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Creativity & Innovation

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Think about all the amazing human problems and challenges that we have been able to overcome over time because of new ideas, discoveries and solutions that have emerged. Without creativity and innovation, organizations will NOT grow, they will be unable to remain competitive, and will end up obliterated by all the changes that take place around them.

The ability to foster and demonstrate the skills for creativity and innovation is critical to the growth of any organization especially in our increasingly **VUCAD** world with so much **V**olatility, **U**ncertainty, **C**omplexity, **A**mbiguity and **D**isruption. Without these skills, professionals and organizations will simply be left behind.

Unfortunately, the prevalent culture in many organizations does everything to stifle creativity, especially in heavily regulated organizations where there is a high focus on compliance, and matured industries that are very comfortable about the amount of growth that they have achieved. What such organizations soon discover is that they are at best sub-optimal and in the worst case, they end up being catapulted to obscurity by the more agile and innovative players from within or sometimes from outside their industry.

A typical case in point is always the disruption in the photography space that heralded the end to giants like Kodak as well as the recent rise of FinTech and Digital Currencies that is disrupting the traditional banking and financial services sector.

What is Creativity & Innovation?

Some scholars and practitioners attempt to separate both concepts, but we prefer to capture them as one integral concept. Our experience suggests that creativity and innovation is about **people** working together to **clarify** what their challenges and opportunities are so that they can come up with **ideas and solutions** that will be **implemented** and create **value** for themselves and society.

The definition we use is anchored on several very important points. Firstly, that creativity and innovation is about people working together – it is NEVER a solo effort, it always requires the collaboration of people. Then, it involves having a shared understanding of what you are trying to achieve. If people working together do not have a common view of what the existential realities are, then it is impossible for them to come up with innovative solutions.

Creativity and innovation are also about ideas and solutions, but these ideas and solutions must be implemented – because coming up with ideas and solutions is NOT enough.

Finally, if your solutions are implemented and they do not create value for yourself and society, then it really was not an innovative activity.

Myths about Creativity & Innovation

Building on this working definition, it is important to quickly dispel some common misconceptions that people have about creativity and innovation that limit our ability to harness the creative potential that lies within us.

Firstly, is that some people are born creative, and others are not. There could be nothing farther from the truth. We are all born NAKE, with a God-given potential to be creative in so many domains – our creativity comes from the exposure we receive, the choices we make and the extent of our deliberate practice.

Secondly is the notion that creativity is limited to coming up with ideas. If you come up with ideas and you do not have the discipline to translate those ideas into results that will create value, then that wasn't creativity – it was perhaps just whining and complaining. Anyone who visits your organization and spends an hour interacting with you can come up with dozens of ideas of how things can be done better, that is not sufficient to be termed creativity. Doing the hard work to bring those ideas to life and overcoming all the challenges in between is what makes for creativity.

There is also this false impression that creativity requires ideas that drop down from heaven. That's NOT true. Creativity and innovation are often the product of observing the environment and “copying” from others. The most innovative solutions are always built on the work done by yourself or of others rather than things that have never been done or conceived before. All our innovative pursuits are an improvement on what already exists in one way or the other.

Finally, but not exhaustively, some people believe that creativity and innovation only apply to the performing arts and technology. This is not true; the best application of creativity is in solving simple everyday problems and challenges through what we call Creative Problem Solving. Technology is often a tool used to achieve these, and the performing arts certainly teach us a lot about what it takes to be creative, but both domains do not have an exclusive claim on the skills for creativity and innovation.

Leading scholars like Skip Ross and Ken Robinson have demonstrated through their research that we are all creative, but that certain things including schooling and the challenges of adult life tend to diminish and stifle our creative capabilities. Therefore, we must be deliberate in equipping people with the skills to unleash the innovative potential that lies within them and creating a culture in our organizations that fosters creativity and innovation.

What Makes People Creative?

Harvard Business School's Professor Teresa Amabile has clearly articulated the three most important competencies that predict creativity and innovation through her critically acclaimed work – The Componential Theory of Innovation. According to her, creativity and innovation are driven by firstly, **domain skills** – the more competent you are in a specific area through learning, practice, feedback, and failure, the more creative you will be in that domain.

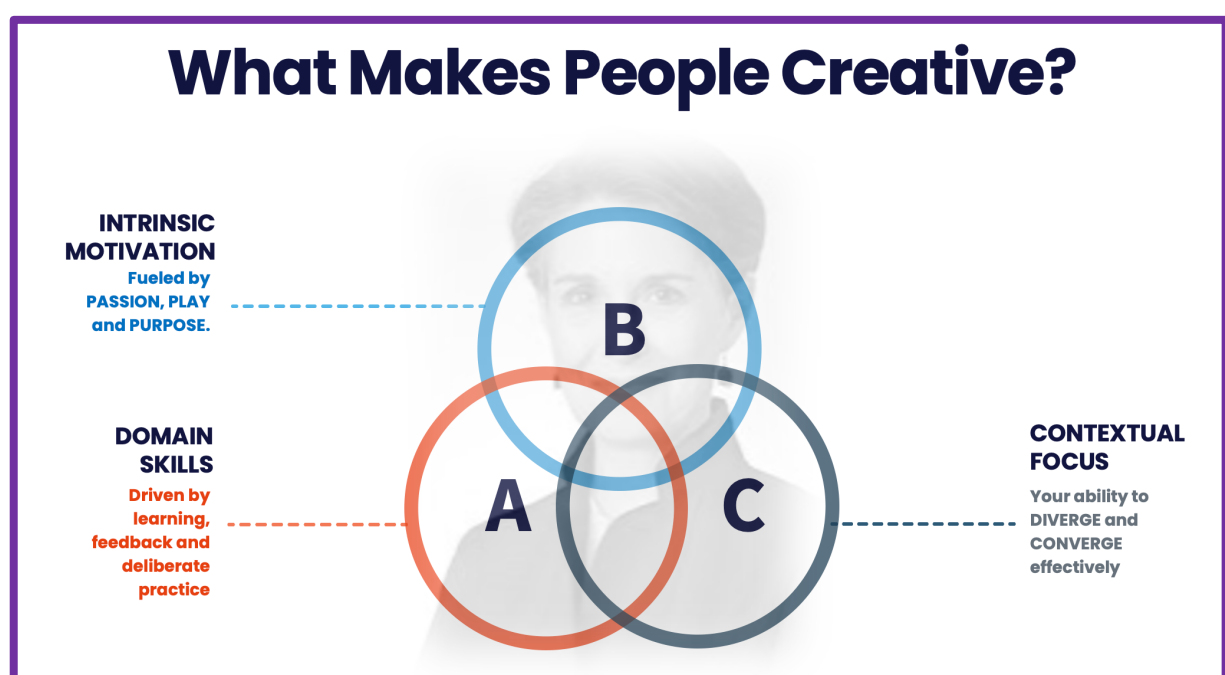
My favourite reflection on this first element is that domain skills are not necessarily about having a degree or academic qualification. We like to make the distinction between having a certificate and having a “*sabifate*” (“*sabi*” is a Nigerian slang that means having practical experience about something).

In addition to domain skills, creative people are also driven by **intrinsic motivation** that reflects the fact that they are passionate about the work that they do, enjoy it, and that it aligns with their purpose. If you are not

intrinsically motivated by what you do, you will struggle to be creative in that domain.

Finally, creative people have the skills of contextual focus – the ability to diverge, to come up with a lot of ideas and then to converge, to select the most appropriate ideas and translate them into results. Divergence and convergence are the sub-skills of creativity that need to be carried out separately and require a different set of attitudes when doing them.

While diverging you should defer judgment, push for more ideas and make connections. While converging you should use affirmative judgment, keep novelty alive and remain focused on the overall goal.

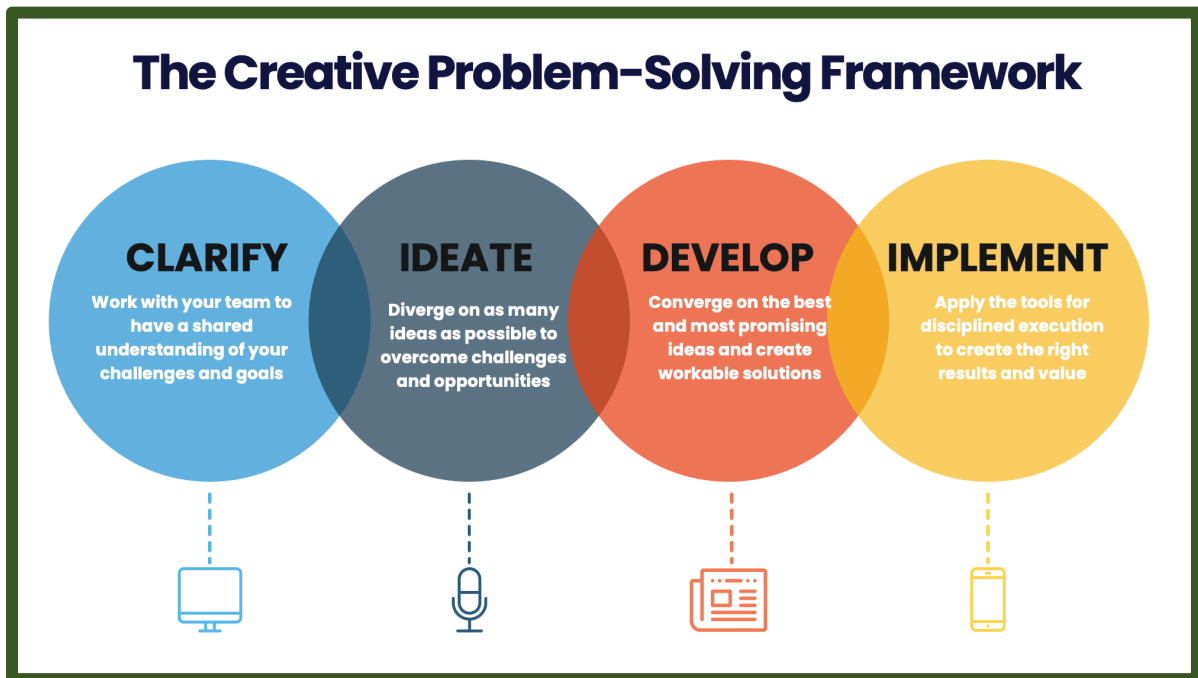


Putting Creativity and Innovation to Work

Now that we have explored the importance of creativity and innovation, debunked some of the myths associated with creativity and innovation and identified the factors that drive creativity and innovation, we will spend some time on learning how to put creativity and innovation to work in your team or organization.

It is important to appreciate the role that organizational culture and processes play in driving or stifling creativity and innovation. Without the right culture and innovation process, many great ideas will end up stifled or in the hands of your competitors. So, leaders must build the capabilities to foster creativity and innovation and avoid the many behaviours that stifle it.

In addition, we have found that by applying a disciplined innovation process like the Creative Problem-Solving Framework to your creative endeavours and the various tools throughout the process, you can create amazing results for your organization.



The Creative Problem-Solving Framework was originally developed by IDEO – the design thinking firm that is reputed to be the hub of modern-day creativity and innovation. It consists of four steps. Firstly, you CLARIFY your goals and challenges, then you IDEATE using the principles of divergence and come up with as many ideas as possible. Then, you DEVELOP these ideas into workable solutions using the principles of convergence. Finally, you IMPLEMENT these ideas using a variety of tools for disciplined execution.

When we facilitate creative thinking sessions for organizations who are interested in improving their processes, developing new products, or coming up with new strategies, we use this Creative Problem-Solving Framework.

We also facilitate workshops on Creativity and Innovation using this framework and the Creativity & Innovation Toolkit that consists of up to thirty different tools associated with the various stages of CLARIFY, IDEATE, DEVELOP, and IMPLEMENT.

Creativity and Innovation are important skills that are required in every organization and should be a pervasive competency that all employees must develop and apply through the process of Creative Problem Solving.

Developing the skills for creativity and innovation and creating an atmosphere to foster these skills requires leaders to be very deliberate. Without these skills, individuals and organizations will be at best sub-optimal and never actualize their God-given potentials.

Professionals and organizations who choose to learn and apply these skills immediately see the benefits of applying them to different aspects of their organization.

We will be very excited to work with you in building the skills for creativity and innovation through our learning interventions and our hands-on facilitation of your product development, process reengineering or strategic planning sessions using these principles and tools.

Please get in touch with our team of organizational development consultants on +234 805 195 3276 to explore these and other unique solutions from Learning Impact NG.