

The 6P Model

Creativity as a practical working method

The literature on creativity is abundant. But where should an enterprise start in order to incorporate creativity into practice?

The 6P Model answers this question

Over time much research has dealt with the concept *creativity*. Many quote Graham Wallace's "The Art of Thought" from 1926 as one of the first scientific initiatives, and since then there have been several waves of interest in the subject. However, the practical application has only been implemented to a limited extent.

It seems that now the time is ripe for putting stimulation of creativity on the agenda in enterprises, public as well as private. It is symptomatic, for instance that CEOs are often quoted in newspapers for talking about the need for creativity.

Another sign of the right timing is that managers and consultants increasingly focus on new management theories like for instance Competing in Time, which suggests a competition that is not concerned with the product, price or service as such, but rather with the speed of introducing new products.

Edward de Bono, consultant and author of more than forty books on creativity, has introduced the concept Sur/Petition as opposed to Competition.

Com/Petition implies that you race others, competing on the same court using more or less the same equipment. Sur/Petition however indicates that you just fly above the others using quite different means of propulsion. Even though this metaphor contrasts with the spirit of the Olympics, it is thought provoking for enterprises for other contexts.

Most likely, the increased interest in creativity derives from the rapid changes in society, and also from the young generations and their focus on challenges and self-realisation in the job.

The 6 Ps of Creativity

The purpose of this article is to describe creativity as a 6P Model focused on how to promote creativity in an enterprise.

We are mainly concerned with what could be called *the small creativity*, i.e. the creative potential present in any enterprise. This is in contrast to *the grand creativity* as found in geniuses. Most enterprises can with a small effort extract a lot from the staff; they need not go looking for new, super-brilliant employees.

Using the 6P Model it is possible to discuss creative problem solving in the everyday life in an enterprise. The 6 Ps are:

- **Product:** Result of the problem solving process
- **Problem:** The job to be done
- **Person:** The active person solving the problem
- **Process:** The time and activity flow in the problem solving
- **Plough:** A creative (creativity stimulating) technique applied by the persons involved
- **Platform:** The environment in which the problem is solved.

The power of this model is that it helps the user set focus on the right dimensions when aiming at more creativity in problem solving - or, for that matter, other qualities like for instance efficiency. The weakness is the forced idea that all words - for mnemonic reasons - should start with a P. (In case a reader finds a valid alternative for “plough”, a good bottle of wine is at stake.)

Let us now go into detail with each P.

Product

The result of a problem solving process is called the product - and hopefully it is a solution to the problem. For an enterprise, such a product might be a physical object, a service, a mental model, an organisation, a procedure of work, etc. As a matter of fact the creative product is the concept derived from the creative process of thinking, rather than the actual implementation of the concept. But let that be.

In everyday language you call a product creative if it is unique (in the sense of "new") as well as useful. A generally accepted wording is:

Creative = Unique and Useful

Notice that it isn't sufficient for the product to be unique, it also has to be useful - and vice versa.

Embedded in this definition is the schism of perspective: From the perspective of one person the product is creative, while it looks commonplace, albeit useful, from another perspective. From which perspective should the uniqueness and usefulness of the product be evaluated?

We will always use the perspective of the problem owner. If the product looks unique and useful to him, then it is creative for him, no matter what other people might think, or how it came into being.

A similar consideration goes for efficient solutions. A solution is efficient when it enhances the efficiency of something, using less resources to produce the same or producing more with the same resources. In short:

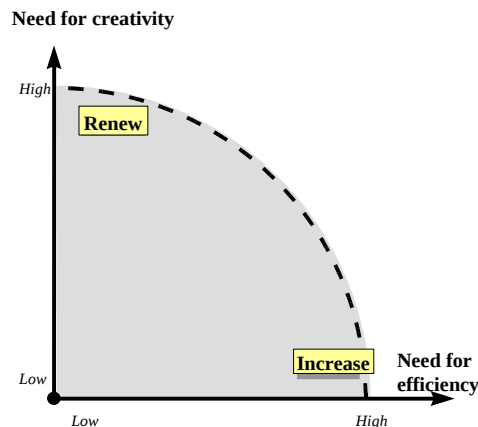
Efficient = More and Useful

In a number of situations it is more important that a product is significantly different, rather than less expensive or available in greater quantity. This is worth attention, since many people automatically look for efficient solutions, no matter the context.

Problem

A problem is at hand when there is a difference between the actual and the desired situation. The problem calls for somebody to find a product solving the problem.

Some problems need creative solutions, others efficient solutions. In reality it is difficult to achieve a high degree of efficiency at the same time as a high degree of creativity. The figure may illustrate the idea:



When operating in the grey zone, it is worthwhile to strengthen either the creativity or the efficiency. But you should not expect to increase both qualities beyond a limit (the grey zone). In the optimal zone (close to the dotted line) you have to decide whether the problem primarily calls for renewal or for increase of something already there - and on this ground you should balance the two qualities.

Person

Everybody has a creative potential, an ability that is more or less exploited. Experience shows that only few people use their potential to the full. Therefore our starting point is that there is a lot of potential present in the persons already there. This potential should be exploited before trying to change people or recruiting new people. The creative potential may be activated in two ways:

- Here and now: By using creativity stimulating techniques (ploughs) and creativity stimulating working methods (processes)
- In the long term: By establishing creativity stimulating environments (platforms) and by training people (person).

The creative potential is often inhibited by our own and other people's prejudices. However, by using creativity stimulating platforms, ploughs and processes these prejudices lose effect. And most people like to be creative, which is an advantage: when started, the process reinforces itself.

Process

A creative process is a process, which normally leads to creative products. This is due to the kind of activities in the process and their order.

In the literature there are several suggestions for the right order of activities in a creative process, for example Osborn's from 1963:

- Orientation
- Preparation
- Analysis
- Ideation
- Incubation
- Synthesis
- Verification

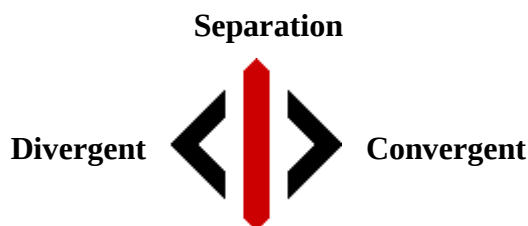
Except for the special emphasis they all put on incubation (as a phase of conception and hatching of ideas), the various courses of events appear to be very similar to the process of general problem solving. The important difference is hidden under the surface. The fundamental principle in a creative process is :

Separated duality

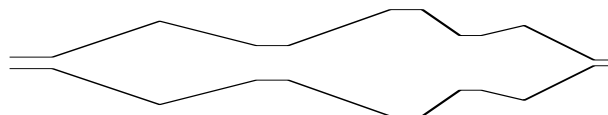
Duality means that you consciously apply a dual or two-sided thinking-mode, for instance divergent and convergent thinking, conscious and subconscious thinking, passive and disciplined thinking, positive and negative thinking, and so on.

Separated means that you keep these thinking-modes and working methods apart in time. You either do one or the other. Not both at the same time. All experience confirms that such a process promotes creativity.

We consider the first of the dualities mentioned above as the most important, and the essence of the creative process can thus be illustrated like this:



The typical creative process does not follow a strictly linear sequence of phases. It flows as an on-going interaction, changing between different phases, and between convergent and divergent thinking-modes. The space for solution is alternately expanding and narrowing:



Plough

In the same way as the plough is used for turning over the fertile soil, so also a creativity stimulating technique can be used for activating the creative potential in the problem solving person.

The plough concept includes all the many dozens of techniques described in the literature on creativity. Many of the techniques are very well tested, in practice as well as in theory. Most of them have been known for many years, but only among a few enthusiasts. It is a pity since the techniques have a much greater range of application.

A classification of the basic techniques might look like this:

- **Association**, in groups as well as individually, for instance: ordinary or reverse brainstorming, recorded round robin, the catalogue method, etc.
- **Communication and dialogue**, including PO-technique, Devil's Advocate, Delphi, Spokesman, de Bono's thinking hats, etc.
- **Exploration and structuralizing**, for example: sensitivity analysis, simulation, listing of attributes, morphological analysis etc.
- **Needs orientation**, for instance: search for ideals, stakeholder's analysis, wishful thinking etc.
- **Construction of solutions**, for instance: idealised design, scenario technique etc.
- **Evaluations**, for example: simple voting, compensatory or non-compensatory ranking, etc.

A number of known (umbrella) methods, for instance Lateral Thinking by de Bono and The Simplex Method by Basadur, combine basic techniques from the categories mentioned above, thus achieving the characteristic dualism of the creative process.

It is worth noticing that the collection of creativity stimulating techniques includes both convergent and divergent techniques. Otherwise, unique as well as useful solutions cannot be attained.

Platform

The platform is the foundation for the person or group working on the problem. It includes structural characteristics, such as social behaviour, wage policy, physical environment, rules and regulations at the working place.

Research as well as experience agrees on a number of creativity stimulating elements in the environment. In short, a creative platform is an environment that stimulates individuals to exercise their creative abilities and to co-operate in creative processes. The creative platform has the following three qualities:

- **Tolerance**: No negative sanctions (no sticks, but many carrots), free mode of expression, positive openness towards new ideas, etc.
- **Diversity**: Wide spectrum of impulses, open access to interesting people and information, differentiated rewards (it matters what you do), involvement of many aspects etc.
- **Activity**: Engagement, minimum of barriers for action, alternation between activity and relaxation etc.

This may be compared to elements characterising:

- **An efficient platform**, for example control, focus and high pace
- **A stable platform**, for example sense of community, known procedures, steady pace.

The optimal environmental factors depend on the objective. Often an enterprise doesn't want to choose only one option, but rather to combine creativity, efficiency and stability. The balance between the different forms of behaviour is decided according to the objective, the competitive situation and competence of the enterprise, both in the current problem solving situation, as well as at a general strategic level.

Development of an organisation normally has a long-term and strategic perspective. Traditionally, most organisations concentrate on a culture of efficiency, while many - if considered objectively - should give higher priority to the creative culture. So here

is an obvious need for working with the basis of the platform (the underlying and permanent bearing construction).

No matter the strategic needs of an enterprise, short-term problem solving tasks, requiring creativity, will turn up regularly. This demands working with the overlying structure of the platform (supplementary extensions to the basis), i.e. promoting elements that are easily implemented in order to stimulate creativity.

Team building is one of the activities involved in development of a platform. Team-building highlights the creation of appropriate behavioural patterns in an organisation or project team. Normally team building is an element in a creative process. In some cases the need is so strong that it is necessary to carry out a separate team-building module before even trying to initiate creative processes.

Which Ps have we decided to focus on?

As facilitators or process-consultants we consider it our most important task to help the problem owner create the product (solution) which in his perspective best solves his problem. To this purpose we utilise the 6 Ps to various degrees:

- **Product:** We don't produce solutions, we are process facilitators. In most cases it is the problem owner who produces the solution, since he has the necessary information and knowledge.
- **Problem:** We don't find the problem - the problem owner has already found it. We probably can't make the problem disappear. But a creativity stimulating process might help clarify the problem, and thus often contribute to a precise formulation of the problem.
- **Person:** We help the involved persons exploit and train their creative potentials via creative problem solving processes. We don't go head-hunting for geniuses.
- **Process:** We plan and manage the process in order to give it the right focus and balance between efficiency and creativity.
- **Plough:** We know a wide range of creativity stimulating techniques, which we teach the employees to use in concrete problem solving.
- **Platform:** We are happy to give advice and support to team-building and organisation development, in order to establish a creativity stimulating platform for the problem solving.

We find it very productive to use the 6P Model. It is well founded, theoretically as well as empirically, and at the same time it provides a general view and a practical understanding of creativity, useful in everyday life in any enterprise in connection with concrete problem solving.

This article is a reprint from an article in *Futuriblerne*, October 1996, volume 24, no. 2, page 8 - 12, issued by Center for Udviklingsteknologi / Selskabet for Fremtidsforskning. Authors are Søren M. Borch and Jan Chr. Clausen