

“Growth in the higher levels of creative ability”

Presented by Adri Grobler

at the

International Model of Creative Ability Occupational Therapy Conference

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This presentation is partially based upon an MBA research report presented to the GSB, UCT



Creativity and complexity
A study into the practices, disciplines and mantras that support creativity in unpredictable and uncertain circumstances.

Foster-Pedley, J. and Grobler, A. (2009)

Introduction

“Creative thinking is much more than using our imaginations to invent lots of new ideas.

Creative thinking is a lifestyle, a personality trait, a way of looking at the world, a way of interacting with others and a way of living and growing.

Living creatively means developing our talents, tapping our unused potentials and becoming what we are capable of becoming through self-discovery and self-discipline.

Anytime we are faced with a problem or dilemma with no learned or practiced solution, some creativity is required.”

(Torrance, 1995)

Introduction

Concerned with:

- Group 3: behaviour and skill development for self-actualisation.
- Aimed at those individuals who have the creative capacity to function on levels 8 or 9.
- Very little research has been done on levels 7 to 9 – outside of traditional domain of therapy.
- Business management research: difference between management and leadership correlate with the difference between levels 7 and 8?

Introduction

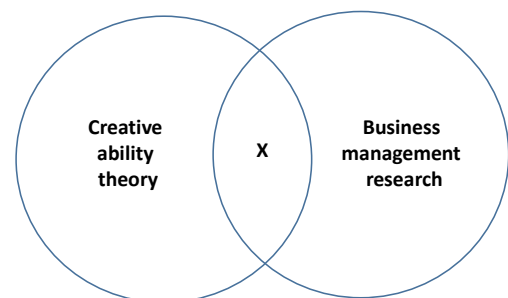
Relevance to audience (OT's interested in creative ability theory):

- Client capacity (developing ability as part of the high functioning client's total capacity)
- Professional capacity (how we can raise our own creative ability).
- Research capacity (ways of thinking about creative ability theory).

Research questions

- How can individuals increase their performance and productivity in terms of creativity over time?
- What are the disciplines, practices and mantras that support creativity in an unpredictable and uncertain reality?
- How can individuals harness creativity to the benefit of society?
- What are the stumbling blocks to creativity and how can they be overcome?

Research area

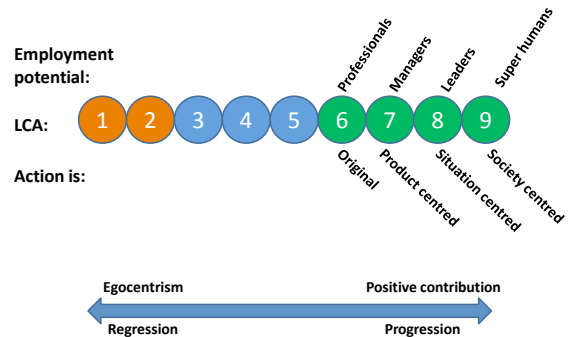


Literature review

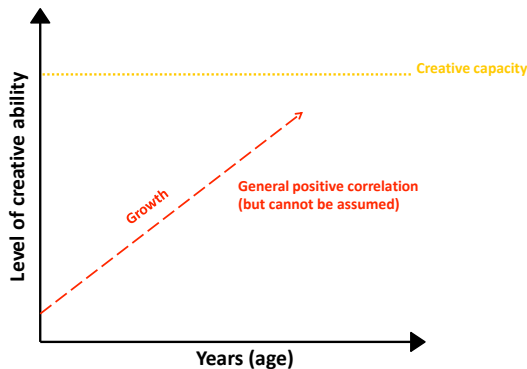
Main influences, apart from literature on creative ability:

- Ralph Stacey and colleagues on complexity and creativity
- Mihaly Csikszentmihaly on flow and positive psychology
- Teresa Amabile on the components of creativity
- Otto Scharmer on the 'U' of innovation
- Nancy Kline – A Time to Think
- Bruce Mau's Incomplete Manifesto for Growth
- Peter Senge and colleagues – The Dance of Change
- Adam Kahane - Solving Tough Problems
- Sir Ken Robinson – Out of Our Minds (learning to be creative)

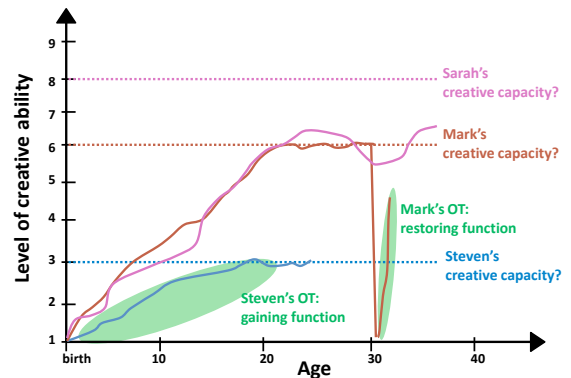
Levels of creative ability as a continuum



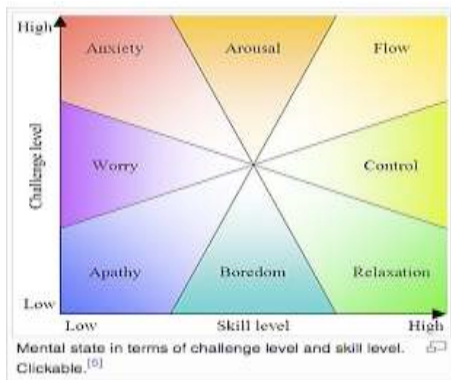
Creative ability over time (BOT graph)



Three fictional characters (BOT graph)



Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's challenge and skill radar



Paradoxical characteristics of creative individuals

"When psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihályi studied eminent people, he found that they held almost contradictory impulses and qualities within:

a desire for solitude but also a need for social stimulation;

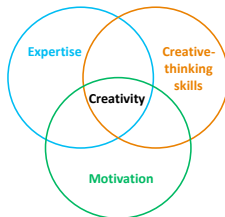
superior knowledge on a subject but also a childlike naïveté.

These qualities seemed to fuel their ability to come up with great ideas and their ability to execute them—quite a combination."

(Flora, 2005:3).

The three components of creativity (Teresa Amabile)

Expertise is, in a word, knowledge – technical, procedural, and intellectual.

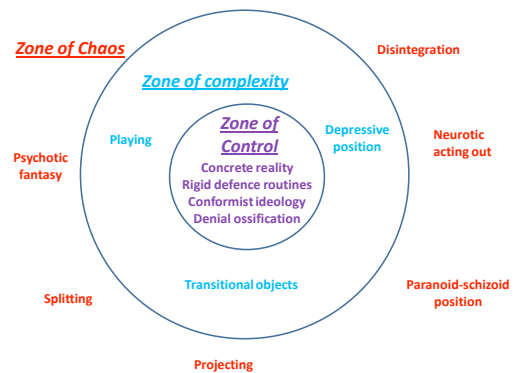


Creative-thinking skills determine how flexible and imaginatively people approach problems. Do their solutions upend the status quo? Do they persevere through dry spells?

Not all **motivation** is created equal. An inner passion to solve the problem at hand leads to solutions far more creative than do external rewards, such as money. This component – called **intrinsic motivation** – is the one that can be most immediately influenced by the work environment.

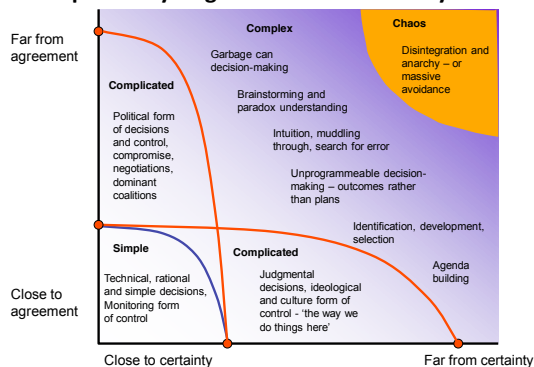
Source: Amabile, 1998, pp. 77-87

Stacey's zones of operation for an individual mind



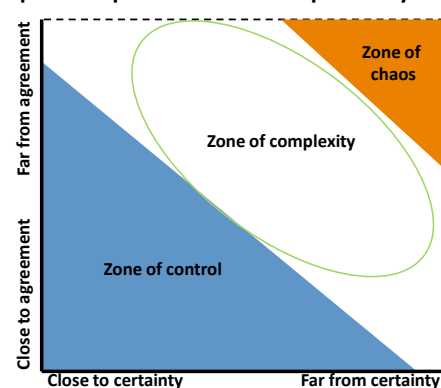
Adapted from Stacey, 1996, p. 126

Ralph Stacey's agreement and certainty matrix

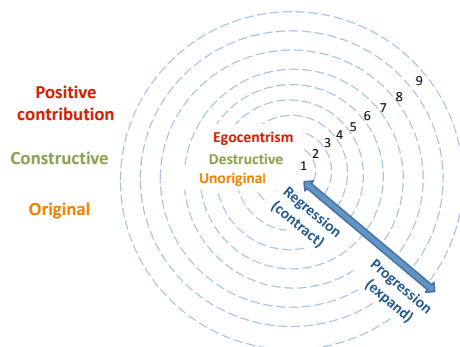


Source: Zimmerman, 2001

Simplified representation of Ralph Stacey's matrix



Levels of creative ability as concentric circles?



Methodology

- MBA mini-thesis, limited scope, a drop in the ocean. A pilot study?
- Post-modern conceptions of knowledge (nominalist ontology and social constructionist epistemology)
- Grounded theory method (constructionist approach) and systems thinking tools
- Purely qualitative study. Induction as method of inference.
- Theoretical sampling (not random). Individuals functioning on levels 8 or 9 (judged subjectively) in diverse and complex environments where creativity is required
- Weakness = very small sample size: 4 case studies (South African)

Four case studies



Paul du Toit

Internationally acclaimed and immensely successful visual artist
Humanitarian and general nice guy
CEO: PlanetPaul Productions



John Vlismas

Internationally acclaimed stand-up comedian
Corporate speaker, painter, writer, social commentator
CEO: Whacked Management, Co-owner: Virus Communications



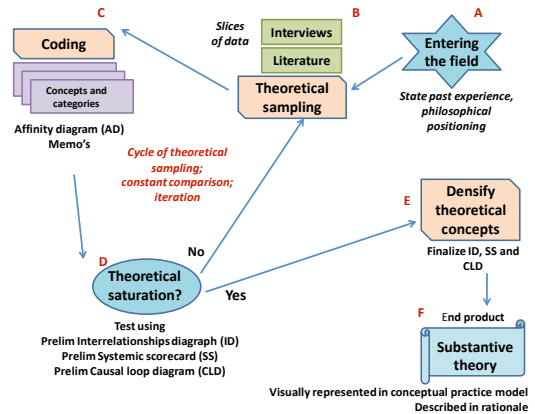
Annemarie Lombard

Occupational therapist (SI), facilitator and coach
Business woman of the year 2008/2009 (SACBW professional category)
CEO: Sensory Intelligence consulting



Dr. Craig Friderichs

Principle medical officer: Dept. of Health, Western Cape, RSA
Humanitarian, steward-leader, visionary, nice guy



Findings

what it is...

- A midrange theory that may support and supplement Vona's grand theory.
- Suggesting critical variables and causal relationships in the growth process as it emerged from data.

...and what it is not...

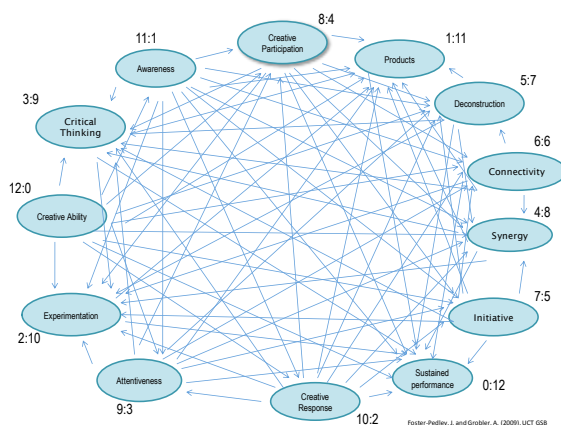
- The conceptual practice model is not a 'model of creative ability' and was never intended to be one.
- Does not claim to portray a universal truth.

Findings

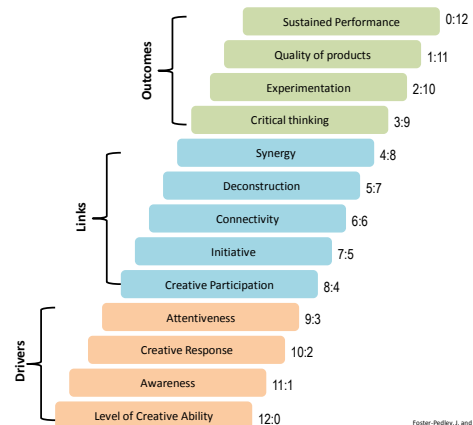
General themes and metaphors from interviews:

- Travel metaphor (creative journey)
- Growth metaphor (nurturing a fruit bearing tree)
- Creativity as bridge (making connections between ideas or experiences that were previously unconnected)
- Ideas from complexity theories (emergence, holism, patterns, simplicity within complexity, polarity management, the element of unpredictability)
- Creativity and meaning (adding value, contributing)
- Finding your medium

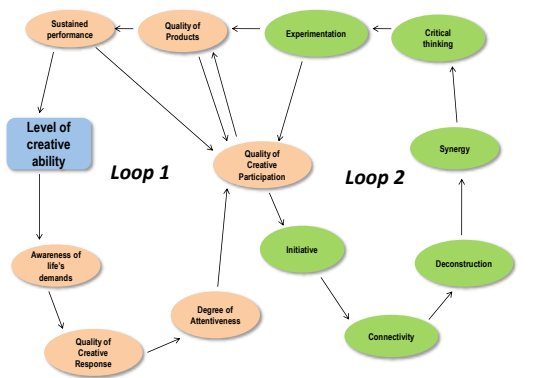
"When your work is the canvas onto which you express your soul, it is the job you were born to do and involves moving beyond self-sacrifice to self-fulfilment, beyond dilemma to authenticity, and leads to a life of purpose and success."
(Williams, 2008: 164).



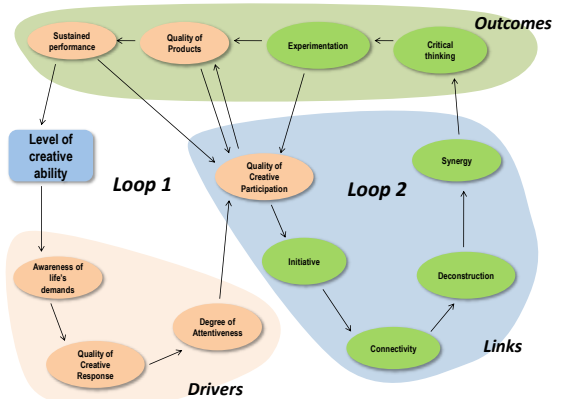
Foster-Pedley, J. and Grobler, A. (2009), UCT GSB



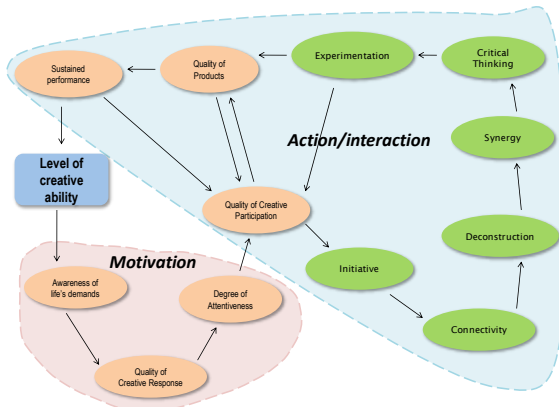
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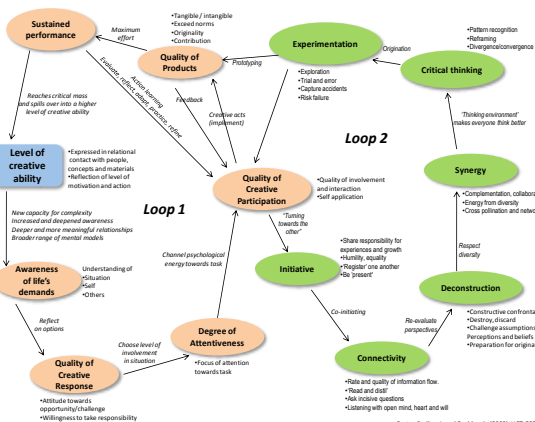


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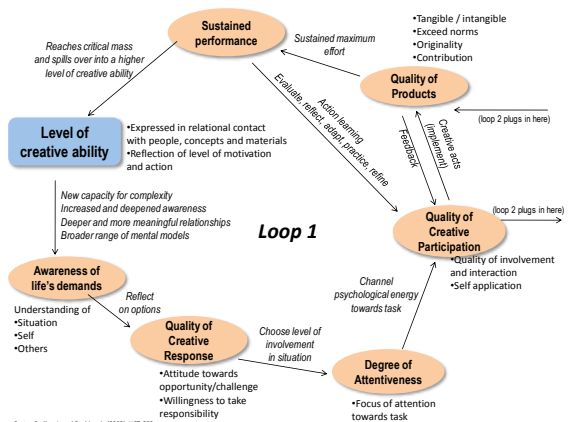
Rationale

"Quantities of knowledge may be poured into human receptacles, but it is only when the human being in his absorption of this knowledge endows it with creativity – when he becomes that knowledge, plus himself, that we get creativity." (Vona du Toit, 1970)

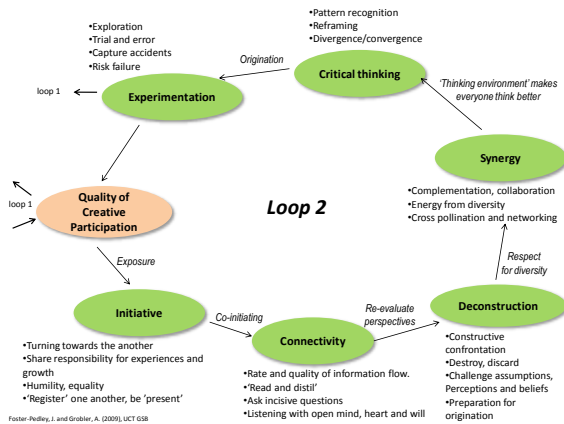
"Through learning we grow, becoming more than we were before, and in that sense learning is unselfish, because it results in a transformation of what we were before, a setting aside of the old self in favour of a more complex one." (Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 2003)



Foster-Pedley, J. and Grobler, A. (2009), UCT GSB



Foster-Pedley, J. and Grobler, A. (2009), UCT GSB



Conclusions

• The double learning loop between sustained performance and creative participation **builds psychological capital**.

• As a result of 'flow' experiences and positive feedback, the individual's **level of intrinsic motivation increases**.

• Throughout the whole process, but especially during creative participation, the individual develops a **new capacity for complexity** reflected by regenerated purpose (Scharmer, 2009), deeper and more meaningful relationships, and a broader range of mental models.

• In other words, the individual develops a **deepened awareness of life's demands** and increased readiness to respond to them, ideally positioning him for a further cycle of growth.

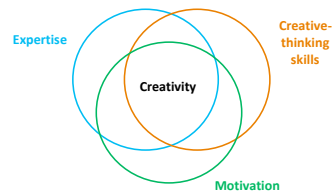
Conclusions (continued)

• The **quality of meaningful interaction between entities in system during creative participation** offers tremendous opportunity for growth, but is dependent upon:

- Openness to be changed by events;
- willingness to adapt mental models and perceptions;
- respect for diversity, treating each other as thinking peers;
- collaboration and complementation in stead of competition;
- rate and quality of information flow in system;
- trial and error, venture, risk failure, capture 'accidents';
- skillful polarity management (playfulness vs. professionalism, expertise vs. beginner's mind, improvisation vs. planning, freedom vs. discipline, listening vs. talking, acting vs. being, divergent thinking vs. convergent thinking etc.)

Conclusions (continued)

• It has been shown how an individual can increase his thinking skills, intrinsic motivation and expertise – the three **components of creativity** (Amabile, 1998). Theoretically, the area where the three circles overlap has been enlarged. This is the space where creativity occurs.



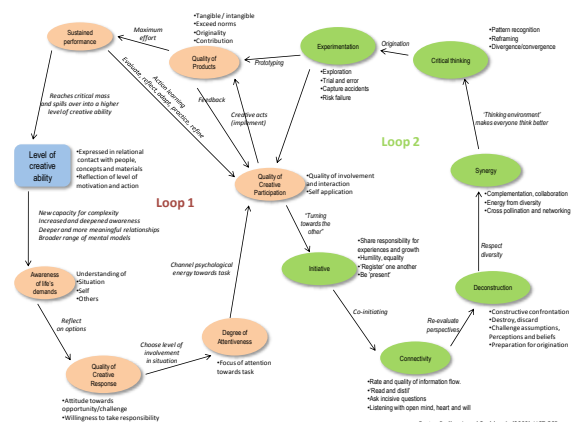
Conclusions (continued)

• It has been shown that the suggested growth process facilitates the refinement of **authenticity** on the one hand, and **connectivity** on the other. This may link to Csikszentmihályi's concept of 'the two pillars of happiness'.

A person who is fully **differentiated** and fully **integrated** "becomes a complex individual, one who has the best chance at leading a happy, vital, and meaningful life" (Csikszentmihályi, 2003: 29)

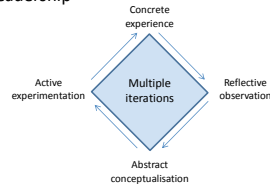
"The end point – the highest level of development – is one at which a person has refined her uniqueness and is in control of her thoughts, feelings and actions, while at the same time relishing human diversity and feeling at one with the infinite cosmos. A person who has reached this stage can truly be called happy, because she needs nothing more." (Csikszentmihályi, 2003: 33).

Happiness



Closing remarks

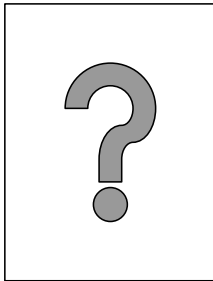
- This study was not aimed at OT's per se, but I believe that it is nevertheless relevant because we have the *capacity* and *responsibility* to function on very high levels of creative ability.
- As practitioners, we need to remain our own subjects of inquiry.
- The 'art' of therapy, the 'art' of leadership
- Track our own growth over time
- Continued action learning



Further research directions

- Refine description of levels 7, 8 and 9
- Assessment tool for these levels
- Larger scale studies (large sample size imperative)
 - ☐ Explore correlation between creative ability and leadership
 - ☐ Explore the creative ability of OT's (new graduates to gurus)
 - ☐ Further explore growth process, mechanisms, variables (refine theory)
 - ☐ Explore usefulness of theory in practice (prove/disprove theory)
- Etc. etc.... seemingly limitless options
- What will the creative response to these challenges be?

Questions



"Incisive questions remove limiting assumptions, freeing the mind to think afresh." (Kline, 2009: 54).

Contact details

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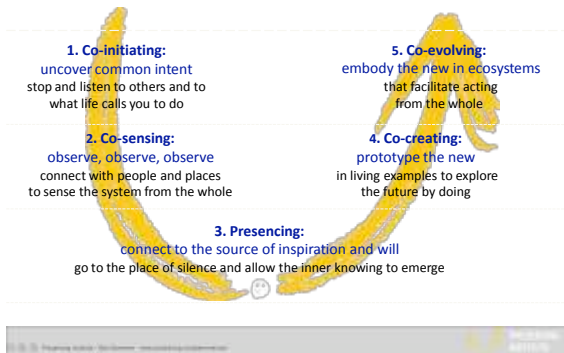
Extra slides

The Time pressure / Creativity matrix (Amabile et al)

Time pressure affects creativity in different ways depending on whether the environment allows people to focus on their work, conveys a sense of meaningful urgency about the tasks at hand, or stimulates or undermines creative thinking in other ways (Source: Amabile T.M., Hadley C.N. and Kramer S.J., 2002, p. 56).

Likelihood of Creative Thinking	Time pressure	
	Low	High
High	Expedition Creative thinking under low time pressure is more likely when people feel as if they are on an expedition. They: • Show creative thinking that is more orientated toward generating or exploring ideas than identifying problems. • Tend to collaborate with one person rather than with a group.	Mission Creative thinking under extreme time pressure is more likely when people feel as if they are on a mission. They: • Can focus on one activity for a significant part of the day because they are undisturbed or protected. • Believe that they are doing important work and report feeling positively challenged by and involved in the work. • Show creative thinking that is equally orientated toward identifying problems and generating or exploring ideas.
Low	Autopilot Creative thinking under low time pressure is unlikely when people feel as if they are on autopilot. They: • Receive little encouragement from senior management to be creative. • Tend to have more meetings and discussions with groups rather than with individuals. • Engage less in collaborative work overall.	Treadmill Creative thinking under extreme time pressure is unlikely when people feel as if they are on a treadmill. They: • Feel distracted. • Experience a highly fragmented workday, with many different activities. • Don't get the sense that the work they are doing is important. • Feel more pressed for time than when they are 'on a mission' even though they work the same number of hours. • Tend to have more meetings and discussions with groups rather than individuals. • Experience lots of last-minute changes in their plans and schedules.

U Process: 1 Process, 5 Stages



The paradoxical characteristics of creative groups

Beginner's mind	A team needs fresh, inexperienced perspectives as well as skilled expertise. Bringing in outsiders is often a useful way to provide the necessary balance of perspective.	Experience
Freedom	Your team must work within the confines of real business needs – and in alignment with your company's strategy. But it also needs latitude – some degree of freedom to determine how it will achieve the strategy and address the business needs.	Discipline
Play	Creativity thrives on playfulness, but business must be conducted professionally. Provide time and space for play, but clarify the appropriate times and places.	Professionalism
Improvisation	Plan your project carefully, but remember that projects do not always go as planned. Encourage team members to look for ways to turn unexpected events into opportunities. Keep plans flexible enough to incorporate new or improved ideas.	Planning

Source: Harvard Business Essentials (2004)

Levels of creative ability and the zones of operation?

