

TIME TO GET SERIOUSLY SERIOUS ABOUT CREATIVITY

In a world facing increasingly complex challenges, creativity is seen as the number one go-to force for positive change. While often described as a basic human trade, creativity still needs to be continuously trained and stimulated, just like a muscle. So to address today's multidimensional challenges, we should be well prepared and bring the most possible expertise and experience to the table.

However, these days there are countless courses, seminars, and boot camps that offer quick fix classes on „creative problem solving“. The providers of these events advertise that their approach will turn everybody into a creative thinker and disruptor pretty much overnight, or at least in the span of four to six weekends, fancy degree included. This “creativity light” approach is symptomatic for our fast-moving world: an oversimplified solution that can be communicated in a couple of easy to remember phrases, promises to be a substitute for something that is actually far more complex.

In the following we address some of the main misconception underlying the “creativity light” approach and offer solutions on how to address the issue from a more in-depth perspective.

MISCONCEPTION #1

THE DECEPTIVE FACADE OF PROCESS, TOOLS AND TEMPLATES.

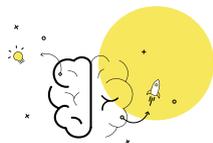
THERE IS NO EASY PEASY RECIPE FOR CREATIVITY.

Each and every of the “creativity light” providers flaunts their version of a creative process chart, their set of creativity tools and their – totally proprietary – set of templates that will help you to use the tools and get through the process.

Let me say this right away: creativity is in many ways the opposite of all those three. It is – at its core – about the absence of process: We all know the clichés of having great ideas in the shower, while exercising or even when we sleep. Those clichés are right on target! They illustrate a scientific fact: our brain needs to switch back and forth from focus to distraction to be able to make uncommon connections.

A better way:

- ▶ Instead of a “one fits all” approach do a creativity audit in your organization: Where are your weak points? What can you address inhouse, where do you need help?
- ▶ No creativity without trust: Take a people over process approach!
- ▶ Whatever the process - always build in time for spontaneity!



MISCONCEPTION #2

THE CREATIVE ENVIRONMENT IS NOT JUST PHYSICAL. PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY GOES WAY BEYOND THE PHYSICAL.

We all know the images: Post-it® notes abound, some casual furniture and one of those grown-up toys: a Foosball table, table tennis or a dart board. While casual, non-intimidating environments are surely a first step to set the stage for creative activity, it is the social environment and not the physical that will make all the difference. To be creative in an organization, one thing is most important: Psychological safety, the shared belief that the group is safe for interpersonal risk-taking. This means safety from unfair judgment, ridicule or even isolation. Don't just take it from me, but listen to Amy Edmondson, Harvard professor and author of “The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth” – it's right there in the title!

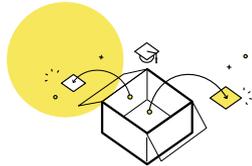
A better way:

- ▶ Spend some of that budget for fancy furniture on team building.
- ▶ Create a safe place for ideas – even the quirky one's – by only sharing results and not intermediate steps.
- ▶ Instead of showing off the creative space, make it a top-secret zone for creative development!



MISCONCEPTION #3

NOT KNOWING IS NOT A SKILL. TO THINK OUTSIDE OF THE BOX – YOU HAVE TO KNOW THE BOX.



„Thinking outside of the box“ is often the go-to description when we talk about creativity. It is a great metaphor for the process of making formerly unseen connections to solve a problem at hand – the very definition of being creative. However, the meaning of the phrase is being more and more morphed to describe „having an outside perspective“. And this, in turn, has led to the conclusion, that people who are new to the matters at hand might be better equipped to innovate. While a fresh perspective is definitely an asset – „fresh“ here too often means „uninformed“ instead of just „different“. The gospel of „a certain amount of naivety“ being the shortcut to innovation will in most cases lead to frustrations in the long run.

A better way:

- ▶ Always bring the relevant technical expertise to the table – especially if you want to challenge the status quo.
- ▶ Create an exchange at eye level: Have non-engineers understand technology – and engineers understand the human experience.
- ▶ Don't make feasibility the last thing to address.

MISCONCEPTION #4

THE MISLEADING COLLABORATION MANTRA. WHO SAYS YOU CANNOT BE CREATIVE BY YOURSELF?



The myth of the open plan office as a creative engine has been debunked by many studies, yet the emphasis on the need for teamwork to be creative seems to be stronger than ever.

To me that has always been surprising: yes, the right team can help to inspire and to test ideas but to me, nothing beats some quality alone-time to really think challenges through before sharing it with a greater audience. In my career, I have also found that there is a strong cultural component when it comes to working creatively in teams. Different cultures have different approaches to hierarchy, individualism, and risk-taking – all issues that can have a huge impact on the psychological safety of a group.

A better way:

- ▶ Create an environment for extroverts AND introverts.
- ▶ Be sensitive to cultural diversity.
- ▶ Realize that productivity and attendance are not necessarily related.

About the author:

Philipp Refior is an expert in Design led Innovation, having led the Design function for 3M Asia for 5 years. He combines a creative education (BFA) with an MBA from a leading university and has long-term work experiences in Asia, USA and Europe.

Through his career Philipp has held various design leadership roles with companies such as Panasonic and 3M. He has been a guest lecturer at Parsons School of Design, New York and KAIST (Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology)

Previous clients include IKEA, Bosch, Siemens, Hyundai, Nestlé, MINI, OXO, HP, Estee Lauder, Allianz, Herman Miller and Coca-Cola.

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THE DEEP BENCH GMBH
SCHYRENSTR. 9 | LOFT
81543 MÜNCHEN
T +49 (0)89 4141 822 00
HELLO@THEDEEPBENCH.COM
WWW.THEDEEPBENCH.COM