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ASTD International Webinar

November 28th 7am EST
Topic: TBD

ICAO Full-day Workshop

December 12th Toronto
Foundations of Leadership & Followership

Dear Samantha,

Hope your summer was enjoyable and generative.

We are just back from Mindcamp, an annual conference that attracts top creativity and innovation professionals from around the world. The experience has inspired us to talk about creativity and to highlight some key distinctions between our leadership and followership roles. These distinctions are useful for optimizing team creativity and are often missed, especially for new leaders and managers.

Send us your related experiences or tips. Unrelated experiences and tips also welcome as we enjoy hearing from you!

Samantha & Dr. Marc Hurwitz

Creating Creative Leaders

People are often surprised when they discover or uncover what creativity means, and how teams and organizations can harness it more effectively. Here are a few of the surprises.

Surprise 1:

Creativity is much more than 'letting loose your inner child'. People remark on how creative their five-year old is with crayons and a pack of paper. Parental pride aside, there are good lessons that small children remind us of - create without fear of judgment, build many creations, delight in the process, etc. However, while children are expert at using their imagination, their ideas are rarely truly **novel and useful**. In an organizational context, we are looking for solutions that haven't been thought of before and are also relevant in achieving our goals and vision.

Surprise 2:

We have different creative thinking preferences. Understanding this builds self- and team-awareness, helping pinpoint potential blind spots. We like FourSight, a leading creative preference tool, for this.

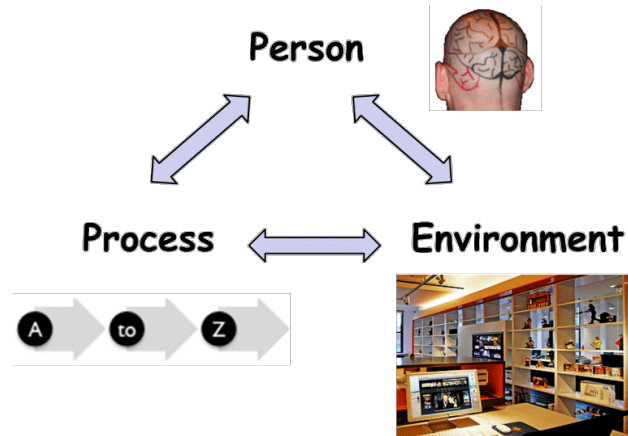
Surprise 3:

You don't need to be creative to be a creative leader. In fact, it can be hard to lead a creative team if you are creatively inclined because you have to continually resist your own impulse to jump into the fray and be the one with the coolest or smartest idea. We're not saying you can't contribute ideas at all, but we are saying you have to wait until the team is contributing in full force. In your leadership role, your job is not to be creative, but to stimulate creativity in others, to recognize and optimize the creative potential of the team, and to give opportunity not to seize it.

Surprise 4:

There are teachable skills and literally hundreds of ideas that you can learn and leverage to create a creative team. A useful framework for the skills and ideas is the PEP model: Person, Environment and Process.

Person- Learn as much as you can about what stimulates and inhibits creativity and play to your team's strengths. For example, people need time to think and time for ideas to incubate. It takes 30 to 90 minutes to begin really thinking creatively and expansively. Also, we all think better when our subconscious has had time to do it's job, i.e., process massive amounts of data and let the important stuff bubble up to the conscious mind.



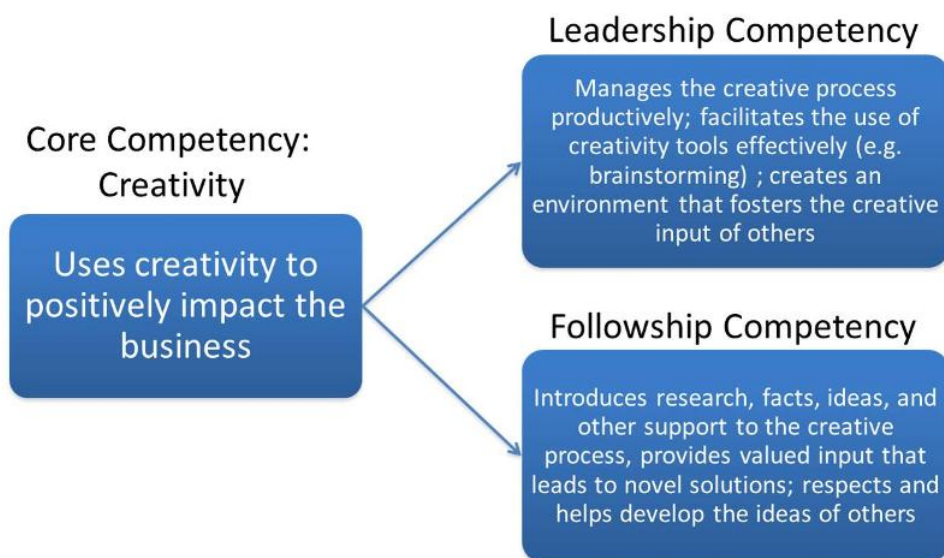
Environment- Build a stimulating and safe environment for teams to reach their creative potential.

- Frame problems as challenges rather than opportunities to generate more diverse ideas.
- Show visible commitment. Be present during creative thinking sessions, rather than the "I'll see you at 5" leader who gives a speech about the importance of the challenge then leaves for the day. And, value the group's ideas through action. Even if you can't run with them at this time, add them to an Opportunity Log or make small progress on one idea. Nothing quashes creativity like ideas that go nowhere.
- Articulate acceptable risks and the tolerance for failure.
- Share the decision criteria at the beginning of the process rather than at the end.

Process - Support the use of good processes and principles for optimum creativity. There are loads of tools and techniques to choose from that foster more ideas: more novel ideas and more workable ideas. A creativity professional can be an invaluable partner for larger challenges, in selecting useful tools, facilitating the process and combatting inhibitors which are sometimes hard to pinpoint as an insider.

Surprise 5:

There are simple ways to stimulate a more creative culture within your organization. Take a look at how your HR and training programs foster creativity. Here is an example using a fairly standard core competency on the left, pulled from the competency dictionary of a large multi-national. See how articulating the competency by role on the right makes it clearer? And with the desired actions articulated distinctly, it is much more actionable, observable and usable for ongoing development.



If there is one thing we learned from our time at Mindcamp, it's that there is no end to the opportunities to tap into more creative potential within ourselves, our teams and our organizations. And, not surprisingly, the more deliberate we are in our creativity and innovation efforts, the better the result.

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