

**Creativity@Work\_ – S. Ramachander 2006 – Publisher:  
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*Creativity@Work* is a slim reasonably priced document (194 pages) and is a treasure of information. It is divided into 15 chapters and has 15 engaging illustrations, which draw out and encapsulate the written word. The book can serve as a guide to the creativity latent in all of us. It encourages the reader to see things differently, to look at the familiar from a new perspective, and to approach everyday situations without the screen of judgment and conditioning. The author's basic premise is that the roots of creativity lie within each of us, not outside. The way to discover these wellsprings is to remove mental blocks and leave the mind open to different perceptions to stimulate associative and divergent thinking. The book is an intellectual adventure.

Human resources are the only renewable resources in organizations but we regrettably still invest much less in building human capital. The book encourages the use of tools to stimulate creativity at work to optimize productivity and build innovative problem solving scenarios. It is about the use of creativity in leadership, teamwork and innovation. It recommends the use of color, laughter and freedom to enhance creativity at work. At its deepest level the book is about fundamental unlearning without which learning, be it personal or organizational is likely to be short-lived and deceptive. The author argues that to unlearn and let go old mental models is a concomitant of learning. It is not a separate act. Learning afresh is the secret of creating new options. Seeing with fresh eyes as if for the first time how the consumer buys where, when and why; in general terms, 'drinking in the reality' with no filters of the past whatsoever, determining 'what is' without pre-determined frameworks to fit the facts into (page 19-24).

Much managerial thinking, even when not numerical, is linear extrapolation. The reason is that, ultimately, all such tools work on the assumption that the future will be akin to the past. The author

argues that “because scientists look for explanations for everything and respect knowledge only if they can measure it, managers too fall in the same trap of thinking they practice exactly what is taught in B-school as management science”. This is a dangerous mental model for managers to adopt, even unconsciously. Reason being: their work, unlike that of physicists and engineers, is not in the realm of the inanimate. It involves dealing with heads and hearts of human beings – diverse, complex and changeable – as consumers, employees, managers and associates of the organization all around. The facile assumptions of the exact sciences can prove problematic when transferred to human resources, but this, alas, is an all-too-common error. In reality, not everything has a cast-iron solution or has an impregnable rationale, to adopt a heuristic approach saying, ‘Let’s try this and see if it works’ is not such a bad way to deal with many things in life. This is nothing to be ashamed of. It may well be the way to creative discovery, as Einstein said, of not knowing the right answer all the time but, of finding the right questions to ask.

Scenarios are alternative futures of what can happen. They can be built around external events in markets, around consumer behavior and institutions, as well as political and technological arenas. These are a sound basis for new product and new business creation. The methods of market research must change in keeping with this new, more open, tentative and experimental approach to the manager’s tasks. Insight rather than data is the key ingredient for developing a different vision of where the business ,category, product, model or brand can go. It also lends itself to sensitivity – towards opposing possible outcomes – and can alert the manager not to be wedded to one point of view or conventional wisdom.

Willingness to experiment by trusting people is a great asset. Else, one can wait eternally as in the game theory of the “Prisoner’s Dilemma” – wondering if the other person would indeed reciprocate and can be trusted. **Letting people have their head, have their say and giving them the freedom to try is a leader’s job.** Innovation is not just another managerial fad – like Six Sigma, TPM, Kaizen, re-engineering, or decentralization – that had their glory days and faded

out, only to be replaced by other theories. Innovation is about acknowledging change, both external and personal, which is a perennial aspect of life as Heraclitus explained “one cannot step into the same river twice”. All the physical sciences point to indeterminacy of phenomena and the need to accept probabilistic conclusions. The applied human science of managing people must start with this realization. The author quotes poet-philosopher-President Vaclav Havel’s definition of education as developing the ability ‘to make the hidden connections between phenomena’, from which physicist and eclectic scholar Fritjof Capra drew the title of his book “Hidden Connections”.

Creativity@Work also offers an insight into the fascinating and wide intellectual canvas of the writer whose writing ranges over a wide intellectual canvas from advances in non-linear dynamic force field diagrams Myres Briggs Indicators (MBTI) to meditation techniques, Vipassanna, Pranayam, Yoga, Tai-chi, which enable channelising creativity and energy. He refers to the recommendation of Kautilya’s *Arth Shasthra*, that essentially “All leaders must be Yogis”. At the other end of the scale (on Page 153), he ranges over Waugh, Botham and Don Bradman and explains how Bradman discovered in a test match in 1932, why he fell a victim \_ -to a ball slightly short of length from Bill Bowes, the English fast bowler, making a rare first-ball duck. As soon as he took guard he was determined to throw the bowler off stride by pulling the first ball from just outside the stump across to mid wicket yet building the pre-meditated sort of shot he succeeded only in dragging the ball round to his stumps. He forgot to stay in the present, free of unnecessary thoughts.

The book is on creativity and action in the manager’s life. Our preconceived idea is that the right brain comprises creativity, intuition, humour, poetry and non-linear ways of thinking, while the left is the seat of reason, logic, structure, formality, linear thought, order, discipline, and powers of deduction as opposed to flights of fancy. Today, neuroscience, psychology and medicine have seriously questioned the dichotomy. They have concluded that the brain is a good example of a Hologram in which the characteristics of the whole are contained in the part.

Drawing on Indian Philosophy the author explains that the ancient Indians termed this “Advaita” or the lack of a duality –a false belief that there is a finite and separate agent called ‘the self’ stressing the unitary nature of all things which we are usually not conscious of, in our everyday lives. This is also termed ‘reductionist’ thinking as it reduces every phenomenon into something we can handle easily. Applied to innovation, this implies that we accept that a number of people in the professional world still tend to think naturally in functional silos of the mind.

For years now, to take a major example, it has been *de rigueur* for writers on management to place all choices in a two variable, binary situation, with a high and a low end on either of the two dimensions so that you get typically four quadrants to choose from. Hence, people for a job may be chosen on the basis of capabilities and competencies on one dimension and on the other, adaptability, acceptability and possible ‘fit’ with the team and the department concerned. A similar two-by-two matrix may be used to evaluate alternative media plans, project investment opportunities and so on. The author furnishes the insight that Asking questions is essentially about freeing the mind from the restraints of experience and the conditioning due to all our influences alternatively.

Kepner and Tregoe introduced a Potential Problem Analysis (PPA) stage just to take care of all sorts of hiccups, which occur as soon as someone attempts the task of implementing decisions. It is the overwhelming verdict of social scientists and management academics that change programmers flounder not so much on the rocks of people’s resistance to change, as it is usually labeled, but as a result of poor ‘thinking through’ to likely consequences i.e. potential further problems that could arise by taking any action that suggests itself now. It may be easy to avoid this stage by saying, ‘Oh enough of talk, let’s get on with it!’ but this is fraught with serious traps.

Tony Buzan has developed an approach called “Mind Mapping” that helps in thinking differently at length. This involves thinking in color, symbols and pictures, besides using the mind’s natural tendency to associative thinking. It is not by any means a rigid formula, which would be the antithesis of creativity, but rather a general approach or

even attitude, an attempt to release the innovative urges and capabilities rather than put the thinker into a straitjacket. The mind finds such frameworks very friendly; a part of one's comfort zone, the most familiar part of life, so to speak. Yet, one of the definitions of living and managing creatively is to embrace the territory beyond one's comfort zone, which we are usually reluctant to do. The author has given an example of a Mind Map on Page. 67.

According to the renowned physicist Fritjof Capra, whose interests go far beyond Physics, the network is the dominant paradigm of life itself. This, not surprisingly, is also true of organizations in society today. The networks appear everywhere, as people networks, news networks, power networks of both political and electrical varieties and telecommunication, to name a few. What is the reason for this underlying mega trend across diverse fields of human activity? Why has this happened more recently?

The very nature of being creative is to find what one's true nature is and live in consonance with it – for conflict within oneself divides the person artificially and is the ultimate unforgivable sin.

The author with candor admits that he can provide a glimpse of what some great thinkers have said on the subject he has made extensive references to the works of David Bohm, Thich Nhat Hanh, Rimpoche, Peter Senge, Fritjof Capra, among others, and has thoughtfully appended a detailed reading list at the end of the book.

Other sources of inspiration to the author are the philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti and David Bohm, the famous scientist whom Einstein considered his intellectual heir. Bohm and Krishnamurti engaged in several dialogues over a number of years in the 1970s and the 1980s on some profound questions, many of which resonate with the themes of this book, particularly the value of dialogue and the meanings of insight, intelligence and listening that 'holds the key' to the quality of attention that must begin the enlightening process. There is a necessary caveat in that the word 'process' is used only as a matter of convenience since their key contribution is the irrelevance of psychological time.

This book is therefore not to be read at one go but to be dipped into as and when one wishes - taking in a few chapters at a time, some, more than once, it is to be savored over the years. This book is not divided into compartments, which would be against the very spirit of the book. It contains a mix of principle and practice, of philosophy and precept.

A management graduate from the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, the author is associated with the Harvard Business School, USA. An independent management consultant, columnist and mentor to senior managers, he was Director of the Institute for Financial Management & Research in Chennai (1998-004) and is a member of the Reserve Bank of India's Southern Area Local Board.

**Deepali Pant Joshi\***

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\* Deepali Pant Joshi is Chief General Manager (Principal) at Bankers Training College Mumbai. The view expressed here are her personal views.