

# Insights and inspirations from the world of Creativity

*People, not organizations, innovate from a personal sense of creativity*

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## **Creativity is the access to innovation - play is the portal** □

Sir George Cox, chairman of HM Treasury's Design Council, said in his November 2005 *Review of Creativity in Business* report:

- Creativity is the generation of new ideas, either new ways of looking at existing problems, or of seeing new opportunities, perhaps by exploiting emerging technologies or changes in markets.
- Design is what links creativity and innovation. It shapes ideas to become practical and attractive propositions for users or customers. Design can be described as creativity deployed to a specific end.
- Innovation is the successful exploitation of new ideas. It is the process that carries them through to new products, new services, new ways of running the business or even new ways of doing business.

Neurobiologist Anna Katharina Braun said, "All animals have a natural need to play. Play chemically affects the brain because it produces emotions that activate the brain. We use the same part of our brain for learning, emotions and behavior."

Most grown-ups remember and appreciate what kids instinctively grasp - playing is great fun, full of curious moments and unencumbered creativity. Play is an easy entry to personal development where our eagerness to be resourceful naturally expands with curiosity. Adults need "playtime" to access more imaginative thinking and for experiencing things newly.

Creativity is stimulated when opportunities to challenge the status quo are created. Our access to that place is through play. It's simply that:

- As humans, we have an innate desire to play - it's a natural opportunity for

learning behaviors, emotions and problem solving.

- Through play activities, the social and cognitive skills we need for adapting to our surrounding environment continue to develop.
- Children do not divide playing, learning and working into separate ways of being but adults think they must.
- Rather than learning through lecture, when we experience something, we learn it and it becomes part of us.
- The brain needs certain stimulations - when this does not happen, some of our abilities to discriminate and distinguish are lessened.

### **Playing games is not just for kids**

The value of play is endless. It takes twists and turns, begins and ends and begins again. It can be calming, stressful, enlivening and restful. It provokes ideas, thinking and acting. In a flash, reality can disappear into a play world where new possibilities spring to life. In play, new ideas gather momentum, and new directions reveal themselves. G. B. Shaw said it best, "We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing."

Playing games, when working with staff and volunteers, is appropriate because it:

- Creates shared references to concepts that bridge different points of view and provide a common arena for dialogue.
- Is participatory, involving diverse viewpoints thus making for better insights and innovation, and creates buy-in to the ideas being discussed.
- Taps into different ways of articulating ideas thus drawing out tacit knowledge, often key to successful outcomes. It also reveals unspoken misconception.

### **Make staff and volunteers champions for creative critical thinking**

Talking about what makes creativity possible does not develop creative thinking. That's more akin to observing a sporting event from the grandstands. Getting on the playing field and practicing creativity makes the difference. Suit up for practice using the following:

- Open up communication within and between staff depts. and volunteer groups.
- Hire staff from diverse backgrounds and experiences, and when enrolling volunteers, avoid cloning the past.
- Encourage staff and volunteers to create new ways for accomplishing their goals and empower their choices.
- Create an organization that extends out to members, industry partners and other stakeholders for contributions of ideas, experiences and resources.
- Encourage inquiry and exploration - have safe harbors for experimentation.
- Design "early-warning" processes to register change.
- Have a clear evaluative process that considers the merit of ideas regardless of where they were incubated.
- Schedule staff and volunteer playtime to generate new ideas and promote partnership.

### Consider:

- Where is your organization blocking creativity? Encouraging and rewarding it?
- As your organization grows and changes, what structures and process might inherently hinder the creativity? What "road signs" could warn you of those circumstances?
- How are you using creative playful activities to encourage learning and innovation?
- Where is humor welcome and encouraged in your organization?

*The illiterate of the 21st century will not be the individual who cannot read and write, but the one who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.*

Alvin Toffler

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