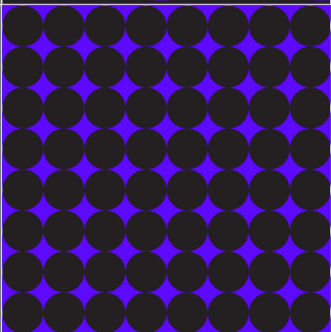
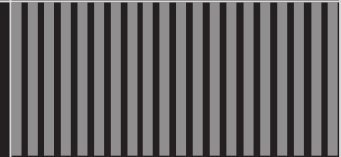
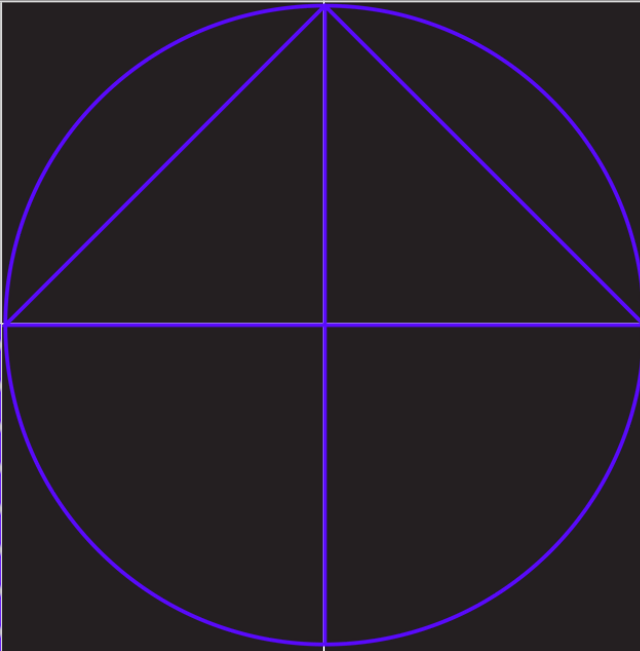
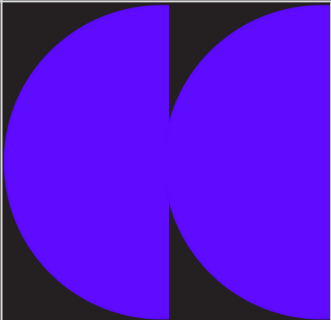
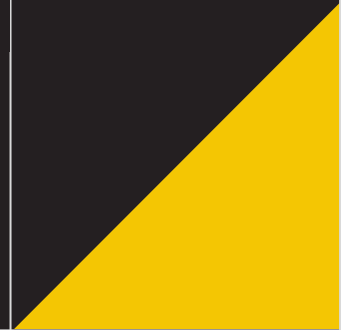


# INNOVATION NORTH



Session 8 Briefing Note:

## CREATING A CULTURE OF CREATIVITY



# Creating A Culture Of Creativity

Creativity is the bedrock of innovation. Behind every successful corporate innovation are creative individuals driven to generate and implement new ideas.

Creativity is even more crucial in today's age of disruption, where organizations constantly need to adapt and respond to a changing environment. As Peter Senge emphasized in our first session, this continual state of flux makes it especially important to put creative ideas into action via prototyping and experimenting.

The problem is, running prototypes and experimenting with creative ideas costs time and money. As a result, many organizations shortchange the creative part of the innovation process.

The upcoming Lab session seeks to answer how organizations can promote creativity in innovation instead of killing it. This session, led by Colin Fisher of University College London, explores what creativity is, how organizations can foster it, and how they can then turn it into dynamic adaptability and innovation.

## Imagine what our world would look like without COVID-19 vaccines...

When Hungarian biochemist Katalin Karikó first tried to use synthetic mRNA to fight disease in the 1990s, she was at the start of a long uphill battle. First, the experiments kept failing: she couldn't find a way to get the synthetic mRNA to its target cells without being destroyed by the body's natural defenses. Worse, she was getting no support for her creativity. Research grant after research grant was rejected—eventually leading her university to demote her.

But Karikó persisted. In the early 2000s, she and her research partner, Drew Weissman, found a way to modify mRNA that so that it could sneak past the body's defenses to the target cells. Their innovation, as many people will recognize, formed the basis of Moderna and Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccines.

Karikó is a creativity hero, persevering for years through obstacles and rejection. But lack of support from her university almost made her quit. "I thought of going somewhere else, or doing something else," she has said. It's a "what if?" that should have organizations thinking hard about what they have to lose by neglecting creativity—and what they may have to gain by fostering it.

# What Is Creativity?

Creativity is defined as the process of generating ideas that are both novel and useful. Even the most original idea isn't truly creative unless it is also useful and has the potential to create value. Likewise, an idea that solves a problem may be useful, but it not creative unless the solutions it generates are original.

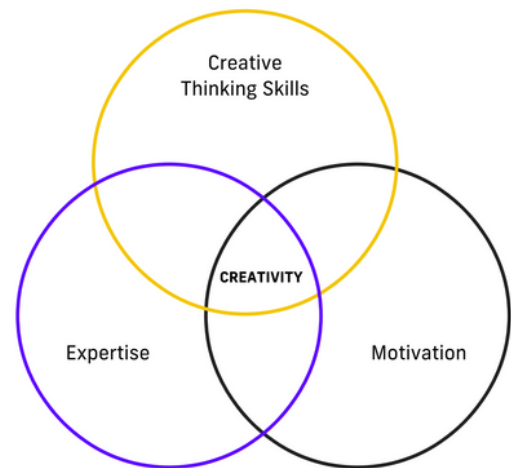
## The Main Attributes of Creative People

When it comes to the factors that make a person creative, experts cite three core traits: 1) expertise, 2) creative thinking skills, and 3) motivation.

**1. Expertise:** Creativity starts with a high level of knowledge and ability—a combination known as expertise. If you are a scientist at a pharmaceutical company, for example, your expertise will include your knowledge about and technical skills in the fields of medicine, chemistry, biology, and biochemistry. The more mastery a person has over the given field or subject, the more creative they can be.

**2. Creative Thinking Skills:** Creative thinking skills are a person's ability to approach problems flexibly and imaginatively. Some factors that boost creative thinking are comfort with disagreeing with others, taking risks to try out solutions that depart from the status quo, thinking laterally, and blending knowledge from seemingly disparate fields.

**3. Intrinsic Motivation:** Even if a person has both expertise and creative thinking skills, it is unlikely that the person will be creative without the drive to do a particular job. And it is best if this drive comes from the inside—from the person's enjoyment of the task (intrinsic motivation) instead of the prospect of being rewarded or punished (extrinsic motivation). Research shows that people are most creative when they feel motivated mainly by the interest, satisfaction, and challenge of the work itself, not by external pressures.



We have another trait to add to this list—one that isn't much discussed in the literature. After analyzing data from past Lab sessions, we have found that the executives with the broadest range of ideas are usually those who able to “zoom out” to look at the big picture and the long term and then “zoom in” to apply those ideas to their specific problem. Those who stay too focused on the immediate problem and short term tend to be less creative.

## **From Individual Creativity to Organizational Innovation**

### **Encourage and Praise Creativity**

One of the most important steps in fostering creativity is for managers to recognize creative work and praise it generously. Employees want to feel as if their work matters, and receiving praise for their creative efforts—whether successful or unsuccessful—will boost their intrinsic motivation. As we've noted, the more motivated an employee is, the more creative they are.

### **Get the Challenge Right**

Managers who want to support creativity need to take care to match people with the right assignments. The employee should feel enjoyably challenged, neither bored nor overwhelmed. To achieve this, managers need to have detailed knowledge about both their employees and the available assignments.

### **Offer Freedom—with Goals**

Granting freedom to employees is another great way to foster creativity. However, it is also important to give them clear goals. People will be more creative if they have the freedom to choose how to climb a particular mountain, but not necessarily if they get to choose which mountain to climb.

### **Allocate Sufficient Resources**

Managers need to give projects enough funding and staffing that employees can channel their efforts into creativity instead of hunting for additional resources. That said, enough is as good as too much: giving a project more resources than it actually needs will do nothing to boost creativity.

## Design Work Groups with Care

It's important for managers to put their teams together thoughtfully, with the aim of creating supportive groups with diverse perspectives and backgrounds. In the best creative teams, members share excitement over the goal, are willing to help their teammates through setbacks, and value the unique knowledge and perspectives that other members bring to the table.

## Provide Organizational Support

Creativity is truly enhanced when the entire organization supports it. Organization leaders must establish systems and emphasize values that make it clear that creative efforts are a top priority. They should mandate information-sharing and collaboration and ensure that problems of workplace politics do not fester.

Lastly, our data from past sessions further suggest that organizations that engage with diverse stakeholders, including those who are often invisible and silenced, are more creative. Melanie Goodchild in Session 7 showed us the value of listening to the community in order to develop unique, yet valuable insights. Being able to pull ideas from differing views, these organizations see the world with fresh eyes that often lead to novel and useful ideas.

In the end, creativity and innovation are intimately linked. A company will only be as innovative as its employees are creative. Although every employee and workplace will have different levels and types of creativity, managers can learn how to make their firms more creative.

With innovation a must for any company that wants to thrive in today's disrupted world, creativity is more critical than ever before.

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