creativity

Chaired by Diane Vincent

By Peter Stoyko with G. Keith Henning
and Deirdre McCaughey

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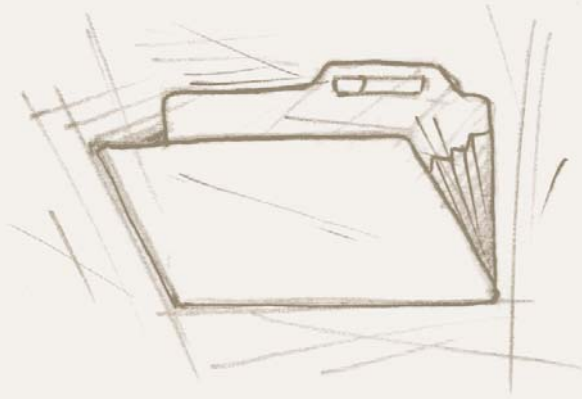


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PREFACE

A WORD FROM THE SCHOOL

The School has embarked upon a new journey. In support of the new Public Service Learning Framework, we are working to help departments strengthen and accelerate individual learning, organizational leadership and innovation across the Public Service. As part of this, the School is working to ensure that innovative practices in public management, whether they are generated at home or abroad, do not remain unknown, but are captured and shared across the Public Service.

The topic of innovation and creativity is vast and important. I am glad that the Roundtable on Creativity has taken on the task of advancing this agenda. This guide offers many important insights about the generation of new and worthwhile ideas. It will help advance the School's work by equipping public servants to generate creative solutions in response to challenging problems.

I sincerely thank the Roundtable's Chair, Diane Vincent, Executive Vice-President of the Canadian International Development Agency, for her commitment and leadership. I also applaud the contributions of the Roundtable members who volunteered their time and expertise out of a belief in the importance of promoting creativity within the Public Service. Finally, I would like to thank the Roundtable Secretariat members for their research and organizational efforts.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ruth Dantzer".

Ruth Dantzer,
President,
Canada School of Public Service



A WORD FROM THE CHAIR

Creativity at Work : A Call to Action

Our mission in the Public Service is to help the Government build a better future for Canadians in an increasingly complex environment.

By marshalling our creativity to provide value for Canadians, we build trust in public institutions.

Creativity is critical.

Creativity is about surfacing and tackling difficult issues, producing valuable solutions and implementing them.

Leadership is essential.

Effective leaders of the 21st century will be the ones who can drive change and foster environments in which creativity thrives.

Leveraging the power of creativity in a sustainable way requires focus, hard work and leadership at all levels.

We are up to the challenge.

Success belongs to me!



Diane Vincent,
Chair of the Action-Research Roundtable on Creativity
on behalf of the Roundtable

What is Action-Research?

The CSPS Action-Research Roundtable process brings together practitioners and experts from both inside and outside of government. The group develops practical advice for dealing with pressing management challenges. The research process revolves around the deliberations of a diverse roundtable—a forum ideally suited for rapidly pooling and scrutinizing knowledge, insights and experiences. The research takes place over a year.

The challenges are selected by managers and senior executives according to their urgency and importance to the Public Service as a whole. The end product contains leading-edge, focused, practical advice that public servants genuinely value and actively use within their work.

Each roundtable is supported by a secretariat composed of scholars and public service researchers.

THE CSPS ACTION-RESEARCH ROUNDTABLE ON CREATIVITY

CHAIR

Diane Vincent, Canadian International Development Agency

MEMBERS

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Acknowledgments

The Roundtable members extend their sincere thanks to the many individuals who contributed to the development of this guide. This includes those who presented ideas to the Roundtable and those who carried out the production process.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Nature of Creativity

Society is moving from the *Information Age* to an *Age of Creativity*. The continual generation and application of new ideas is now the cornerstone of sustained economic competitiveness and cultural vibrancy. Likewise, to achieve their primary goals, organizations are becoming more reliant on the creative contributions of its people. The challenge of helping people live up to their creative potential requires the exercise of a more sophisticated array of leadership skills and the provision of enabling environmental factors (*a supportive milieu*).

It follows that, if the Public Service of Canada is to build a better future for Canadians, it will find ways to promote creativity. There is not necessarily a contradiction between promoting creativity and maintaining necessary controls, such as accountability. Much like the human brain—which has both an artistic and empathetic side and a logical and utilitarian side—an organization needs both sets of activities to be complete. The mistake-proof organization does not exist. Intelligent risks must be taken from time to time. An overemphasis on controls can breed a false sense of security and undermine an organization's ability to adapt. Indeed, creative solutions can go a long way toward balancing the risk-taking and the care-taking inherent in public administration.

So what exactly is creativity? Creativity is the invention and application of new and worthwhile ideas to improve the way in which an organization works. Everyone has the potential to be creative. Creativity can come from anywhere within an organization. Being creative is also something that people must work

hard at, but the pay-off from the resulting ideas can make other aspects of work much easier. The innovations can be ground-breaking and revolutionary, or they can be small, incremental improvements. Indeed, people have creative styles that tend to make them better at producing one kind of innovation or the other.

Promoting creativity can be difficult. It is not easy to demonstrate the value of a new product or service that does not yet exist. Once implemented, the benefits of an innovation may not accrue immediately. New ideas can also challenge conventional wisdom and appear threatening. Despite these challenges, people tend to be happier when working in creative organizations. Creative work is pleasurable and interesting work, leading people to be more loyal and engaged in what they do.

Idea Leadership

Building creative organizations requires leadership. Leadership can be exercised at any level within an organization. An *idea leader* is someone who knows how to spot a good idea and adapt it to suit the organization's needs. Good ideas may sometimes be left to languish out of neglect and indifference. Idea leaders are entrepreneurs who find ways to sell ideas and guide them through to full implementation. They bring people together to collectively drive the innovation process.

An idea leader is also someone who is conscious of how personal actions can inadvertently affect fledgling ideas. Creativity is often destroyed by the actions of managers who are focusing on other things.

The most strategic method of fostering creativity and idea generation through leadership is to put into place a *cycle of continuous innovation*. This involves: (a) creating a surrounding milieu that promotes idea generation; (b) continually scanning for new opportunities and clarifying problems; (c) implementing practical techniques that generate new possibilities; (d) bringing stakeholders together and forging a business case; and finally (e) implementing the ideas and ensuring follow-through. This guide discusses a variety of individual and group techniques for generating new ideas (e.g., brainstorming and brush-fire teams).

Creating a Milieu that Nurtures Creativity

The *creative milieu* encompasses an organization's surroundings and ethos (including organizational culture, interpersonal dynamics, systems and physical surroundings). One of the idea leader's key jobs is to create this milieu by putting enablers in place and by removing obstacles.

There is a large number of enablers. Intellectual diversity produces the creative conflict needed to generate truly novel ideas. Vibrant, wide-reaching interaction exposes people to new influences. Employee engagement causes people to strive and to submerge themselves in creative problem solving. A sphere of autonomy reduces conformity and provides the necessary decision-making latitude. A safe space in which to express ideas openly and authentically without fear encourages people to contribute. Intellectual growth opportunities help to replenish the intellectual stockpiles that people need to continue contributing.

Supportive and empathetic managers act as catalysts and role models. Given time for pause and reflection on work, people are more likely to think up better ways of conducting that work. Appropriate levels of organizational support—funding, technology and expertise help to bring ideas to fruition. Finally, a dynamic (in some respects, turbulent) environment will keep people on their toes and discourage them to be content with the *status quo*.

More than half of all obstacles to innovation tend to come from within an organization, not from outside forces. One of these obstacles is rankism, the tendency to value a person's input based on status instead of merit. Horizontal barriers and the inertia of formal procedures and routines can also undermine the implementation of new ideas. Public servants are becoming "time poor", as hectic schedules and heavy workloads undermine the ability to reflect carefully on work.

An idea leader brings people together to engage in deep and meaningful dialogue about how to develop the creative milieu. This leadership guide includes an overview of the dialogue process and a self-diagnostic instrument that will help facilitate such conversation. Advice is also offered about actions that can be taken immediately to build the creative milieu.

Building the Creative Public Service

The Public Service of Canada can do a number of things to transform itself into a place where creativity thrives.



- **New Learning Opportunities**

Leadership, creativity and innovation are needed throughout the entire Public Service. Creativity should be promoted, and creative problem-solving skills should be taught, as part of public servants' learning. This applies to the Canada School of Public Service's courses, as well as the School's role as a learning clearing house. It is recommended that creativity-oriented learning tools and opportunities be developed to meet public servant's learning needs.

- **Creative Smart Practices**

In the past, case studies have been used very effectively as learning tools within the CSPS in specific courses and seminars. It is recommended that future case studies highlight creative and innovative solutions, and that these smart practices be integrated into the School's curriculum.

- **Creativity and Organizational Strategy**

Senior executives within departments should emphasize the value of creativity to their staff. Championing the cause involves thinking about how to bolster the creative capacity of the workplace. This includes integrating creativity into the change management strategies of a department or agency.

- **Communicating Successes**

The Government of Canada, as a whole, should communicate the value of creative endeavours to the public. This will reinforce the public's trust in government as an institution and its accountability to Canadians. The Public Service is full of success stories involving creativity. These successes should be trumpeted far and wide. By acknowledging the great creative work that is done on a daily basis, public servants gain a sense of pride and confidence.

- **Recognizing Successes**

The Institute of Public Administration of Canada has an excellent annual award that recognizes cases of innovation in public management. Public service leaders should look for ways to reward cases of creativity and innovation more generally and investigate the possibility of creating a more formal program to encourage and recognize creative and innovative work.



CHAPTER ONE: THE NATURE OF CREATIVITY

I. INTRODUCTION


Benjamin Zander is a music teacher and conductor of the Boston Philharmonic orchestra. After reflecting on decades of experience—with his wife, Rosamund, a family therapist—he noticed a contradiction in the way that many people play music.¹

Music is usually considered to be one of the most creative endeavours there is. Yet, many of Zander's students were limiting themselves because of an anxiety over how they would be graded. Players in his orchestra exhibited similar tendencies that prevented them from achieving their full potential: they feared making a mistake that would cause them to stand out unfavourably from the rest of the ensemble. Instead of pursuing their passion with zest and vigour, the musicians were languishing in mediocrity.

The two Zanders concluded that these musicians had adopted several self-limiting patterns of thought. The musicians seemed to think that success is achieved through conformist behaviour and, above all else, the need to look out for one's own interests. This is just the way things are, the musicians assumed.

They passively accepted the *status quo*, believing that nothing could really change. As a result, they habitually “played second fiddle” and did not stretch themselves. In other words, the musicians adopted a calculating, survivalist mentality instead of continually thinking of better ways to be true contributors.

How does someone break out of this mind-set? The Zanders argued that people start by thinking of the world as full of creations and opportunities to create. “Once you have begun to distinguish that *it's all invented*, you can create a place to dwell where new inventions are the order of the day,” they wrote. “Such a place we call ‘the universe of possibility’ ...”² This involves several practices. For example, one should speak about problems in terms of possibility; that is, not in terms of empty optimism, but with realistic consideration about new avenues for improvement. Lightening up and embracing humour at work and in life also help. Moreover, there is a need to enrol others in the act of taking the initiative and thinking up new ideas jointly.



None of this means losing sight of the orchestra’s ultimate goal: playing a piece of music as a collective. On the contrary, it means fulfilling the group’s ultimate mission—playing the music in key as written—while also encouraging people to rise to the occasion and to play their instrument in a way that seems fresh and spirited. Most listeners may not notice these individual sparks of invention, but they will appreciate the overall quality of the performance.

Of course, these insights have an application outside of the orchestra pit. Thinking about the art of the possible and continually finding new ways to improve are ideals that public organizations everywhere seek to achieve. As Richard Florida points out, the *Information Age* has given way to an *Age of Creativity*.³ Economically advanced societies are less dependent on the processing of raw materials and flows of information than they once were. Instead, societies remain economically competitive and culturally vibrant by nurturing the creative talents of their people. Likewise, a society’s institutions increasingly rely on capabilities invented by clever and imaginative people. To use Florida’s words, we increasingly rely on a *class* of creative professionals—a class in which anyone can become a member, given enough imagination and passion.

When most people think about public sector institutions, “creativity” is not the term that immediately springs to the mind. The stereotypical view of public institutions as stolid and uncreative is somewhat unfair. Everywhere in the Public Service there are innovations that simply go unheralded. Public servants are usually too shy about trumpeting their successes. As a result, few attribute major breakthroughs (such as the invention

of the Internet) to the public sector. The poor perception is somewhat self-perpetuating: as more public servants see their institution as rigid, confidence is sapped and fewer people are willing to try something new.

By the same token, creativity does not just happen. It must be encouraged and supported. Nurturing creativity is hard work, especially in an increasingly transparent public sphere with every activity closely scrutinized. The media are all too anxious to expose mistakes and are always on the lookout for the latest misstep. Yet the mistake-proof organization is an impossibility. That tension is what causes many public servants to act like Zander’s musicians. They are more likely to keep their heads down and take the safe route.

So if modern organizations are dependent on creativity, where does that leave the future of the Public Service of Canada?

This guide aims to help Public Service leaders overcome this dilemma by cultivating a creative workforce. The term “leader” does not simply refer to senior executives, or even just those with management responsibilities. Leadership can occur at any level within the organization; or, as the Zanders put it, leadership can be exercised from any chair in the orchestra.⁴ The ultimate aim is to cultivate creative organizations. We are not used to attributing creative abilities to an entire organization, and yet organizations can act as creative beings. These organizations are able to adapt by continually looking for opportunities to improve, as well as by finding clever ways to take advantage of those opportunities.

Of course, creativity cannot simply be mandated. The creativity of a workforce cannot simply be turned on and off, like water from a faucet. To a great extent, promoting creativity is something that leaders do indirectly by putting into place the right environmental conditions. This is what it means to create a *milieu* in which creativity can flourish. This guide also offers would-be leaders of change some advice about how to create and sustain this milieu.

II. WHAT IS CREATIVITY?

So what does “creativity” mean, exactly? The term is somewhat ambiguous, partly because the idea is thousands of years old.⁵ The term “creativity” has been used in countless ways to describe often radically different notions. Confusion also arises partly from the inconsistent way in which the term has been bandied about the modern workplace. Everything these days seems to be touted as being creative in some way. One book calls this “spinnovation”, as if the mere claim to “outside the box” thinking is enough to make something creative.⁶ Therefore, it is worth taking the time to explore the meaning of creativity, dispelling some myths and misconceptions along the way.

Creativity, as the term is used here, means a new and worthwhile idea that is applied to improve the way an organization works.⁷ Some make a distinction between creativity and innovation, with the former referring to the *invention* of an idea and the latter referring to that idea’s *application*. No such distinction is made here. The two terms are often used interchangeably. Why? Because creativity left unimplemented is of little value within the public sector workplace. The aim of this guide is to remain firmly planted in the realm of the practical. If an idea is good, then it is worth putting it into effect.

Creativity is not a goal in its own right. Indeed, promoting creativity at any cost is a problem. Creativity exists to serve a larger purpose. By promoting creativity simply for the sake of doing so, that purpose is displaced. Worse, promoting new ideas aimlessly can create faddish cycles: each new idea has a brief shelf-life, after which it is replaced by another short-lived idea. This cycle breeds cynicism and is not conducive to sustained improvement. Creativity exists to help organizations get their fundamentals right.⁸ New ideas should not blind people to the many good but un-leveraged ideas that already exist. Moreover, a glut of ideas can overwhelm, causing good ideas to become lost in a sea of bad ones. The truly worthwhile ideas need to be differentiated from the merely novel ones.

Everyone has the potential to be creative. One manager of graphic artists puts it this way: “Creativity is in everyone; it just manifests itself differently with each person ... Amazingly creative things happen around us every day and escape in forms we don’t recognize.”⁹ Certain jobs and occupations are not usually thought of as hotbeds of creativity. Any practical pursuit holds opportunities for innovation. What often holds innovations back is a failure to acknowledge them as new and worthwhile ideas. Creativity therefore needs to be considered in a broader, more encompassing way.

Creativity can come from anywhere within an organization. Research shows that widely recognized innovations come mostly from middle managers and front-line personnel—the people at the “coal face” of the Public Service.¹⁰ As one researcher explains: “Innovative ideas spring up all over the place—both inside and outside of organizations, and from the middle, bottom, and top layers of an organization. Innovation, it turns out, has little regard for title.”¹¹

Being creative is often hard work. The romantic notion of the lone artist having an epiphany may sometimes hold true. However, creative acts often take a great deal of practice and effort. It is “one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration,” as a famous inventor once put it.¹² Many paintings considered to be masterworks appear to be the result of spontaneous and frenzied flourishes of the artist’s brush. Yet, the fact remains that most masterworks were carefully planned. For example, Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger*, arguably his most innovative painting, was completed only after the artist created more than a hundred sketches and mock-ups. Novel aspects of the painting were actually adaptations of things that Picasso saw while walking around the streets of Paris. “Eureka!” moments, in which an inventor is suddenly struck with a new idea from out of the blue, are relatively rare.

Although effort is required, creativity is not an added pile of work. Time within the modern workplace is already scarce. Workloads are heavy and people have very little surplus energy to devote to unimportant tasks. For this reason, it is worth thinking creatively about ways to do work more efficiently and to free up time for the most important tasks.

Innovations may be ground-breaking and revolutionary, or they may be small, incremental improvements. In other words, innovations come in all shapes and sizes. For example, replicating pre-existing ideas in novel ways can be creative. Creativity can involve looking at an area of activity in a completely different way and then acting on that new point of view. One reason that many innovations are not celebrated is that they are minor improvements to relatively routine areas of work. Progress comes from developing a sensitivity to innovations that come in such unfamiliar forms.



“I’ll be happy to give you innovative thinking. What are the guidelines?”

III. WHY IS CREATIVITY IMPORTANT?

Creativity is sometimes portrayed as something that is not “mission-critical” or not a “core competency”. It is treated as a nice extra, but not as integral to the government’s *raison d’être* as, say, financial probity or democratic accountability. To put it bluntly, creativity is incorrectly treated as “soft” and peripheral, not part of the hard-nosed world of public administration.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The benefits of creative thinking and innovation are central to every organization’s success. It is no coincidence that the most prominent theme of the 2006 World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland was “the creative imperative”. Pausing to fully explore the many benefits of creativity is clearly warranted.

Creativity is a source of important organizational capacities, of higher levels of performance, and of advances in service quality. A study of 800 private companies found that approximately 25 percent of revenues came from new products and services, and that creative problem solving and idea-generating techniques were able to improve the internal operations of the companies as well.¹³ Examples also abound within the public sector.

For example, the Government of Singapore launched a series of initiatives designed to bolster the state's ability to generate worthwhile ideas. One such effort, the Ministry of Defence's *Productivity and Innovation in Daily Effort* (PRIDE) program, generated hundreds of ideas that eventually led to improvements in safety and troop performance (for example, shooting accuracy).

When a policy area is characterized by an ever-changing, tumultuous environment—a situation that is increasingly the norm—creative problem solving helps the organization to adapt. Creative thinking can also help to solve difficult problems that are poorly defined or to cope when there are major gaps in information. As Min Basadur points out,¹⁷ adaptability is not a function of the short-term, reactive changes that happen in the face of unexpected events. Adaptability involves anticipating opportunities and

problems, all the while creating timely solutions. Only by harnessing the power of creativity can an organization be truly adaptive. The organization then changes in a deliberate way instead of flailing in the wind.

A workplace in which creative ideas flourish also tends to be a workplace in which people love to work. It is very difficult to get excited about an organization that operates in a bland monotony. In contrast, when an organization encourages creative thinking, employees are more satisfied with their jobs and are more willing to commit themselves to the employer. These workplaces are also the most likely to attract talented people in the competition for the best and the brightest employees. More generally, people report a higher quality of work life within workplaces that afford a creative outlet.

“Our challenge is to serve in an era of transparency without retreat or fear of risk; to rise to the issues facing our country; to be innovative and creative in how we serve; to renew ourselves continually; and to be an institution that a new generation of leaders will want to join.”

—Clerk of the Privy Council, 2005¹⁴

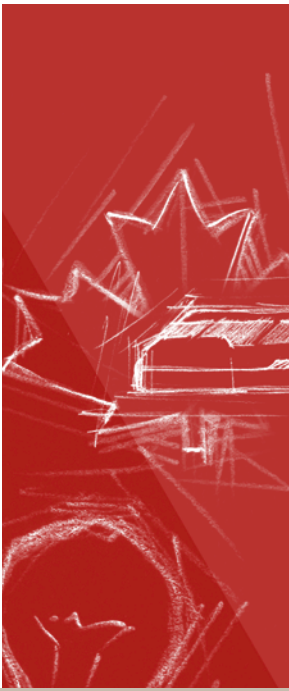
Creative Styles

While everyone has the potential to be creative, all people do not approach creative problem solving in exactly the same way. Everyone has unique interests, experiences and knowledge. More importantly, everyone has a preferred way of interpreting the world and thinking about problems. In other words, people have their own *style* of problem solving.

When it comes to creative problem solving, it is useful to think about people's tendency to be *adapters* or *innovators*. *Adapters* prefer to operate within the system. They prefer to collaborate rather than strike out on their own. These are the people who are more likely to persevere through trial and error. Conversely, *innovators* are more tolerant of ambiguity and prefer to work with greater individual discretion. These are the people who are more willing to entertain solutions that are a major departure from the norm.

Of course, real people tend to exhibit characteristics of both styles. In other words, each person is an *adapter* or an *innovator* to a greater or lesser degree; few people exhibit just one style or the other.¹⁵ Neither style is better than the other, for both can be a source of improvement.

For the leader, encouraging creativity often involves helping others understand their personal style and playing to those strengths. Teams that are assembled from people with a diversity of styles have been shown to improve an organization's capacity to solve problems. *Adapters* are better able to detect threats and opportunities within the system, while *innovators* are better attuned to the outside. The milieu that a leader helps to build should also reflect these differences. For example, *adapters* prefer a more relaxed, familiar and sociable atmosphere, while *innovators* feed off energy and playfulness.¹⁶



At the most general level, society benefits immensely when a population is given the opportunity and encouragement to be creative. An intellectually stimulating culture gives people a greater pride of place. The prevalence of creativity and innovation fuels higher economic growth rates.¹⁷ Of greatest concern to public servants is the decline of legitimacy and confidence in public institutions. Although no magic solution to addressing this decline of deference exists, the public looks favourably upon institutions that are seen to be practicing cutting-edge governance.

IV. WHAT DOES A CREATIVE WORKPLACE LOOK LIKE?

These are tumultuous times. The pace of life seems to be ever-quickening. Information flows around the globe in larger and larger torrents. The population of the country is becoming increasingly diverse. As a result, pressure is being placed on the Public Service to find new ways to remain relevant and to continually improve. That pressure signals the necessity to take intelligent risks in pursuit of opportunity. Yet, at the same time,

What's In It for Me?

One might rightly ask "How does creative thinking provide benefits on a personal and professional level, as distinct from the organizational benefits?" To put it in crass terms: "What's in it for me?" After all, continually improving is a demanding undertaking. It means never being satisfied with the status quo and always finding ways to change for the better.

The fact of the matter is that creative work is pleasurable work. Interesting jobs always seem fresh because an engaging challenge is waiting around the next corner. Satisfaction comes from the sense of personal pride a person feels while accomplishing something real and meaningful. Without fresh challenges, people may feel "a loss of enthusiasm for work, a loss of a sense of purpose in work and an emotional flatness regarding work that affect the use of time and talents, energy and effort."¹⁸

It is when people are lulled into a dull routine that work begins to feel like a chore. Chances are that you know of someone who falls into this category. These people, in the midst of the "career blues," feel that work is an endless treadmill of busywork. Most people experiencing these doldrums assume that re-engaging with work involves a major career transition. Research suggests otherwise. Most people who make a radical career change, hoping to find more fulfilling work elsewhere, find themselves in circumstances similar to the old job soon after.¹⁹ More often than not, reigniting a career involves seeking out new opportunities within a current job and being persistent in the pursuit of improvement.

Creative expression comes with its own rewards. Most people have a creative outlet within their personal life. That outlet can be a sport or a hobby. It can be an enthusiasm for a particular type of music, painting or other art form. There are many natural artists among us. Strangely, these same people tend to leave their creative interests at the door when they enter the workplace. Applying the same creative abilities in the workplace may not be appropriate. However, this does not preclude finding a creative outlet that taps the same sources of fulfilment.

To some extent, suppression of the creative impulse is taught to us. Children are naturally creative. As they grow up, their impulse to try new things is discouraged as conformism sets in. Finding a creative outlet is a process of re-awakening a natural curiosity and sense of adventure.

There are also more mundane reasons for working more creatively. Continual improvement brings with it admiration from one's peers. Provided that improvements are aligned with organizational objectives, tangible rewards soon follow as well.

risk must be better managed. The public is not willing to write a blank cheque and demands forthrightness from public institutions. Recent controversies have underscored the need for a management agenda that ensures probity, transparency and responsible stewardship of public resources.

These developments seem to suggest that there is a conflict between creative risk-taking and custodial care-taking. As we will see, this is not necessarily the case. History tells us, however, that the Public Service has oscillated between a tendency to implement overarching

controls and a tendency to empower its employees. Those pendulum swings have led to much confusion and exasperation. The cycle needs to be broken to achieve a sustainable balance between risk-taking and care-taking. This is precisely what the Government is doing with its on-going agenda to improve public management. This raises the question “What would a creative workplace look like within this context?”

The Great Creativity Conundrum

If creativity is so beneficial, then why is it not valued as highly as it should be? A creative idea can be inherently difficult to sell to colleagues. An idea's merits are not always obvious and may not be universally perceived as worthwhile. Fashioning a business case for a good idea raises a number of dilemmas.

- *How can the value of a new product or service that does not yet exist be demonstrated?*²⁰ Potential clients may not even know that they want a particular service until it becomes available, at which time they might wonder how they lived without it. This dilemma can be overcome by providing some sort of “proof-of-concept”. Possibilities include building customer service scenarios, experiments, product prototypes, or pilot programs.
- *How can results be demonstrated in the short run?* The benefits of implementing a new idea may be easy to explain but the actual benefits may take a long time to accrue. In other words, demonstrating success sometimes requires patience, a virtue which is often in short supply within the modern workplace. By breaking down implementation into smaller steps, each resulting in “small wins”, a person can go some way towards placating impatient colleagues.
- *How can an idea that challenges conventional wisdom be sold?* Creative ideas often challenge the prevailing view. Those who have a strong intellectual stake in an older mind-set may dismiss a new idea out of hand. They may even respond angrily. Overcoming this type of resistance requires that others be brought into the process of innovating and be stepped through the logic of the new idea.
- *How can others be convinced of the need to cultivate creativity when the creative process is so poorly understood?* It is true: no single formula can generate novel and worthwhile ideas. Creativity can seem elusive to those who crave tangible, straightforward and predictable methods. Fortunately, much can be done to create a work environment conducive to the generation and application of ideas. Workers in that environment are likely to find such an environment extremely enriching.

More specific advice for overcoming dilemmas such as these can be found later in this guide. For now, it suffices to highlight the marquee benefits of creativity and stress that good ideas often do not sell themselves. Considerable effort and forethought are required to bring colleagues on board.



At the risk of oversimplification, a creative workplace tends to sustain the same energy and enthusiasm that were seen in its people as when it was first established. Whether in a business start-up or a new government unit, some optimism and swagger usually come with striking out on a new mission. These are organizations that are charting a new path and are therefore obliged to find new ways to overcome previously unknown challenges. Unfortunately, as an organization matures, comfortable routines and complacency can set in. Past success can blind an organization to new opportunities, as the people within rest on their laurels. Or, as is more common in the public sector, a past mistake can make an organization overcompensate; its people look backward in fear, instead of forward with ambition.

It is often said that creativity and control are incompatible, or that creativity can flourish only when controls are relaxed.

This is not the case. Every Public Service job involves a measure of discretion (or ought to). It is within this sphere of autonomy that a great deal of creativity can be exercised. Indeed, limitations often require creative thinking in order to achieve the best results. That said, discretion should not be mistaken for license to do as one pleases. Organizations, by their very nature, require that people exercise responsibilities with care, not with a reckless disregard for other priorities. In other words, creativity does not entail giving people a complete and unaccountable freedom.

Daniel Pink offers a better way to think about the relationship between creativity and control.²² Pink likens these competing tendencies to the functioning of the brain: the *left hemisphere* of the brain is logical, mathematical, utilitarian, and disciplined; the *right hemisphere* is artistic and empathetic, sees the larger picture,

Touchstones of a Creative Organization

What are the characteristics of a public organization that is able to continually reinvent itself? Much depends on the values, vision and attitudes that animate the organization's culture.

- A creative organization has a clear *vision*; that is, it has a widely recognized sense of direction and purpose. This vision is not simply an empty statement. It is an understanding of the organization's identity to which employees can relate and align their personal aspirations with.
- A creative organization is anchored by a set of *values* that place people first. People are respected and everyone's unique contribution is recognized. The contribution of diversity, in its many forms, is acknowledged. People form bonds of trust. Deep dialogue—dialogue in which people express themselves freely and listen actively—is encouraged. The work is imbued with meaning that resonates with people, causing them to be passionate about what they do.
- The prevailing attitude is such that people are not content to do the bare minimum or be satisfied with the existing state of affairs. People are driven to discover and explore new opportunities. Everyone acknowledges that the possibilities for improvement are endless. People have the confidence to step into the unknown and can tolerate working in conditions of ambiguity.

Although creative organizations come in many forms, these are some of the characteristics that make a place a joy to work in.

and enables inventive thinking. Pink argues that individuals and organizations operate in a balanced way when they make the most of both sides—that is, when they think with the “whole brain”. Problems occur when we neglect one side over the other. Organizations that operate under hyper-control or, conversely, in near-chaos are unlikely to operate very effectively.

One part of achieving a balance between risk-taking and care-taking is to set more realistic expectations about the nature of risk. Controls often breed a false sense of security; that mistakes will not happen. Contrary to prevailing wisdom, the risk-taking that often comes with innovation can be an essential element in the intelligent management of risks. Moreover, ways to minimize the potential for adverse consequences when implementing new ideas can be found. For example, the industrial designer Alan South refers to a method called “chunking risk”: that is, “breaking down seemingly large problems into miniature experiments to the point where—lo and behold—you’ve generated system change without even knowing it.”²¹

CASE IN POINT

Continual Improvement in Shared Services

It is not uncommon for several government departments and agencies to be co-located within a single building complex. Co-location creates an opportunity for the organizations to get together and pool support services. Indeed, *locally-shared support services* are now mandated by government, especially given the potential for cost savings. Yet, before these arrangements became policy, a group of eight departments got together


on their own to look for ways to improve shared support services within Les Terrasses de la Chaudière (in Gatineau, Quebec). Their experience provides a wealth of information about how creative problem solving can be encouraged within a decentralized set of interdepartmental teams.²²

The distinguishing feature of these teams was that they bring together practitioners from the front lines. Each team was devoted to finding ways to improve services within a particular area as opportunities arose. No central leadership was imposed. Instead, each team operated in a more organic way by letting each member exercise leadership. “A key element of the culture is a sense of collective, rather than individual, power,” reported those who were involved. “Through dialogue and open discussion, people begin to develop mutual understanding of each other’s needs and situations.”²³ The projects were selected by the Council of Administration, another voluntary group on the look-out for new opportunities.

The accomplishments of these groups are legion. Teams were able to fix a number of long-standing problems faced by occupants of the building: shortcomings with air quality, access for persons with disabilities and climate control. Mail and courier operations were combined and streamlined, saving enormous amounts of money without loss of jobs. Departments were able to pool resources to purchase needed infrastructure, such as telecommunications equipment. Photocopying and reproduction services were standardized and operated under a single contract, adding to the cost savings. Common temporary help services were established in the most ambitious boundary spanning effort.

“Creativity gets killed much more often than it gets supported. For the most part, this isn’t because managers have a vendetta against creativity. On the contrary, most believe in the value of new and useful ideas. However, creativity is undermined unintentionally every day in work environments that were established—for entirely good reasons—to maximize business imperatives such as coordination, productivity, and control.”

— Teresa M. Amabile²⁴



All of these successes led to a reduction in costs at a time when resources were tight. More importantly, the successes led to improvements in the quality of work life. Each new success brought with it a palpable change to the culture of each department involved.

V. IDEA LEADERSHIP

To recap, creative ideas do not implement themselves and innovation is usually hard work. The value of a good idea is not always evident, nor is there always a consensus that an idea is indeed worthwhile. Thus, if an organization is to systematically leverage the power of creativity, doing so in a sustainable way, then leadership is an important driver of success. Anyone, regardless of rank, can exercise this leadership. This raises the question “What kind of leadership is needed?”

Creative ideas are best handled by an *idea leader* (also known as an idea practitioner or idea entrepreneur). As Thomas Davenport and his colleagues explain: “The good idea practitioners all filter, add to, or subtract from the ideas they implement, “fitting” them to their organizations’ specific needs.”²⁵ These pragmatic entrepreneurs seek out ideas, packaging them in ways that resonate with others. During implementation, idea practitioners act as advocates of the idea—championing the case for change and taking the steps necessary to follow through to completion.

Leadership of this kind is needed to counter the passivity that often afflicts a workforce. Many great ideas are developed within an organization, only to be left unimplemented because of a lack of follow-through.²⁶ Thus, leaders encourage others to seize the initiative and to provide positive reinforcement. Innovations also threaten existing power relations,

requiring leaders to understand the political dynamics within the organization and be able to handle threats to implementation. In that role, the leader often finds ways to give the various interests a stake in the success of new ideas.

Many good ideas are crushed, and many creative people are inadvertently discouraged by careless managers. Many managers fail to consider fully the consequences of their decisions on fledgling innovations. Because promoting creativity is often not seen as a priority, new ideas are sidelined—denied the resources and personnel needed for implementation. Leaders should give thought to how their actions affect personal initiative and innovations already undergoing implementation.

CASE IN POINT

Idea Leadership in Action

Idea leaders are an extremely diverse bunch. What they all have in common, however, is a commitment to continual improvement and the diligence to see their good ideas put into practice. Follow-through is crucial. If an idea is left to languish, it is of little use to anyone. It’s worth pausing to consider some accomplished idea leaders within the Public Service of Canada.²⁷

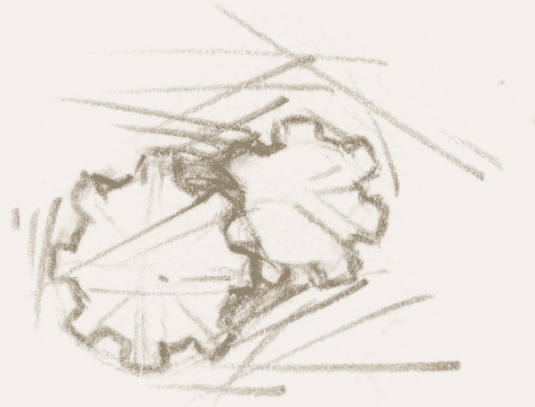
Consider the case of Shelley Segovia, for example. This Oshawa-based public servant in Human Resources and Skills Development Canada spearheaded the development of an on-line tool (the TD₀₃ screen) to help Employment Insurance claimants get accurate answers to questions about their records. Also consider Clément Vigneault, a horticultural researcher who is responsible for more than 60 major innovations involving winter storage of plants, the transportation of horticulture products, and the electrical eradication of weeds, among other things.

There is also the case of Fred Vivash, a Canada Revenue Agency employee who led the development of innovative Web-based service infrastructure that helps Canadians file their income taxes with greater convenience and efficiency. These idea leaders not only thought up excellent ideas, but they found ways to implement them as well. Many similar cases can be found throughout the Public Service.

VI. HOW SHOULD THIS GUIDE BE USED?

This chapter has explained why creativity is an imperative for the modern public organization and has described the general features of a creative organization. It is now appropriate to speak more specifically about the types of things that leaders can do to promote creativity within their own backyards. The chapters that follow will do just that.

The next chapter discusses some of the methods commonly used to promote creativity. They include an account of enabling factors and obstacles, as well as the strategic and tactical issues which leaders should know. The chapter after that offers advice about how to apply these lessons within the workplace. It helps leaders to figure out how to involve others—broaden the circle—through collective diagnosis of a workplace's creativity problems and opportunities. The final chapter offers some general recommendations for promoting creativity within the Public Service of Canada as a whole.



CHAPTER TWO: CREATING A MILIEU THAT NURTURES CREATIVITY

I. INTRODUCTION

Individuals are very different in their creative abilities, enthusiasms and styles. That said, everyone can be offered advice about aspects of the surrounding environment that are most conducive to generating and applying new ideas. That is, there is a workplace “milieu” that is most amenable to creativity. The milieu encompasses an organization’s surroundings and ethos, including such aspects as organizational culture, interpersonal dynamics, organizational systems and physical surroundings. Every element of the ideal milieu will seldom exist. Nonetheless, leaders can do many things to enable creativity, remove obstacles, and otherwise intervene strategically.

II. ENABLING FACTORS

The modern research about creativity is enormous. Social scientists from a variety of disciplines have been writing about the subject for more than fifty years. What does this research tell us? One of the richest veins provides a long list of factors that enable creativity within the workplace. They can be grouped into the ten categories discussed below.

Enablers of Creativity


1. **Intellectual Diversity.** The workforce contains an adequate mix of people from different occupations, interests, skills, backgrounds, experiences and personalities.
2. **Vibrant, Wide-reaching Interaction.** Expansive channels of communication expose people to new influences.
3. **Employee Engagement.** People's personal and professional interests are aligned and complementary systems of reward and recognition are in place.
4. **A Sphere of Autonomy.** Well-understood boundaries separate necessary controls from the latitude required for a person to seize the initiative.
5. **A Safe Space and Trust.** The environment is such that people feel free to express themselves openly and authentically without fear.
6. **Intellectual Growth Opportunities.** Active investments are made to develop the knowledge and skills of the workforce.
7. **Supportive Managers.** Empathetic managers act as catalysts and role models.
8. **Discretionary Time and Energy.** Opportunities are provided to pause and reflect on work and to think of new ideas.
9. **Organizational Supports.** Access to appropriate funding, technology, expertise and other aids is provided.
10. **Organizational Dynamism.** In a changing environment, people are encouraged to continually look for ways to improve.

1. Intellectual Diversity

Diversity of perspective and thinking style is the most widely cited ingredient of the creative workplace. Diversity of perspective can include diversity of occupational background, ancestry and personality type. The presence of diversity opens a workplace up to new viewpoints, alternative ways of thinking about problems, and new combinations of disparate ideas. The resulting dynamic

contains a heavy dose of *creative conflict*: divergent thinkers are compelled to defend their arguments and deeply consider the views of others, all with the aim of constructing something new.²⁸ These are the moments when sparks fly.

There is a point beyond which the amount of diversity begins to yield diminishing returns, or even breeds conflict. Shared mental models or goals among group members have a role to play.²⁹ The group is most cohesive when it shares a strong sense of purpose.



Leaders play a crucial role by matching up people with different mind-sets—what Jerry Hirshberg calls “divergent pairs”.³⁰ For example, marketing professionals and engineers—two groups with very different occupational cultures—can be brought together to develop products with greater public appeal. Leaders also promote healthy attitudes towards others who are different—a quality often called “diversity maturity”.³¹ Diversity-mature individuals act respectfully and suspend judgement so as to better understand the viewpoints of others. They also accept responsibility for promoting diversity, display a willingness to challenge the prevailing wisdom, exhibit a comfort in dealing with diversity dynamics, and demonstrate self-awareness about how personal views relate to diversity. Diversity maturity reduces the likelihood of divisive forms of conflict arising.

CASE IN POINT

Teaming Up Against Illegal Contraband

Border security was a top-of-mind issue even before the tragic events of September 11, 2001. The creation of the Canada Border Service Agency opened up new opportunities to secure Canada’s borders.³² In a particularly interesting case, new ways were found to detect illegal contraband to prevent it from crossing the border. What made this job such a challenge was the sheer technical and organizational complexity of the detection process. Many of the technologies required had to be developed specially for the agency. Making the technology viable in the field is a challenge because of the length of Canada’s border and the desire to avoid unduly interfering with the travel of law-abiding citizens.

As with any good research and development project, a diverse team was formed. Technical staff within laboratories and enforcement staff from the department’s headquarters were both included.

The team has been able to develop a number of solutions. For example, highly specialized *ion mobility spectrometry* equipment was developed to detect narcotics and explosives. An even more spectacular example was the development of remotely operated underwater vehicles for examining the hulls of ships. Worries about terrorism led to the development of a variety of radiation detectors for use at the border. Cases like this one show how creativity can be rapidly applied to problems to remain one step ahead of criminals and terrorists.

Such solutions are not the only example of applying technology creatively to solve problems. Canada has consistently ranked number one among 22 countries in e-Government innovations.³³ These innovations demonstrate that public servants have risen to the challenge to fulfil the Canadian government’s vision of citizen-centred services.

2. Vibrant, Wide-reaching Interaction

Expansive channels of communications expose people to new information, experiences, and stimulating interaction. Networks among leading thinkers on a subject are almost always rich sources of cutting-edge ideas. Communication across boundaries reduces the chance that good ideas will languish in isolated corners of an organization.

One of the most fruitful forms of interaction takes place at the “edges” of an area of practice.³⁴ These edges can be the outer boundaries of an organization, such as the place where employees interact with clients. Edges include the places where industries and ministries overlap, converge or collide. They even include the edges of demographic boundaries, such as interaction across regions or generations. Communication across all of these edges can lead to new insights because of the cross-fertilization of ideas that takes place.

Much can be done to increase the breadth of networks among relevant parties. One example is to sponsor employees to attend professional conferences. The physical work environment can also be designed to encourage spontaneous interaction on a regular basis. The change can be as simple as installing a staff lounge, or a similar open space, to encourage so-called “water-cooler” conversations. New physical office designs also open alternative workflows that allow people in markedly different jobs to collaborate.

CASE IN POINT

Emergency Preparation & Response

Thankfully, large-scale emergencies involving dangerous materials are rare events. The infrequency of these events poses a challenge to the public servants entrusted with protecting public safety. Experiences from various jurisdictions have to be pooled. People with experience need a mechanism for comparing notes and finding ways to be better prepared. In highly technical areas, such as the identification of dangerous goods, specialized experts have to be brought together to reflect on problems.

To this end, Transport Canada formed the ERGO project team.³⁵ Many creative tools were developed to help identify dangerous goods. A guidebook about lifesaving techniques, entitled *ERG2004*, was written for emergency response staff involved with shipping and for carriers of dangerous goods. More than two million copies have been distributed to date. An interactive computer application, called *ERGO*, was also developed and made available on the Internet. These tools have become popular around the world. This work was crucial because making Canada safe for the transportation of dangerous goods also involves helping people in other countries operate safely, too.

What about those cases in which an organization has to respond quickly to an once-in-a-lifetime crisis? Such situations are difficult to prepare for precisely because they take place under extraordinary (often chaotic) circumstances. A great deal of interdepartmental collaboration is needed because the required expertise and capacities tend to span various ministries.³⁶

A noteworthy case is the Interdepartmental Tsunami Task Force. This group had to respond without warning to the tsunami disaster in Southeast Asia. They developed creative solutions on the fly under extreme pressure. A keystone was the Canadian International Development Agency’s matching-funds program, which leveraged \$425 million in the middle of the emergency to raise additional funds from Canadian citizens. Few programs of this kind had been tried before in Canada and so a great deal of innovation was required. The Auditor General has cited this initiative as having been particularly successful.



3. Employee Engagement

If a person feels passionately about work and if an *esprit de corps* with co-workers emerges, then that person will be more likely to be inspired to create and strive to continually improve. This is what being actively engaged in one's vocation means. As David Whyte puts it: we are engaged when we "feel that we do what is right for ourselves and good for the world at the exact same time."³⁷ Engagement has two sides: harnessing a person's internal drive and providing external inducements.³⁸

If work is aligned with people's personal and professional interests, then they are more likely to absorb themselves in their work in a spirited way. Having people work on multifaceted tasks instead of repetitive jobs that have been split into highly specialized and standardized routines is one way to make work more absorbing.³⁹ Workplaces that tap into the sources of self-motivation within staff are better suited to creativity because they encourage self-reliance and self-confidence. People are given a greater sense of stewardship over the ideas that they develop.

The link between creativity and reward-and-recognition schemes is not so straightforward. Incentive systems are problematic if they unduly focus on short-term results and discourage individual initiative. Some argue that if reward systems are needed, the tasks are not worth doing in their own right and are unlikely to be performed enthusiastically.⁴⁰ However, there is evidence that rewards can encourage creativity if they relate to a person's skills, a creativity-relevant process, and an actual creative accomplishment.⁴¹ If incentives stimulate and reward curiosity and exploration, then they also have a positive effect.⁴²

4. A Sphere of Autonomy

A sphere of autonomy means insulating people from arbitrary and meddling interference (excessive and ill-informed "micro-management") and delegating authority over those areas that are relevant for nurturing new ideas. The amount of insulation and delegation depends on the nature of the tasks performed and the occupation. At the very least, it means having a clear sense of the boundaries between necessary controls and a protected sphere in which employees can express themselves. Ideally, it involves the absence of highly authoritarian controls and the presence of decision-latitude over how work is performed.⁴³ This can also involve the installation of participatory decision-making processes in which everyone has a say in the direction of the organization.⁴⁴

Under certain circumstances, this sphere of autonomy may take the form of a protective "bubble" around a group. Many autonomous work teams are given a great deal of freedom within clearly set parameters. Experiments can be conducted in this autonomous space and hassles from other parts of the organization are kept at bay, at least temporarily.⁴⁵

5. A Safe Space and Trust

A "safe space" is an environment in which people can express themselves openly and authentically without fear of reprisal. If the atmosphere is not relaxed and easy-going—allowing for playfulness, friendliness and humour—then interaction becomes forced and lacks spontaneity.⁴⁶ If people feel insecure about expressing themselves, then they are less likely to expose themselves to criticism, to offer feedback, and to follow-through on the ideas offered by others.

A safe space is also an environment in which people can take intelligent risks without fear that failure will be dealt with harshly. In other words, a failure to achieve the desired results is seen as a learning opportunity, not as a reason to assign blame. Insecurity will also cause people to act in ways that they perceive as “safe” rather than take the initiative and try something new.

At its root, a safe space reflects the quality of the relationships formed within the workplace. Bonds of trust and reciprocity give people a sense of belonging to a group. Of course, trust (like feelings of security) can evaporate if people perceive themselves as being manipulated or exploited in any way.

6. Intellectual Growth Opportunities

A creative organization encourages intellectual growth in its employees. It makes active investments in their capacity to think creatively and to broaden their intellectual interests. These investments can be as basic as providing access to developmental opportunities, such as formal learning programs and secondments. The corollary is that newly acquired skills are put to use and are not left to deteriorate. More generally, opportunities for choice and discovery within one’s work should be available.⁴⁷

These investments need not be just about training, narrowly defined. Creative thinking skills are often nurtured through learning opportunities that are less obviously tied to a person’s immediate job. Good ideas often come from unlikely sources of learning.

7. Supportive Managers

A supervisor’s behaviour and relations with staff can either promote or discourage creativity. Encouragement, clarity of goals, instilling a sense of common purpose, open communications and supportive evaluations are vital.⁴⁸ No single management style is more likely to promote creativity, although managers should convey that they intend to act as “catalysts” instead of “frustrators”.⁴⁹ Unfortunately, 41 percent of public servants say that they tend not to receive encouragement to be innovative or to take the initiative in their work.⁵⁰

Managers have a certain amount of authority and access to other authorities by virtue of their role. One of the most constructive stances that managers can take is to figure out ways to use their power to *serve* their staff. This might strike many as unconventional and it is. The traditional view is that staff is responsible for serving the manager, which is also true. By conceiving of work relations as a web of reciprocal service relations, people are continually finding ways to help others bring their ideas to fruition.

Management also plays a role in demonstrating to others that creativity is worthwhile. As Larisa Shavinina found in research conducted in a Public Service agency: “... if you are a manager and are interested in creativity and value it, your subordinates will share that enthusiasm, and will do their best to bring creative solutions. If not, chances are low that something creative will happen in your organizational unit, especially when there are few rewards for creativity in the Public Service.”⁵¹ In other words, it is not sufficient for managers simply to pay lip-service to the value of creativity. Genuine interest and commitment must be shown.

8. Discretionary Time and Energy

The modern workplace is full of time pressures and heavy workloads. People are asked to juggle an ever-more complicated array of tasks, yet less and less time seems to be available. Public servants are becoming “time poor”; little opportunity is available to take a time-out to digest information, recharge intellectual batteries, and think up new ideas. For example, in the 2002 Public Service Employee Survey, 43 percent of public servants reported that they are usually unable to complete their duties during normal working hours.⁵²

There is conundrum here. As work becomes more intellectually demanding, less time is available to pause and think deeply about what needs to be done. Creativity suffers as a consequence. Without time to reflect, people become reliant on memory and past experience instead of on invention or discovery. Rehashing old memories can take a person only so far. Indeed, research shows that once a personal schedule is eighty percent booked, that person’s ability to innovate declines rapidly with each additional booking.⁵³

What can be done to manage this conundrum? Experts claim that the answer lies in setting time aside during the workday to reflect in quiet contemplation or to undertake other stimulating activity, such as reading an interesting book. Simply taking a walk to clear the head and think deeply will help. This is called *fallow time*.⁵⁴ The term suggests that a person’s intellectual reserves are like a farmer’s field. A field must be left unplanted every once in a while so that nutrients in the soil can be replenished. Otherwise, the soil becomes over-exploited until eventually, nothing will grow. An



"I think you'll like this idea-it's sort of 'dull' meets 'inoffensive.'"

organization that simply harvests the knowledge within a workforce without actively replenishing this knowledge is not building sustainable capacities.

Another reason to set time aside for thought is that germinating ideas can fully develop. Some people need time to mull over an idea to draw out its full implications. In these cases, more time should be given for reflection instead of rushing to judgement.

There may be some resistance to this approach. Some people do not consider fallow time to be “real” work. They may even consider it to be a form of slacking. This view is short-sighted. Better management of time breeds efficiency. Once innovative ideas emerge, they improve the way work proceeds. This is all the more reason to underscore the value of creativity to colleagues in an attempt to change the workplace culture.

9. Organizational Supports

It stands to reason that creative ideas are more likely to be implemented when resources (such as technology, funding and expertise) are available. Some organizations create innovation seed funds or well-funded units specifically designed to cultivate ideas (“idea incubators”).

Funding new ideas is something of a paradox: without sufficient support, and support at the right points during implementation, then ideas go unrealized; if too much support is splashed onto ideas, then the implementers are tempted to take the easy (meaning costly) route. Allocating too much funding on an idea can also unduly inflate expectations. This can lead to disenchantment if there is a lack of short-term returns on an investment.

10. Organizational Dynamism

Creativity is more likely to flourish when the organization operates within a constantly changing and unpredictable environment (but not an overly chaotic maelstrom). The reason is that few alternatives exist: rigidity and a failure to adapt soon lead to a loss of relevance. Amid turbulence, people are kept on their toes. They are spurred and stimulated into thinking in novel ways and into considering alternatives to tricky problems. If the environment is mundane and uneventful, making the case for continual change is far more difficult. Those with a stake in (or allegiance to) the existing order are better able to defend themselves because there is less onus on them to justify the current path and act in fresh ways.


Not all organizations exist in such a turbulent environment, which is most often associated with highly competitive markets where products have brief shelf-lives. It is possible to create a turbulence-driven work environment even when these ideal conditions do not exist.⁵⁵ This involves relying on loosely-configured and partly overlapping teams, as well as breaking down organizational boundaries. Senior managers are not cloistered but are constantly interacting

with others within the organization. No one is allowed to build a personal fiefdom. Teams challenge each other to respond to new ideas. In sum, in such an organization, no one can hide.

Even if radical change is not in order, any organization can do a great deal to foster incremental improvements by introducing new ideas to a work unit. As mentioned earlier, some people have a personal style of innovation that thrives within an atmosphere of dynamic collegiality. In this situation, people are able to share ideas and bring out the best in others through relaxed and collaborative dialogue.

III. OBSTACLES TO OVERCOME

A survey of 436 prize-winning innovations from U.S. and Commonwealth public institutions says a great deal about the relative prevalence of implementation obstacles, at least within success stories.⁵⁶ Resistance from outside of government (e.g., opposition from interest groups, the general public and private sector companies) accounted for 24 percent of obstacles faced. Resistance from “political” forces (e.g., laws, regulations, inadequate resources, and opposition from politicians) accounted for 23 percent. The remaining 53 percent of obstacles were found within the public service, including coordination problems, logistical obstacles and obstructive attitudes. A large proportion of innovations spearheaded by public servants are therefore hindered by their colleagues (advertently and inadvertently). To a large extent, these internal obstacles result from the tendency of innovations to uproot long-standing occupational patterns and power structures.



A detailed look at these obstacles speaks volumes about what leaders can do to break down barriers to innovation. Without such interventions, there is a risk of a chill settling over a workplace.

Creativity encounters several hierarchical impediments. “Rankism” is the tendency to value a person’s input based on that person’s status within an organizational or professional hierarchy, rather than on the merits of a particular contribution. Organizations that have many hierarchical layers also tend to dilute ideas as they move up and down the chain of command.

Vertical impediments can also be a factor. Organizational barriers pose coordination problems, block information flows, and undermine the exchange of expert advice. When work is hived off into narrow disciplines, schools of thought, or roles, then thinking comprehensively becomes more difficult. Innovations, when they occur, tend to be piecemeal and usually do not benefit from the cross-fertilization of ideas from others. For all of the foregoing reasons, highly networked organizations are better suited to the creation and proliferation of ideas. That said, if horizontal relationships across an organization become bogged down in seemingly endless and unproductive meetings, then good ideas can get stuck in limbo.

Formal procedures and routines have an inertia that undermines change efforts. Formalities may become institutionalized and the standard way of doing things. Often, these formal routines are desirable and an important source of efficiency. Likewise, laws, regulations and statutory mandates place limits on the extent to which both public and private organizations can pursue a promising idea. Privacy, security and secrecy legislation sometimes place limits on public officials to openly share information and ideas.

Of course, many of these regulations exist for good reasons. They nonetheless limit the creative process.

Studies show that when power becomes concentrated within an organization, people without power feel less involved and fewer ideas are sent up the chain of command.⁵⁷ When several actors have veto rights, creative ideas are vulnerable to being quashed. Moreover, the long tenure of public officials can: create a knee-jerk adherence to long-standing programs and policies; give people a sense of allegiance to long-standing programs and policies, especially those they had a hand in developing; and cause “goal displacement” whereby the maintenance of rules becomes an end in itself.⁵⁸

As Theodore Levitt points out: “A powerful new idea can kick around unused in a company for years, not because its merits are not recognized but because nobody has assumed the responsibility for converting it from words into action.”⁵⁹ In some cases, creative ideas are ignored because they do not align with existing organizational objectives. Such ideas may suggest new organizational directions.

When a new idea undermines existing power relations, threatens entrenched interests, or challenges the deeply ingrained views of others, then resistance often results. Truly radical innovations face such protests precisely because they embody fundamental change. Historically, public organizations have had to address forms of resistance that originate outside of their organizational boundaries, such as from interest groups.

A number of time-related pressures reduce a person's ability to think creatively: severe time constraints and unrealistic deadlines; heavy work-loads that deplete mental and physical reserves of energy; a seemingly endless treadmill of low-value busywork; and a lack of time to freely think and reflect. Interestingly, when asked, most people tend not to perceive this pressure trap because they are under the mistaken impression that time pressures encourage creativity.⁶⁰ Unfortunately, time pressures do not just diminish creative thinking on a particular day, but can reduce creativity for up to two days afterwards—a “pressure hangover” of sorts.⁶¹

IV. STRATEGIC ISSUES

The foregoing inventory of enablers and obstacles raise a host of considerations for would-be idea leaders. Ideally, leaders would promote creativity in a systematic, not in a piecemeal or random fashion. This raises questions about how and where to begin.

Figure 1 shows a model of the ideal cycle of continuous improvement. The process flows in a loop because continuous improvement is a journey without a final destination: opportunities to further improve will always be available. Moreover, the loop underscores the need to guard against backsliding once a creative idea has been implemented. This is what it means to innovate in a sustainable way.

A variety of innovation models exist within the literature. Most of them contain some variation of the five stages in the figure.

- **Stage 1: Laying the Groundwork**

In order to create a milieu that is conducive to the generation and implementation of clever ideas, it is necessary to put enablers in place and to remove obstacles. Attempts to improve can be quashed before they are started if people feel that the cards are stacked against them.

- **Stage 2: Scanning and Clarifying**

A creative workforce is always on the lookout for problems, neglected ideas and unexploited opportunities. In many cases, this watchfulness involves clarifying problems and fleshing out existing ideas. It is the institutionalization of vigilance and the drive to improve.

- **Stage 3: Developing Possibilities**

Once a problem or an opportunity has been identified, generating creative solutions is the next step. A variety of practical techniques (which will be discussed in a moment) are available to help individuals and teams develop solutions.

- **Stage 4: Generating Commitment**

The urgency of a problem or the value of a solution is not always evident to everyone. Building a rock-solid business case and demonstrating the viability of any proposed solution is therefore vital. If crucial stakeholders have not been involved to this point, now is the time to build a coalition committed to implementation. If change is to be sustainable, then commitment is required to prevent backsliding into old ways of doing things.

• Stage 5: Taking Action

Finally, the process of implementing an idea now begins. Depending on the complexity of the innovation, this process may have to be broken down into manageable steps. Idea leaders play a particularly crucial role here, championing ideas, ensuring that resources are in place and ensuring follow-through.

Of course, this depiction of the innovation process is highly stylized. Creative ideas emerge in many different ways. Urgent problems and fleeting opportunities may not allow for such an orchestrated sequence of activities. Nonetheless, the model helps to show how leaders can achieve success.

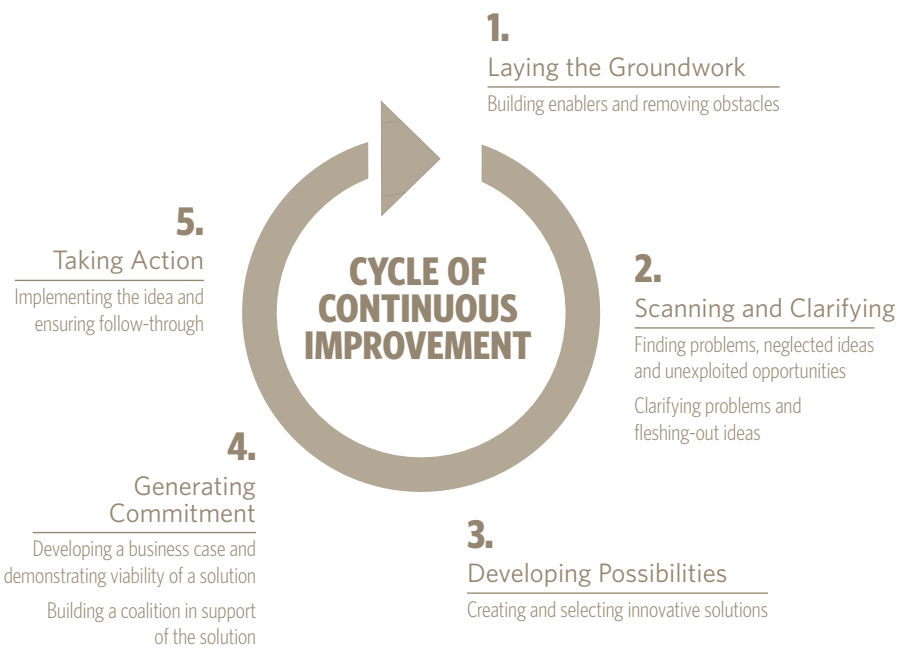
V. PRACTICAL TECHNIQUES

The process of generating new ideas can be made more productive by applying one or more tried and tested techniques (otherwise known as “smart practices”). These techniques are often used by creative professionals, especially in situations where they feel that their attempts to generate new ideas have reached an impasse. Of course, the following list is not exhaustive. It is simply intended to suggest several popular methods.

Tactics for Individuals

Solitary individuals can generate ideas in a number of ways. All tend to involve people reflecting deeply on problems and seeking out sources of inspiration.

FIGURE 2. THE CYCLE OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT




PRACTICAL TECHNIQUES

1. **Excursions.** Leave the site of the original problem and think about solutions while in another context.
2. **Brainstorming.** List as many ideas as possible within a specified period of time.
3. **Idea Wallets.** Keep a portfolio of problems to be solved and ideas worth elaborating.
4. **Idea Mapping.** Graphically chart concepts and ideas, as well as the interconnections.
5. **Conceptual Block Busting.** Exercise problem solving abilities and the imagination through puzzles and thought experiments.
6. **“Scratching” for Ideas.** Take time out of normal work duties to search for sources of inspiration.
7. **Unfocus Groups.** Convene discussion groups composed of people who are extremely knowledgeable, opinionated or off-beat with respect to a topic.
8. **Brushfire Teams.** A quickly assembled team elaborates on and pilots a fledgling idea.
9. **Divergent Exploration.** Deliberately look for unconventional solutions or combine obvious solutions in unconventional ways.

Excursions. When a person is faced with a tricky problem, it often makes sense to leave the site of the original problem and to think about solutions within another context. This change of scene is what is meant by an *excursion*. The value of this technique is that it lifts many of the mental constraints found within the original problem situation. Temporarily vacating the original situation also provides an opportunity to ponder a wider array of solutions and to gain exposure to ideas from elsewhere.

Brainstorming. Brainstorming is among the most widely known idea-generation techniques. It involves listing as many ideas as possible within a set period of time. Judgement is deferred until all of the ideas have been captured on paper. After the list is complete, the ideas are sifted to determine the most

worthwhile. On occasion, ideas are combined. Although brainstorming can be done individually or within groups, research clearly shows that individual brainstorming is more effective: “Nearly all laboratory studies have found that group brainstorming leads to the generation of fewer ideas than comparable numbers of solitary brainstormers in both laboratory and organizational settings.”⁶² The effectiveness of individual brainstorming is worth emphasizing because this finding contradicts received wisdom. If the goal is to pool ideas by brainstorming as a group, then having each person brainstorm individually beforehand is advisable. The subsequent conversation can then focus on commonalities and omissions.



Idea Wallets. Within the industrial design firm IDEO, staff is encouraged to act like anthropologists by systematically scavenging for good ideas. One technique involves maintaining an *idea wallet*, or a portfolio of problems to be solved and ideas worth elaborating on.⁶³ Much of the contents of this wallet are gathered by rummaging through other people’s “trash bins” (their half-baked, discarded or unimplemented ideas). One person’s rejects may become another person’s solutions. The main benefit of an idea wallet is that it serves as an archive. A particular moment may not be opportune to implement an idea. Yet, at some point in the future, it may be appropriate to pull an idea out of the wallet and propose it to others.

Idea Mapping. Cognitive psychologists claim that we learn by mentally drawing connections between new information and information already within memory. In a sense, the brain is organized into giant webs of ideas and concepts. Many creative ideas come from the novel combinations of ideas already stored in memory; that is to say, new ideas can come simply from drawing new connections. This is the logic behind a technique called *idea mapping* (also called mind-mapping and concept mapping). A basic idea map is created by jotting down a number of ideas or concepts on a large piece of paper, and then drawing the interconnections between those ideas and concepts. Sometimes the process of drawing connections inspires new lines of thinking. More often, the map causes people to wonder about what is missing and to think about additional ideas. Some particularly elaborate idea maps start with a core concept or problem

and involve people charting ideas which emanate outwards. This technique is known as “radial thinking”.⁶⁴ Once completed, a radial idea map may reveal a number of interesting solutions to a problem, may highlight previously neglected ideas, and may combine ideas in novel ways. A computer software package on the market can make the mapping process more efficient and flexible.

Conceptual Block Busting. Creative ability is often viewed as something a person is born with. In fact, creative thinking is something that can be learned and actively cultivated. Even people with a lively imagination may want to exercise their abilities by working on puzzles and thought experiments. Such exercises help people remove conceptual blocks; that is, “mental walls that block the problem-solver from correctly perceiving a problem or conceiving its solution.”⁶⁵

“Scratching” For Ideas. Workers in artistic professions often take time out of their usual schedule to look for sources of inspiration. The choreographer Twyla Tharp calls this approach “scratching”.⁶⁶ It can involve looking at the work of others or even at something tangentially related to the problem at hand. What sources of inspiration are available? Of course, this depends on the challenge at hand. Common sources include journals and magazines, other workplaces, books, and conversations with other people who approach matters from a different angle.

Tactics for Groups

Generating ideas jointly within groups is often ideal because the very process of invention may earn buy-in from colleagues. An important caveat is that group processes are messy and more time consuming. Ideally, individual and group methods will be combined to best suit the individual styles and the challenge at hand. If diversity and dialogue are built into a work unit, many ideas are likely to flow without resort to special exercises.

Unfocus Groups. In a typical focus group, a researcher assembles a representative cross-section of individuals and asks a series of questions about their tastes or opinions. In contrast, an *unfocus group* is a deliberately unrepresentative group of people who are brought together so that ideas can be bounced off them.⁶⁷ The selected people should have an extreme interest in the products or services being developed and, therefore, should also be extremely knowledgeable, opinionated and occasionally off-beat. These groups are particularly well suited for fleshing out themes and underdeveloped ideas.

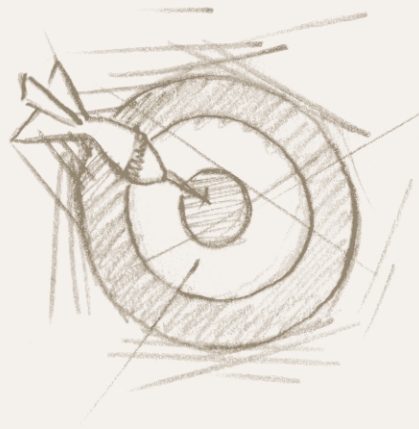
Brushfire Teams. When a fledgling idea needs to be quickly investigated and piloted, assembling a *brushfire team* may be the answer. These teams are laboratories in which ideas can be tested and shown to work (or not, as the case may be).⁷⁰ The hope is that, by demonstrating success, momentum will build behind an idea. The idea then spreads like a wildfire.

A related idea is the idea incubator or laboratory. The archetypical “idea factory” is the SkunkWorks research and development facility within the aerospace company Lockheed Martin. Private firms often separate their research and development activities by putting them within a specialized branch, but separation needs not be the case. Smaller teams may be better for developing certain ideas and for stewarding them through to implementation.

Divergent Exploration. One method of tackling a difficult problem is to look at it from every conceivable angle, deliberately looking for unconventional solutions or ways to combine obvious solutions in an unconventional manner. To look at a problem from an array of different perspectives, the thinkers usually put themselves into the shoes of various stakeholders.

VI. CONCLUSION

This chapter has surveyed many of the practicalities of promoting creativity in the workplace. The larger point is that a great deal can be done to systematically cultivate a milieu conducive to creativity. Of course, such changes do not happen overnight. Persistence is required. During the workday, all employees should be asking themselves, “What can be done today to make this a more creative place to work in order to better serve Canadians?”



CHAPTER THREE: EXPANDING THE CIRCLE

I. INTRODUCTION

It is not enough to act unilaterally as the lone hero who champions creativity. Leadership involves enrolling others in the promotion of creativity and continuous improvement. This involves reaching out to colleagues and explaining how creative thinking is just as vital to the healthy operation of public organizations as other core competencies. There is no magic formula that will persuade others to join the cause. Instead, buy-in happens when people are engaged in deep and meaningful conversations as equals.

Ideally, the process of dialogue will lead to a cascade of change throughout the organization. As colleagues become enthusiastic advocates for creative problem solving, their enthusiasm will become infectious. As an appreciation of creativity ripples throughout the organization, they will be more likely to enlist others. Sustainable change requires this winning of the hearts and minds of others in this way.

How can this domino effect get started? This chapter offers some advice about how to conduct the dialogue process and suggests some questions to discuss.

II. WHAT IS DIALOGUE?

“Dialogue ... is a conversation with a center, not sides,” explains William Isaacs, “It is a way of taking the energy of our differences and channelling it towards something that has never been created before.”⁶⁸ To be clear, a dialogue is not a debate in which competing parties attempt to “win” the argument. Nor is it a typical committee meeting, wherein people represent the interests of a role or an organizational unit. Instead, dialogue is an open and candid conversation in which everyone is invited to share one’s views and actively listen to others. People come to the table as unique individuals and are expected to speak about their personal views.

Dialogue is more likely to be productive if it takes place in small groups. Dialogue sessions involving a dozen or more are possible. However, in groups larger than five people, a person’s opportunity to become actively involved in the conversation declines with each additional person entering the group. In large dialogue groups, sufficient time should be set aside to make sure that everyone has ample opportunity to discuss the matters under consideration. In fact,

sufficient time must be set aside to conduct any dialogue session. Conversations that are rushed, or where there is pressure to prematurely reach closure, often result in a false sense of accomplishment. Hurried conversations may also breed anxiety if people are not allowed to reflect and reach their own conclusions.

The physical setting also matters a great deal. Ideally, a dialogue should be held in an environment free from distractions. If people are constantly checking mobile telephones or handheld e-mail devices, then a dialogue is unlikely to flow. People need to be present in both body and mind.


Research conducted by David Kantor suggests that dialogue sessions are most fruitful when there is a balance between four complementary roles.⁶⁹ The first role is the *mover* who initiates ideas and lines of thinking. This gives the conversation a direction. The second role is the *opposer*, who offers scrutiny to ideas that are on the table by challenging in a constructive way. This provides a conversation with rigour. The dynamic between these two roles also breeds creative conflict. Without a clash of ideas, original ways of understanding a problem are less likely to emerge. The third role is the *follower*, who builds upon ideas which are already on the table. Followers help conversations to reach closure. Finally, there is the *bystander*. These are people who quietly reflect on what is being said and only interject occasionally. When they do contribute, they tend to reframe the conversation by offering a fresh perspective. Their contributions act as a healthy reality check and encourage the consideration of a wider array of views.

Ideally, a balance among these roles emerges naturally. Each person may adopt a different role at points in the

conversation. Those leading the session need to monitor the conversational dynamic to determine whether all four roles are present. If an imbalance exists, then the likelihood of a productive outcome diminishes. The leader can fill one of the absent roles to add the necessary balance.

There are a few things to know about what to expect from each session. People need not necessarily arrive at a consensus. Participants should not be pressured into conforming to the views of the group as a whole. A consensus may emerge naturally but it is not a requirement. People should simply be encouraged to see issues from other view points and, collectively, to reach an alignment of views if some form of agreement is required. Usually, the benefit of dialogue is that individuals are assisted in reaching their own conclusions while deeply considering the views of others. The mutual understanding that results often proves more constructive than a short-term (or forced) consensus.

Dialogue also requires participants to listen actively. Just *hearing* what others are saying is not enough. An attempt should be made to fully understand the views of others and to duly consider positions taken by others. Participants need, therefore, to suspend judgement and to silence their inner critic. Passive and uncritical acceptance is not the point either. Participants simply need to avoid jumping to conclusions and pre-maturely dismiss the ideas of others. People are less likely to speak candidly if they feel that their views are misunderstood. At the opening of the dialogue session, reminding participants about the value of active listening is usually a good idea. It is surprising how seldom people think about the way in which they listen to others.



The hosts of the dialogue session need to refrain from imposing arbitrary constraints on the conversation. A dialogue session operates best when the interaction remains informal. Overbearing discussion leaders can raise alarm bells. Any sign of manipulation will cause participants to become guarded. Once trust is lost, it is usually difficult to rebuild. For this reason, leaders should be clear from the beginning about their intentions and expectations. This can include a few basic ground-rules but formal rules of order should be avoided.⁷⁰

III. DIALOGUES ON CREATIVITY

Once colleagues have been assembled within a dialogue session, the discussion should turn to what creativity means to each person and why it is important. A general discussion of this kind can be worthwhile. However, a group tends to be more productive if the conversation addresses specific questions related to cultivating creativity. By answering a series of questions about the state of the workplace, a group is able to come to a shared diagnosis of strengths, weaknesses and opportunities.

A number of dialogue-based diagnostic instruments already exist. Chief among them is the toolkit for teams developed by the Canadian Centre For Management Development's (former CSPA) Roundtable on the Innovative Public Service, chaired by Ruth Dantzer.⁷¹ This instrument encourages teams to assess themselves against a battery of questions in order to determine their readiness to implement large-scale innovations. The diagnostic instrument offered in this guide is designed to complement this effort. The emphasis of this instrument is slightly different, however. This instrument is focused on the enablers who promote a milieu conducive to developing and implementing ideas, both large and small.

It is suggested that the dialogue session proceed in stages. The first stage involves having each participant fill out a copy of the questionnaire. This should only take a few moments. The second stage involves openly discussing people's views on the various issues raised by the questionnaire. Some items may rate particularly low or high among members. It may be useful to discuss why this is so. There may be differences of opinion on certain items. This is an opportunity to discuss the different ways people perceive their workplace. It is often the case that a gap exists between the views of supervisors and staff. Understanding the causes of this gap in perceptions is an important step in reaching a mutual understanding of the problems faced. The third step involves identifying those areas that need to be improved. If a block of questions seems particularly weak, then this suggests an area that demands attention. Finally, participants in the sessions should discuss the types of things which can be done to put enablers into place.

Ideally, the group should periodically meet to discuss progress and additional areas of change. The dialogue session should not simply be a one-off event. If a group is serious about continual improvement, it will always be making sure that the milieu supports creative problem solving.

CULTIVATING A CREATIVE MILIEU: DIAGNOSTIC TOOL

Enablers

Note. For purposes of this diagnostic instrument, the terms “work unit” and “immediate colleagues” refer to those people (a) you work with on a regular basis and who (b) come under the authority of the most senior supervisor to whom you directly report.

	To Little or No Extent			To a Great Extent
DIVERSITY				
1. Does your work unit contain people with a mix of intellectual view points (e.g., interests, experiences, expertise and thinking styles)?	1	2	3	4
2. Do the people in your work unit have a strong sense of shared purpose?	1	2	3	4
3. Do the people in your work unit appreciate and accommodate multiple view points?	1	2	3	4
INTERACTION				
4. Are your immediate colleagues encouraged to form contacts outside of the organization?	1	2	3	4
5. Are the people in your unit encouraged to interact regularly with colleagues or clients?	1	2	3	4
6. Is the layout of the workplace conducive to unscheduled and casual interaction?	1	2	3	4
ENGAGEMENT				
7. Are you aware of the personal and professional interests of your immediate colleagues?	1	2	3	4
8. Are your immediate colleagues in jobs that suit their interests and aptitudes?	1	2	3	4
9. Is the development of creative solutions adequately rewarded within your work unit?	1	2	3	4
AUTONOMY				
10. Are the goals and expectations of people's jobs well understood?	1	2	3	4
11. Are responsibilities in your work unit delegated to the appropriate people?	1	2	3	4
12. Do people in your work unit have the freedom they need to conduct their work effectively?	1	2	3	4
Column totals				
Page 1 total				



	To Little or No Extent			To a Great Extent
PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY				
13. Is an atmosphere of humour, playfulness and friendliness encouraged in your work unit?	1	2	3	4
14. Do your immediate colleagues feel that they can express themselves openly and authentically without worry?	1	2	3	4
15. If mistakes are made, are they dealt with in a fair and constructive way?	1	2	3	4

INTELLECTUAL GROWTH				
16. Do people in your work unit have access to the learning opportunities they need to perform their jobs effectively?	1	2	3	4
17. Are the knowledge and skills of your colleagues put to good use?	1	2	3	4
18. Are the jobs in your work unit varied and challenging?	1	2	3	4

SUPERVISION				
19. Do supervisors in the work unit show enthusiasm for creative problem solving?	1	2	3	4
20. Do supervisors in the work unit go out of their way to help implement creative solutions to problems?	1	2	3	4
21. Do supervisors in the work unit act creatively to solve problems in their own jobs?	1	2	3	4

TIME & ENERGY				
22. Do people in your work unit have enough time to reflect on their work?	1	2	3	4
23. In your work unit, can assigned workloads be completed within regular working hours?	1	2	3	4
24. Are people encouraged to take time out of their schedules to reflect on the work that they do?	1	2	3	4

Column totals				
Page 2 total				

SUPPORTS

	To Little or No Extent			To a Great Extent
25. Are appropriate levels of funding directed towards creative solutions to important problems?	1	2	3	4
26. Do people in your work unit have access to the tools and equipment needed to do their job effectively?	1	2	3	4
27. Do people in your work unit have access to the professional advice they need to do their job effectively?	1	2	3	4

ENVIRONMENT

28. Are your immediate colleagues fully aware of emerging threats and opportunities that exist within their work unit?	1	2	3	4
29. Are your immediate colleagues fully aware of emerging threats and opportunities that exist outside of their work unit?	1	2	3	4
30. Are your immediate colleagues encouraged to work collaboratively across boundaries within the organization?	1	2	3	4


Column totals

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Page 3 total

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Final Tabulations

Page 1 total	<input type="text"/>	Score / Interpretation
Page 2 total	<input type="text"/>	
Page 3 total	<input type="text"/>	
Grand total	<input type="text"/>	
		30-59 / Severe creativity shortcomings
		60-90 / Moderately conducive to creativity, major room for improvement
		91-120 / Generally conducive to creativity, minor room for improvement



IV. FROM DIAGNOSIS TO ACTION

Diagnosing problems with an organization's milieu is only the first step towards making the Public Service more creative. Enablers have to be put into place. Problems and opportunities must be actively sought out. Solutions need to be developed and implemented in a sustainable way. It is important to recognize that conditions will never be perfect. They almost never are. Idea leaders have to exercise initiative and cleverness.

Several specific interventions carried out immediately can have a major impact on an organization's milieu. A few suggestions follow. Of course, this is not an exhaustive list. If there is a specific area that a work unit thinks needs improvement, these suggestions offer a starting point.

1. Diversity. Work-unit diversity can be improved through staffing actions or by inviting people from other work units to get involved. One study of 349 public servants found that, even in regions where diversity is relatively low, job fairs and candidate searches are effective outreach measures that can have a major impact.⁷² Some public organizations have used intellectual growth opportunities (for example, educational sponsorships and developmental assignments) as a lure to draw in diverse talent from other places and to recruit new public servants.

Breaking down Barriers

Often, simply looking at the presence of enablers of creativity is insufficient. Some thought should be given to that which stands in the way. To some extent, the instrument in this guide addresses obstacles insofar as low scores on a particular item suggest the existence of obstacles. Indeed, many of the obstacles discussed in Chapter Two tend to be related to the absence of enablers.

That said, in many situations, people (particularly leaders) inadvertently undermine the creativity of others. Setting time aside to discuss inadvertent obstacles to creativity is worthwhile.

- Are the deadlines set in the work unit arbitrary and unrealistic?
- Do supervisors in the work unit unduly interfere ("micro-manage") in areas where a staff person is better able to make a decision?
- Do the jobs in the work unit offer enough variation in tasks to maintain people's interests and enthusiasm?
- Are there points in the decision-making process at where good ideas are subject to an arbitrary veto?
- Do supervisors give subtle signs which indicate a lack of interest in new ideas?
- Do immediate colleagues pressure co-workers into accepting the prevailing view of a problem?

2. Interaction. The physical surroundings of a workplace can have a major effect on the types of interactions that take place. Redesigning physical spaces does not require large outlays of money. Often all that is required is the rearrangement and repurposing of existing materials, with some thought given to how it can enhance the chances for spontaneous interaction. Staff can also be encouraged to attend conferences, as well as other, less time-intensive learning events (for example, brown-bag sessions).


3. Engagement. Better job and project matching can immediately reinvigorate personal initiative within a workforce. Leaders should also make sure that reward and recognition systems (for individuals and groups alike) promote innovations that are aligned to key business lines. Some organizations have resorted to “audits” that identify and eliminate low-value busy-work that saps enthusiasm.

4. Autonomy. Supervisors can often do more to describe expectations and truly delegate responsibilities to those who are most capable. Finding ways to eliminate unnecessary approvals and other hurdles, thereby reducing “red tape,” is a common practice within smart regulation initiatives. Equally important is that supervisors refrain from certain forms of meddlesome micro-management simply out of habit or a fear of losing control.

5. Psychological Safety. Some thought should be given to the types of signals leaders are sending to others that encourage or discourage individual initiative. A leader’s body language may be discouraging due consideration of an idea. A careless phrase may dampen enthusiasm. These small signals reduce people’s sense of security. A great deal can also be done to make a work unit more open to casual interaction, such as occasionally holding lunches and retreats.

6. Intellectual Growth. The Government of Canada has a Learning Policy that mandates active investments in training and development. Even when money is available, time needs to be set aside so that the learning can take place. New innovations in e-learning provide growth opportunities with minimal interruption. Many such opportunities can be provided without employees even having to leave the workplace.⁷³

7. Supervision. Supervisors can help a great deal by modelling the behaviour they expect from others and by engaging employees in a thoughtful and empathetic way. If supervisors are unacquainted with the barriers faced by staff members, they should set aside time to learn about them and to look for ways to offer support.



8. Time & Energy. Managing time and workload can be a complicated undertaking. A few simple actions can help: effectively delegating tasks; setting firm limits on meeting times and designating “meeting-free” workdays; reducing the number of iterations a job takes; synchronizing workflows with others and setting more realistic deadlines; cutting down on low-value, time-wasting activities; processing similar tasks (such as responding to e-mail messages) at one time instead of in a piecemeal way throughout the day; and automating routine tasks.⁷⁴

9. Supports. Some organizations opt to create innovation seed funds that provide financing for good ideas. In many cases, people are simply not aware of the wealth of resources which are available. Simply providing a convenient listing of support options can be extremely valuable. One such tool is the expert locator. This listing of people within an organization highlights the interests, skills, experiences and subject-area expertise of those people.

10. Environment. A team can choose to engage in a scanning exercise. This sweeping look at the internal and external environment can identify emerging threats and opportunities. This exercise tends to work better when those from outside (such as clients and partners) are brought in to offer their perspectives.

V. CONCLUSION

This chapter provided advice about how to engage others in a dialogue about the virtues of creativity and potential avenues for change. A practical tool is included to help facilitate the process. As with any instrument, the results will be only as good as the effort and cleverness put into its use. Multiple dialogue sessions over time provide needed practice and a sense of momentum. The use of dialogue should ideally become a common practice within the work unit. This type of practice has, in its own right, a positive effect on the creative milieu.



CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSIONS

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Hopefully, this management guide has reinforced the need to see improvement in a holistic way. Creativity should not be viewed as separate from daily work, but as an integral component. Much is said about the need to “get back to basics” and to focus on “core, mission-critical” functions of an organization. The drive towards creative solutions is as much a part of this vital core as are the more conventional duties, such as financial probity. Indeed, creative thinking has the potential to enhance all parts of an organization. As the quotation from Leonard and Swap suggests below, creativity is as much a fundamental way of seeing work as it is a set of identifiable activities.

Leadership is crucial for the spread of creativity as an attitude and as a practice. Everyone has the potential to exercise leadership and to engage others in the cause. Indeed, everyone is responsible to pitch in and do one’s part.

One area that this guide has not addressed in any detail is the need for a larger institutional change. This topic has been omitted partly because creative problem solving should evolve organically. That is to say, people should come to their own understanding of what creativity means to them and to their work. Creativity at work can not be mandated by fiat from a higher authority. Many change management initiatives that are imposed in this top-down fashion often fail to live up to expectations.

This need for organic change does not absolve senior leaders from their responsibility to nurture creativity and champion its virtues. Senior leaders can do a great deal to either help or harm the cause. Public Service leaders should become high-profile role models by showing how creative problem solving can be used to address the daunting challenges faced by the institution. In this spirit, the Roundtable on Creativity offers a number of suggestions to the cadre of senior Public Service leaders.

“Creativity, like learning, is not only a process but also an attitude ... Many chances to enhance creativity do not come neatly packed in a clear decision point but are diffused over time, in tiny acts or omissions of action. Casual comments. Body language. Unexamined assumptions. Feelings—unexpressed or made obvious. So much depends on what we, as managers, honestly believe about the creative potential of those around us and of the situation. Managing creativity is all about the values we enact.”

— Dorothy A. Leonard and Walter C. Swap³



- **New Learning Opportunities**

Leadership, creativity and innovation are needed throughout the entire Public Service. Creativity should be promoted, and creative problem-solving skills should be taught, as part of public servants' learning. This applies to the Canada School of Public Service's courses, as well as the School's role as a learning clearing house. It is recommended that creativity-oriented learning tools and opportunities be developed to meet public servant's learning needs.

- **Creative Smart Practices**

In the past, case studies have been used very effectively as learning tools within the CSPA in specific courses and seminars. It is recommended that future case studies highlight creative and innovative solutions, and that these smart practices be integrated into the School's curriculum.

- **Creativity and Organizational Strategy**

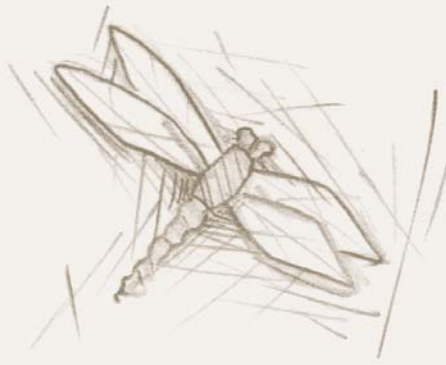
Senior executives within departments should emphasize the value of creativity to their staff. Championing the cause involves thinking about how to bolster the creative capacity of the workplace. This includes integrating creativity into the change management strategies of a department or agency.

- **Communicating Successes**

The Government of Canada, as a whole, should communicate the value of creative endeavours to the public. This will reinforce the public's trust in government as an institution and its accountability to Canadians. The Public Service is full of success stories involving creativity. These successes should be trumpeted far and wide. By acknowledging the great creative work that is done on a daily basis, public servants gain a sense of pride and confidence.

- **Recognizing Successes**

The Institute of Public Administration of Canada has an excellent annual award that recognizes cases of innovation in public management. Public service leaders should look for ways to reward cases of creativity and innovation more generally and investigate the possibility of creating a more formal program to encourage and recognize creative and innovative work.




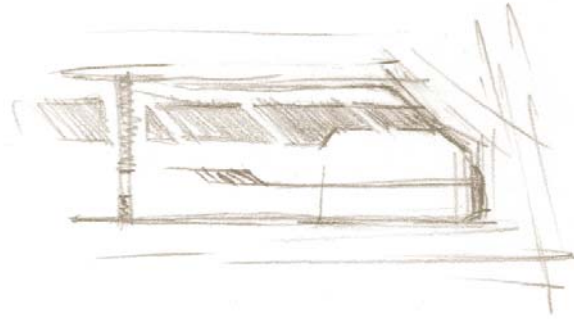
END NOTES

- 1 This passage draws from: Rosamund Stone Zander and Benjamin Zander, *The Art of Possibility: Transforming Professional and Personal Life*. New York, NY: Penguin, 2000.
- 2 *Ibid*, p. 17.
- 3 Richard L. Florida, *The Flight of the Creative Class: The New Global Competition for Talent*. New York, : Collins, 2005; and Richard L. Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: and How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*. New York, NY, Basic Books, 2002.
- 4 Zander and Zander, *op cit.*, p. 66.
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