



“Creativity takes courage.”

- Henri Matisse

To manage the complexity, pace of change, and the “adaptive challenges” facing higher education (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Sanaghan & Jurow, 2011; Sanaghan & Lohndorf, 2015), presidents will need all the creativity they can generate. Senior leaders, especially presidents, will need to do two important things:

1. Nurture and build their own creativity
2. Build the “*Creative Capital*” of the leaders throughout their campuses

The 7 practices we share in this paper have been tested and proven by presidents with whom we have worked over the years. They are reality-based, not just “pie in the sky,” and they actually work.

Although we will cite a fair amount of research about creativity, this is not an academic paper in tone or character. It’s a *practitioner’s manual* on how to improve your “Creative IQ” (Sanaghan & Conway, 2010). We will also suggest specific books to read, articles to review, TED Talks and YouTube videos to watch. We have the advantage of having already sorted through the immense amount of material that is available on creativity, and we want provide you with practical, commonsensical resources that will inform your thinking and your creative journey.



KEY RESOURCES

There are 3 TED talks that every senior leader should view and use to prompt a discussion about organizational creativity on his/her campus:

1. “Do Schools Kill Creativity?” by Sir Ken Robinson, who is considered one of the giants of creative thinking.
2. “How to Manage Collaborative Creativity,” by Dr. Linda Hill, an academic from Harvard.
3. “How to Build Your Creative Confidence,” by David Kelley, from IDEO, one of the great design firms in the country.

Creativity is Critical to Constructive Leadership

Several years ago, I co-authored *The Creativity Profile* (Sanaghan & Conway, 2010), which assessed organizational creativity in three critical areas:

1. The *constructive* leadership of the organization
2. The *positive* culture of the organization
3. The use of effective *procedures and protocols* that organizations use to tap the creative talent of their people

We used this *Creativity Profile* in scores of leadership programs in higher education that we designed and delivered. In our many conversations about the results of the profile, the most important category for people who participated in filling out the survey was the constructive leadership of the organization. Without that, very little matters. Leaders, especially senior leaders, have huge impact and influence on organizational creativity. That realization is my primary motivation for writing this paper.

“Leader, the cold, hard truth is that your behavior is the single most important factor in determining whether the people who work for you will be creative.”

- Roger Firestein, 1996.

Before we begin, let's "fix dictionaries" and notionally define what we think creativity actually is: "*Creativity is the generation of novel ideas that add value*" (Sanaghan & Conway, 2010).

The "add value" piece of the definition is essential to how we see creativity. Creativity from our perspective is not just having a bunch of interesting, different, or wacky ideas; these ideas must have value. This means that the ideas produced must have the potential to benefit someone, improve a process, solve a problem, answer a challenge, or introduce a different way of looking at things that helps the team or the institution move forward. A creative idea should produce an "outcome" of some kind. It adds value in a meaningful way (Sanaghan & Conway, 2010).

I've been fortunate enough to participate in or facilitate over a hundred senior team/cabinet meetings over the years. I have witnessed really smart, dedicated leaders struggle with complex, sticky, and ambiguous challenges and try to solve them. It can be really hard work, but every once in a while something special happens and a creative notion, idea, or approach enters the room. Everyone "sees" the new idea and often wonders "Where the heck did that come from?"

Often, there is little or no argument about the new course of action. Instead, people react by saying, "That just makes sense" or "I didn't think about that before" or "Why didn't we see this earlier?" This "magical" moment rarely happens when trust is low, in an environment where critics reign supreme and everyone is afraid to risk looking stupid by proposing a "different" idea. Those environments are deadly spaces where creativity dies quickly - really quickly.

This is an important note: "opportunities" can be destroyed in seconds if they don't receive the support they need to breathe a little, grow a little, and blossom into something meaningful and real.

These delicious moments can be rare, but when they occur they can be game changers. People see a new path that was hidden from view, a perspective that offers dramatic change, and allows people to "see" things very differently. Presidents need to be able to create and nurture these moments when they occur, because they are fragile things.

The practices we will share in this paper will help presidents become more creative themselves and will help members of their senior team build their own creative muscles.

If a president can learn to use his or her own creativity, the leverage that can be achieved is extraordinary. Put differently, when a president has the reputation of being open to "creative" and different ideas (not "wacky" new ideas, but ideas that shift perspective and add value), those ideas will come in buckets. The president's openness to new ideas and new thinking will be known throughout the campus, and people will be willing to share their early and fragile thinking with this leader. When this happens, a sense of meaningful, not false, optimism is created throughout the campus. People begin to believe that together they can deal with any complexity or challenge they face because of the talent and creativity they possess. I have had the privilege of seeing and experiencing this kind of campus climate and it is a great thing to witness. We need more campuses like that.

Creativity- Enhancing Practice #1:

Have an “idea catching” system

This is one of the most pervasive themes in the field of creativity (May, 2011; Schwartz, 2011; Kelley & Kelley 2012) and one of the simplest to implement. We all have lots of ideas bouncing around our heads all day long. The problem is that we often lack the discipline to capture these creative notions and possibilities before they disappear. We tell ourselves that we will remember these ideas because they are so great, but that rarely happens.

“The palest ink is better than the strongest memory.”

- Chinese proverb

If you have an idea, don't hesitate. Capture it as quickly as you can and preserve it for later review and consideration. You can make use of different *idea catchers*:

- A “creative journal” that you can carry with you at all times (e.g., Moleskin or Rite in the Rain)
- An app such as Evernote, Google Keep It, Simplenote, or Remember the Milk
- Small sticky notes to capture your ideas in the moment. They really are small, about 1 square inch, but you can write a lot in an inch! (I always carry a pack of them in my briefcase.)
- A voice recorder of some kind (e.g., an Olympus digital voice recorder, Livescribe, or Smart Pen)

Use whatever “system” is most comfortable for you, but use something that works. Capture your creative thoughts and musings as soon as you can. Don't hesitate!

Make sure you have an idea catching system for your bedside table. We've all had the experience of waking from a dream state and having a flash of an idea we want to remember, but then it quickly disappears.

Also, *don't* judge your ideas when you jot them down, just capture them. (We will talk later about the negative impacts of judgments and criticism on creativity.)

EXAMPLES OF THIS PRACTICE IN ACTION

- The artist David Hockney had all the pockets in his suit jackets tailored to fit a sketchbook.
- The musician Arthur Russell liked to wear shirts with two front pockets that he filled with scraps of score sheets.
- Edison produced over 1000 patents. When he died, he left behind 3500 notebooks containing details of his ideas and thoughts.
- One of our presidential clients has the habit of calling his office or secretary's voicemail and sharing his creative ideas while he is driving to work. For him, driving to work, but not from work, stimulates his creative thinking, and it is important to capture his ideas before he arrives and is distracted by the tasks of the day.

Finally, “borrowing” ideas that you find is almost always a good practice because this prevents you from being limited only to your own creativity. Quirky ideas, creative notions, and seemingly wacky ideas are all around us, capture and use them! (Obviously, give appropriate acknowledgement when you do.)

“Good artists copy; great artists steal.”

- Pablo Picasso

Creative Principle:

Capture your ideas ASAP.

Creativity- Enhancing Practice #2:

Neutralize the critic in your meetings

In thousands of daily meetings across this country, creativity is stifled, pummeled, and destroyed. This is especially true in higher education, where discipline, rigor, and critical thinking are prized. I have witnessed hundreds of meetings where a “different” notion, strange idea, or curious perspective is immediately pounced upon and stamped out of existence, within seconds.

Although *thoughtful* criticism can be useful, it is rarely helpful in the first 10 seconds of idea generation. Ed DeBono, considered one of the great giants of creativity (1985, 2015) believed that constructive criticism had an important place in the creativity process, but emphasized that criticism is best used after an idea has been generated and has developed a little.

In meetings, the greatest creativity killer is often the self-appointed “meeting critic” who uses sarcasm, eye rolling, and critical remarks (e.g., “Let’s be real here,” “We need concrete solutions, not airy fairy ideas,” or “Where did you get that idea?!”) to stop the generation of creative ideas. If I had a dollar for every “critic” I have met in campus meetings, I would be a rich person, a very rich person.

“A new idea is delicate. It can be killed by a sneer or a yawn. It can be stabbed to death by a quip and worried to death by a frown on the right man’s brow.”

- Ovid

Although Ovid lived 2000 years ago, his words resonate deeply, describing many of the meetings conducted on our campuses today. Why is this? How did these critics gain so much negative power and influence? As we try and grapple with the complex challenges facing us, negative and harsh critics are not the answer (they never were) and we must find ways to nurture the often-fragile creative spirit of our people.

As a president—or as any senior leader—you can set the tone for a problem-solving meeting by establishing a simple ground rule:

“Today, I want to explore many ways to deal with the difficult and complex issues facing us (e.g., retention, student access, falling graduation rates) and I want to encourage lots of ideas, different ideas, out of the box ideas because what we are currently doing isn’t working the way we want it to. I want to strongly suggest that we hold off on criticism, until we flesh out some possibilities.”

This is a game changer. Whenever I have seen this ground rule actually lived, the generation of ideas is astounding. The leader gives people permission to explore and expand their creative ideas without fear of attack or ridicule. The leader also communicates that the critical rigor comes later. That rigor does come, but it comes when it is most effective (De Bono, 1985).

If you find that a meeting critic has taken over a meeting, you might call for a short recess and communicate the negative impact they are having on the discussion. They might be unaware of the impact (though I find that many are). Either way, a gentle reminder might slow the critic down a little.

I have seen a president quietly pass a note to a meeting critic, and it slowed them down quickly. Sometimes a non-verbal signal (e.g., raised eyebrows, a furtive look) might help a critic self-monitor his or her behavior.

Here are some key things to remember about a meeting critic:

- They can squash ideas in seconds and can prevent people from suggesting other “different” ideas.
- It’s easy to be a meeting critic and it takes very little real thinking. A sixth grader can be a critic (Sanaghan & Conway, 2010).
- Although they are good at criticizing others, rarely are they open to the criticism of others. They tend to be “thin skinned” and may possess “sensitive “and rather large egos.
- They have a place in the creative process, but their input must be invited at the right time in the process.



KEY RESOURCES

Interested leaders should become familiar with Ed De Bono’s book, *Six Thinking Hats* (1985). This book shares an organized and structured process for facilitating creative and disciplined conversations. Many of the faculty I have worked with respect DeBono’s thinking and his work a great deal, and they value the six steps in his creative process.

Also, one of the very best books on leadership and creativity is *Creativity, Inc.* by Ed Catmull, Ph.D., who was the CEO of Disney & Pixar Animation Studios. I highly recommend it.

Creative Principle:

Criticism has its place in the creative process—but *not* when you are generating ideas.

Creativity-Enhancing Practice #3:

Invite “wildcards” to your senior meetings

One of the serious challenges every president needs to be aware of with his or her senior team discussions is the dilemma of “listening to yourselves too much.” A senior team can get comfortable with each other’s ways of thinking and become very predictable in its solution finding. Creativity can suffer as the senior team tries to reach “consensus” on a solution or strategic initiative.

We have witnessed several presidents invite a “wildcard” into their senior team meetings to prevent the kind of “group think” made famous by Irving L. Janis (1982). On most campuses, there are individuals who simply think differently than the rest of us. They see connections and opportunities invisible to the eye; see possibilities where others see only obstacles; see colors when others see things in black or white, when others engage in “either/or” thinking. These people frequently offer a different perspective. We call these people “wildcards.”

Unlike critics who often crush new and creative thinking, a wildcard can open up a group’s thinking and show them new possibilities and perspectives. They can be a gift to the creative process. Fortunately, we have buckets of them on every campus. Presidents need to identify these wildcards and periodically involve them in their senior team’s strategic discussions.

Here’s how to identify some of your campus *wildcards*:

1. Their reputation usually precedes them, especially if they are faculty members. People can name these creative individuals quite readily. Just ask for some “nominees,” build a relationship with them, and periodically invite them to your senior team or strategy meetings.
2. Wildcards tend to ask a lot of “why” questions (which can aggravate some people), but their questions aren’t critical nor do they have an edge, and that’s important. They are naturally curious and want to understand other people’s thinking, not criticize them, unlike the campus critics. This is key to remember.
3. They tend to be optimistic and willing to explore possibilities, even in the face of clear barriers and hurdles. They ask “what if” questions because they want to open up possibilities for discussion. People who crave closure can find this a little frustrating at times, but please be patient with these questions.
4. They see connections others tend to miss and often, they will make a statement about a situation or share a metaphor that describes how they see the current state. This helps others see the connections, relationships, or links quickly and vividly.



KEY RESOURCES

Here are a few provocative articles to inform your thinking about creativity:

1. “You can Teach Someone to Be More Creative” (2015) by Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic.
2. “How to Kill Creativity” (1998) by Teresa Amabile, one of the great thinkers about creativity from Harvard.
3. “The Emotions that Make Us More Creative” (2015) by Scott Barry Kaufman.

“Coaching” a wildcard

Don’t invite a wildcard into a senior team meeting or to a one-on-one conversation without sharing with them *why* you are inviting them to the discussion. Let them know you

value their perspective and that others might be resistant to their ideas initially. Share with them that you will communicate with the senior team members so that they understand the wildcard's role in the discussion, and to alleviate any defensiveness or anxiety. Also, communicate that you want them to *constructively* challenge ideas that they have questions about, but not to be a negative critic.

This coaching will create the entrée into a conversation. When done well, this conversation can make the senior team really think through their ideas and challenge their assumptions. It is almost always value added.

You don't always have to bring in a "creative type" as a wildcard. With a very creative senior team that loves idea generation and informed dreaming, a "different" thinker could be the director of the physical plant, a project manager, or a history professor. The purpose is to inject a different perspective into the conversation in order to see other possibilities.

Creative Principle:

"Wildcards" can prevent you from listening to yourself too much and can provide different perspectives that will engage your creative thinking.

Creativity-Enhancing Practice #4:

Create or find your own physical creative space and do some work at the same time

Walt Disney had two different office spaces: one with a large window, where he would generate creative ideas, and a second one that was a small room with no windows, where he did the editing of his movies. Is there a way for you to create your own *physical* creative space?

When I want to be reflective or creative, I go to a local college library that is blessed with a quiet study room that comfortably fits about 20 people. I do not bring all my "accouterments" (like a computer, iPhone, iPad), just a pad of paper and myself.

I find the quietness and gentle isolation feeds my creative spirit. Other people walk in the woods or by the shore, still others do gardening or something with their hands (e.g., cooking, woodworking, or painting). One of my presidential clients gets his best ideas riding on his Harley motorcycle on the weekends! Still another one took up cycling at 50 and lost a lot of weight in the process, and believes his best and most creative thinking happens when he is out in nature, cycling with no distractions.

When I first arrive in the quiet room in the library, I use a writing technique that I learned from the popular book *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron (2002). Every morning, Cameron writes 3 pages of thoughts, ideas, and speculations in a stream-of-consciousness. She just writes what comes to mind, with *no judgment or editing*. It is an unedited, uncensored brain dump. She does it to prime the pump for creative thinking for the day.

Another creative thinker and writer is Natalie Goldberg, who wrote the provocative book *Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within* (1986), in which she described her own creative technique for producing good writing. She writes for several minutes, once again with no editing or judgment. When she doesn't have anything else to say, she continues to write down "*I don't have anything else to say*" until the time is up. These timed writing exercises keep your hand moving and the thoughts flowing without any requirements for the quality of the content.

Several presidents I talked with reported that they use different physical spaces to do their best creative thinking. One president visits a small, little-used chapel on their campus as their personal "creative space." They don't visit for spiritual reasons per se, but the quiet, beautiful, intimate space is a wonderful incubator for creative ideas.

Another president visits the football stadium's donor suite when not in use. It has windows everywhere overlooking a beautiful campus on one side and distant mountains on the other. She reported that the stillness, isolation, and stunning view help her think more creatively and strategically. She even holds her cabinet meetings once a quarter in this space as they spend an entire day thinking about the future of the campus.

Still another president takes time on a regular basis to visit the student/teacher classrooms that the College of Education uses as a training ground for aspirational teachers. She believes the child-like wonder that first and second-grade children possess feeds her own creative spirit. She visits there whenever she is dealing with a complex problem. She just chats with the children, listens to their stories, and lets her creative juices flow unconsciously.

Some people need a place with minimal distractions, as I do; others need to interact with other people. Whatever the case, find a physical space (e.g., a garden, a room in your home, a bench in a local park) that enables you to relax, reflect, and create.

Creative Principle:

The right physical space can support your creative spirit.

Creativity- Enhancing Practice #5:

Make your thinking visible

When dealing with a challenge or seeking a solution, we too often keep our thoughts to ourselves; in a group discussion, we think through things in our heads. Things keep rolling around, but clarity eludes us. To achieve that clarity, we might need to “see” our thinking.

It is almost always helpful to make your thinking “visible” to others, even to yourself. Visually displaying the elements of your thinking does not need an artist’s touch; stick figures and simple symbols can convey powerful ideas. Don’t get caught up in the notion that your drawing has to be beautiful. It doesn’t. It just needs to be *understandable*.



KEY RESOURCES

The Back of the Napkin (Expanded Edition): Solving Problems and Selling Ideas with Pictures by Dan Roam (2013) is a wonderful resource for those of us who think we are “drawing-challenged.” It shows how to easily represent visual ideas.

When you visualize your challenge or problem, you (and others) can “see” the interconnectedness of ideas better. You can use flipcharts (my favorite) or whiteboards to capture the ideas and the flow of the conversation.

We have one presidential colleague who used Idea Paint to cover an entire wall in his office. This exceptional product can quickly turn any wall into a whiteboard to draw on, track progress, or communicate ideas.

Capturing your ideas visually helps make your thinking more disciplined because it forces you to communicate your thoughts externally and not leave them rattling around in your head. You can revisit your ideas regularly, adding more pictures and meaning as your creative journey continues.

I have seen dozens of leaders use this visualization process with great success. Over the years, I have learned “mind mapping” (Wycoff, 1991; Buzan, 1996) and “brainstorming” (McCafferty, 2014) and have found them to be helpful in unpacking a problem, helping me explain to others what I am thinking, and helping me to see connections that aren’t visible in my head.

In the last decade, a whole new field of “graphic facilitation” has emerged, where gifted artists visually capture the essence of an important meeting, a strategy session or a strategic planning process. It is an amazing thing to see how the major concepts are captured on a couple of flipcharts or on a long wall. Participants can add to the pictures to clarify meaning or highlight specific concepts and important ideas.

There is an excellent book on the subject, *Visual Meetings* by David Sibbet (2010). It is well-worth the read. If the president can develop this skill with the senior team, visual meetings just might become the way other meetings throughout the campus are conducted—even Board retreats.

Creative Principle:

Visualize your thinking to stimulate your creativity.

Creativity-Enhancing Practice #6:

Learn to use the “Metaphorical Problem Solving” technique

Metaphorical problem solving is a creative tool that will enable you to see challenges and problems in a dramatically different way. It is not a practice per se, like many of the other ideas we suggest in this paper, but it is one of the simplest and most powerful creative problem solving tools to learn about and put *into* practice.

We are all familiar with the metaphor “life is like a bowl of cherries,” or “I have a dream,” used by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to convey the powerful hopes and aspirations of entire generations. And if a friend told you that “last night my bed was like a sack of lumpy stones,” you would likely understand what their sleeping experience was like.

Metaphors are powerful communicators that can help create the psychological space needed to look at a problem, challenge, or opportunity in a different way. It can create an “aha” moment where you have a flash of insight into how to solve a difficult situation (e.g., low morale, poor divisional communication or collaboration, declining enrollment). It can take you to a different level of thinking and a very different way of thinking. It takes some practice, but it can produce powerful results, especially when you feel “stuck” with a problem and don’t know what to do with it.

When you engage in metaphorical problem solving, you do three simple, yet important things:

1. **Create a metaphor** that describes your problem or challenge – something you are trying to solve.
2. **Solve the metaphor** instead of trying to solve the actual problem or challenge. You put your creative thinking into *solving the metaphor*. This is somewhat counterintuitive, but a powerful way to generate solutions to the real problem.
3. **Transfer your “metaphorical solution”** to your real challenge. See if you can apply your metaphorical solutions to the problem you are actually dealing with.

We have used this metaphorical method with several presidents over the years and have yielded some impressive results. For example, we used it to help solve a “parking problem” on a crowded urban campus. With another campus, we helped alleviate an overcrowded dormitory situation where there simply were not enough rooms for over 100 incoming freshmen and we were one month away from opening day.

I will go into some detail with this particular creative problem solving process because it is so effective and also easy to learn (Sanaghan & Conway, 2010).

Step One: Create at least three metaphors that symbolize and describe your current problem. These metaphors should capture the essence of your problem clearly and succinctly. Some examples:

- It’s like trying to capture a slippery snake at night.
- It’s like trying to open a box without a key.
- It’s like an all-terrain vehicle headed in the wrong direction (we are moving fast over bumpy ground, but not accomplishing much).

Step Two: Come up with some potential solutions to the metaphors. For example, for “How would you catch a slippery snake at night?” you might offer:

1. Get a flashlight so we can actually see the snake.
2. Get lots of people involved so the snake doesn’t get away.
3. Give it some food so it comes to us.

Step Three: Transfer your metaphorical solutions to your real situation.

Here's how this process might work . . .

1. We need more **light** on this student service problem. Let's visit several of our peer campuses and see how they solved this problem. Then convene a group to create some solutions and an action plan for this service problem in the next 30 days.
2. We need to get **more** of the **right** people involved in this student service problem. We have been thinking about this by ourselves for months. We need a lot of different "brains" and perspectives to help us tackle this problem. Let's also invite several groups of students to help us think about this collectively.
3. We need to create more **incentives** so students use our system more often and provide ongoing feedback about its effectiveness. We could give them deep discounts on campus store items they like or create a lottery system with a big prize for those students who fill out our service surveys. Or we could actually pay each student \$5.00 to fill out the feedback form, which would give us the information we currently lack to figure out why students don't use our system.

This creative problem solving process will take a little practice, but it is worth the time invested. It will provide a leader or a group of individuals with different ways of looking at something, sometimes very different ways. When we have used this on campuses, we have seen it work about 50% of the time, which is an excellent percentage with complex problems and challenges. It can be taught in an hour, practiced several times on small problems to build your ability, and then applied to more difficult campus problems.

The key to this problem solving method is to loosen up your creativity and defer judgment when you are producing the metaphors. You will know what the "right" metaphor is intuitively, so create several so that you have options to choose from.

Then, solve the metaphor and transfer your metaphorical solutions to your real problem.

Creative Principle:

Learn to use Metaphorical Problem Solving to create the psychological space to develop creative solutions to difficult problems.

Creativity- Enhancing Practice #7:

“All great deeds and all great thoughts have a ridiculous beginning.”

- Albert Camus

Defer your self-judgment and ignore other people’s judgment of you

“Half the battle is to resist judging yourself”

- Kelley & Kelley, 2012

The above quote is from the leaders of IDEO, which is one of the most well-known and prolific design firms in the world. What they talk about just might be the most important creativity principle of all time. Almost all of us have a finely tuned, highly sensitive, quick acting, negative voice in our heads that constantly judges our thoughts, writings, production, and work. Carl Jung called this “voice” the “inner critic,” and the inner critic works overtime, all the time.

Many creativity experts (Ray & Myers, 1986; Kelley & Kelley, 2012; May, 2011; Amabile, 1998) talk about the destructive power of this inner critic. It stops creative ideas dead in their tracks. Barely does a small possibility emerge and our “voice” starts judging it (e.g., “This isn’t practical; get real” or “What was I thinking here?” or “Wow! Glad I didn’t share this with my team!”). You get the idea. The inner critic takes creative ideas from incubation to a quick death.

Mathew May (2010) uses the provocative term “Ideicide” to describe the negative self-censoring most of us engage in on a daily basis. He calls it “the highest crime against creativity,” and it happens millions of times a day. We seem to be overly cautious about sharing our ideas and allergic to making mistakes or looking silly.

Creativity experts Michael Ray and Rochelle Myers, who taught a course on creativity at Stanford for years, talked about this voice of judgment (VOJ) back in the 1980s. It is still here with us, looming large and destructive. One of the simplest strategies you can try that just might begin to stifle the Voj is this:

For one day during the week, use a journal to note how many times you judge yourself during the day. In fact, try it for one hour and see what emerges. Then build yourself up to a couple of hours, then a full day. This might take a couple of weeks but the information you gather will be revelatory.

I promise that you will be astounded about how often your inner critic rears its ugly head. Take some time to reflect about when and why your inner critic is most active. Use the following questions, adapted from Michael May’s work on creativity (2011), to build a practice of reflection about your Voj:

- When is my inner critic most active? When I am with others? By myself? With my team? Peers? My boss?
- How does my critic get in my way (e.g., keeps me from participating in group discussions; interferes with writing my reports because my “style” isn’t coherent enough; makes me worry incessantly about teaching an upcoming course)?
- How often do I find myself judging the ideas of others?
- When is my critic the quietest? Is it ever quiet?
- How does my critic get in the way of my speech writing and giving?

Don't overdo this or over-analyze it. What you are trying to do is notice how often your critic is stopping or hindering you when you think, write, and speak. It is the first step on the journey to less "ideacide."

"An essential aspect of creativity is not being afraid to fail."

- Edwin Land

For leaders, this is something to consider: When someone shares the beginning of an idea, they are vulnerable. They have taken a risk by putting something out there to be reviewed. Creating emotional safety in the room is a leader's responsibility, especially if there are different "levels" in the room (e.g., tenured professors; adjuncts; staff). Letting the critics rule the day from the first moment of conversation and exploration will guarantee one thing: very little creativity or risk taking. Good luck with that approach.

Creative Principle:

Defer judging your ideas to let them breathe a little. (This is the hardest practice to follow.)

Remember, defer judging others' ideas, too.

The second half of this critical practice involves dealing with our real fear of being judged by others (Kelley & Kelley, 2012; Ray & Myers, 1986).

Let's be clear here; I am not trying to say that all of us are delicate, frail, or overly sensitive individuals. We aren't, *but ideas are*. Ideas are fragile things - like bubbles trying to float upwards to the sky. They need support, not bazookas. They need nurture and care, not a cold slap of "reality."

Earlier in this paper, we talked about "neutralizing the critic" in a meeting and establishing a ground rule that states that criticism is necessary, but has its own specific place and time in the creative process. This ground rule is a game changer and will allow people to generate the creative bubbles that can provide real solutions to the myriad of complex problems we face on our campuses.

Summary

None of these creativity-enhancing practices are difficult to learn, but neither are they easy to implement. They do take some time and attention, and a little patience. Just having an “idea catching system” for a week probably will not reap any great thoughts or ideas, but after a month, you may find that you have some very interesting and different notions that you just might be able to develop into something useful. Please consider one that resonates with you, *only one*. Try it and own it over time.

A president can create a campus culture that is *creativity-friendly* by modeling the way. This doesn't mean that they have to somehow be a creative genius themselves. If his or her people know that the president is trying to develop their own creative muscles, and most importantly, that they support the creativity of others, you will see creative “bubbles” emerge. And if we are to meet the complex and ambiguous challenges facing higher education, we need as many bubbles, as many creative new ideas, as we can get.

In review—the 7 creativity-enhancing practices:

1. **Capture** your ideas ASAP
2. **Criticism** has its place in the creative process, but not when you are generating ideas.
3. **“Wildcards”** can prevent you from listening to yourself too much and can provide different perspectives that will engage your creative thinking.
4. **The right physical space** can support your creative spirit.
5. **Visualize** your thinking to stimulate your creativity.
6. **Use metaphorical problem solving** to create the psychological space to develop creative solutions to difficult problems.
7. **Defer judging** your ideas; let them breathe a little.

Resources

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