



Creativity: The Strategic Tool Of The Twenty-first Century

| By **Tania De Jong AM** |

Australia is a highly successful and prosperous nation. However, it has ridden its luck, especially when it comes to the natural resources it has previously relied on. In the twenty-first century, being lucky is just not enough; we have to work on nurturing our talent and inventiveness – which, in short, is our creativity.

Creativity: An Endangered Species?

Futurists Ryan Matthews and Watts Wacker recently stated: “Creativity has become the most universally endangered species of the twenty-first century. Never has the need for creativity been so compelling and never has genuine creativity been in such short supply. We have a broadband culture but not the content to fill it.” Even though we may pride ourselves on our innovation and creativity, we need to have a closer look at how we really measure up:

- The GE Global Innovation Barometer has ranked Australia’s status as an innovation leader 16th out of 30 countries. Only two per cent of 2800 senior executives surveyed worldwide mentioned Australia as an innovation champion
- We tend to think of artists and scientists as the creative ones, yet many artists and scientists struggle to make a living in Australia
- Many of our corporate leaders agree that developing a culture of innovation is critical, yet at the same time acknowledge that they do not allow their people to think
- Innovation is siloed into advanced manufacturing and biotechnology/medical research

Creativity Is The Most Important Leadership Quality

For CEOs, creativity is now regarded as the most important leadership quality for success in business, outweighing even integrity and global thinking, according to a recent study by IBM. The study is the largest known sample of one-on-one CEO interviews, with over 1,500 corporate heads and public sector leaders across 60 nations and 33 industries polled on what drives them in managing their companies in today’s world.

In today’s fast-paced business environment, creativity and innovation are prerequisites for success – and perhaps even for survival. That is why creativity and innovation are now moving to the top of the agenda for many organisations around the world, and it is no coincidence that many of the most innovative companies have appointed heads of creativity and innovation.

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Creativity and innovation are core competencies for leaders and managers, and it is their role to teach people how to perceive the world in new ways; to find hidden patterns, to make connections between seemingly unrelated phenomena, to ask important questions and generate solutions. Generating fresh solutions to problems, and the ability to create new products, processes or services for a changing market, are parts of the intellectual capital that gives a company its competitive edge. Creativity is a crucial part of the innovation equation.

The Right Brain Holds The Key

Many experts and futurists believe that organisations need to place greater emphasis on right-brain functions such as artistic and big-picture thinking, and the ability to conceptualise. Creativity offers the answers to many of the big issues that we face in these unprecedented times, because it can help unlock our full human potential and connect us to others.

Doing so develops stronger communication and problem-solving skills and thereby fosters sustainable levels of motivation and wellbeing at both a personal and organisational level. This in turn leads to greater levels of engagement and innovation in organisations and an enhanced ability to make a contribution to our society, rather than just focussing on profits.

The Challenges

If you enter a kindergarten, you will encounter some of the best creative thinking that you will find: finger paintings of pink and green people and blue dogs set against polka-dot skies, and imaginative stories about fairies in magical and faraway places. Young children are naturally creative and they are continually creating new ways to learn and constructing a world view from a collection of initially disconnected events, colours, movements and sounds. So what happens between the open and effortless experimentation of childhood and the struggle to think creatively that is experienced by so many in adulthood?

In many organisations, there is no clear pathway for developing personal creativity and

nurturing, developing and celebrating ideas. In fact, often those employees with the ideas are ignored or stifled, to the point that their voices and ideas eventually fall silent and they disengage from the organisation, not necessarily physically but certainly emotionally.

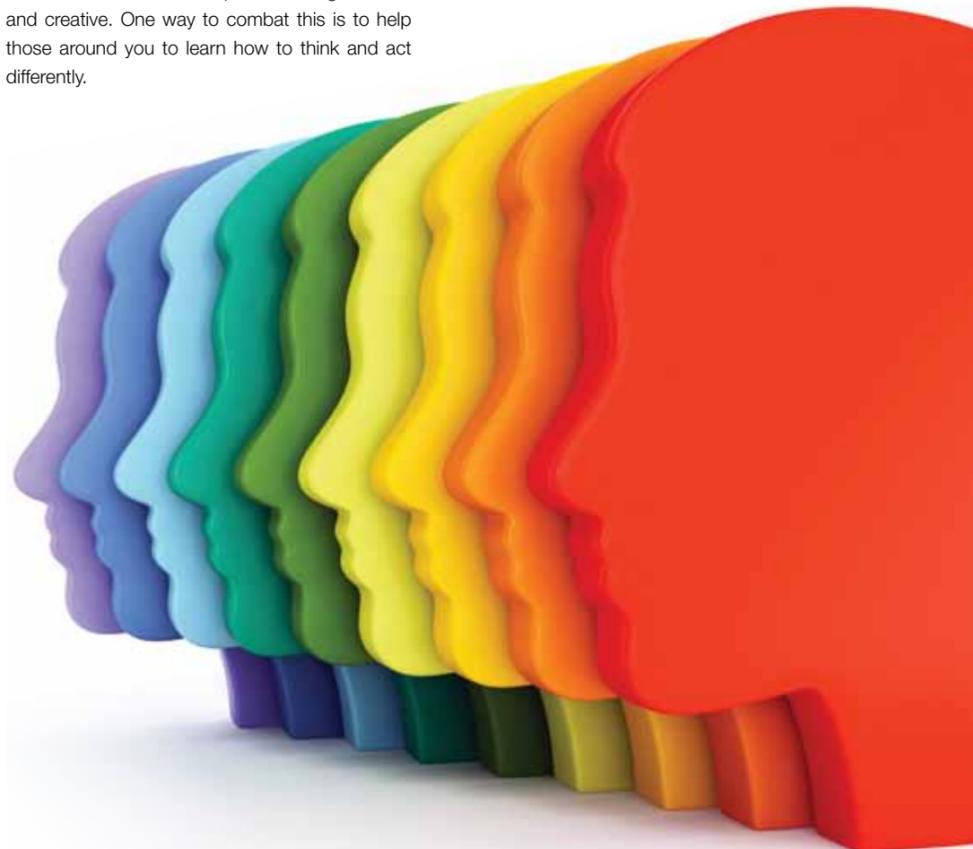
One of the challenges businesses face today is overcoming the barriers to stimulating creativity and innovation. Organisations need to create opportunities for individuals and communities to connect with one another in new and meaningful ways, and to share and develop new ideas.

The barriers are always present; we live in a world where computers, the internet and images of celebrities are continually pushing us further away from meaningful connections. We interact with boxes and screens instead of with one another, which means we are in grave danger of becoming a society in which our alienation, disengagement and self-centredness mean that we fail to build relationships that are generative and creative. One way to combat this is to help those around you to learn how to think and act differently.

Workplaces Of The Future

Workplaces of the future need to incorporate programs and develop an organisational culture that offers employees a voice and a greater understanding and fulfilment of their potential. Creative leadership programs that take people outside of their traditional comfort zones are becoming more and more critical. These programs can lead to improved employee wellbeing, engagement and self-awareness, to increased leadership and productivity, and to a greater ability to innovate and make a difference. In the face of competitive and economic pressures, many organisations are convinced that creativity and innovation are the keys to success.

Significant international research has recently shown the enormous benefits of creative participation for wellbeing, self-esteem, connection to others, increased brain function, strengthening the immune system and much more.



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$$F_{\text{grav}} \sim \frac{m_1 \cdot m_2}{d^2}$$

where: F_{grav} represents the force of gravity between two objects
 \sim means "proportional to"
 m_1 represents the mass of object 1
 m_2 represents the mass of object 2
 d represents the distance separating the objects' centres

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Be known as an organisation that fosters creativity and innovation through diversity, openness and respect of courageous new ideas. Companies that fail to innovate now will not be around in five to 10 years, which means it is worth the risk to get creative.

Creative Leadership And Innovation Programs

Creative leadership programs that engage the right side of the brain help people to unlock their creative potential, which is often lying dormant within. Programs should aim to move employees out of their comfort zones, remove their self-limiting beliefs and change their paradigms as managers and leaders. They not only help people's sense of self-esteem, connection and wellbeing, but they also lead to outcomes that include meaningful and creative leadership, greater innovation, a sense of connection and increased productivity.

A common result of a creative leadership program is that those involved will often find that they are no longer willing to separate their values from their work; they have a new-found yearning to align their life purpose with work to make it meaningful. Work is meaningful when our whole self is engaged and challenged, and we add to the quality of life of those around us.

Creativity is the key to Australia's and the world's future, and it must be understood that everyone is creative. Be known as an organisation that fosters creativity and innovation through diversity, openness and respect of courageous new ideas. Companies that fail to innovate now

will not be around in five to 10 years, which means it is worth the risk to get creative.

Creativity fosters innovation, but how can you ignite creative sparks within your organisation? Employees are an inexpensive and efficient source of creating new ideas and sparking innovation. How can you unleash the creative spirit within your workforce? There are a number of ways to build a vibrant research and development strategy in your organisation without spending a fortune.

Here are a few strategies:

- Every employee is a potential designer of a new idea and often just needs the opportunity to be heard. Do not restrict creativity and innovation to your R&D or marketing area. Remember: everyone is creative
• Ask your employees lots of questions (what if, why, why not and imagine if) and allow them to imagine new possibilities
• To bring together great ideas, utilise cloud-based software that allows sharing and development to occur anytime, anywhere
• Provide opportunities for reflection, retreat and problem solving, so that good ideas are continually emerging
• Encourage risk-taking and remind yourself (and your employees) that failure is part of all innovation

- Host a scholarship program to encourage innovation within the organisation, and to also attract new talent from outside the organisation
• Reward brilliant ideas with tickets to innovation conferences, holidays or shares
• Remember that innovation comes from diversity; bring together your most diverse teams to solve the biggest challenges the organisation faces
• Allow people time to invent new ideas ABS

Tania de Jong AM is a leading soprano, inspirational keynote speaker and award-winning social entrepreneur and business woman. She is the founder of Creative Universe, which offers a range of Australia's best performers and speakers as well as creative leadership and team building programs. She is the executive producer of Creative Innovation, a major conference that takes place in Melbourne each year. Tania's aim is to demonstrate strategies and processes for creating organisational performance, productivity and wellbeing, and to showcase world's best practice and ideas for the development of innovative futures for community, business and government. For more information, please visit www.creativeuniverse.com.au and www.creativeinnovationglobal.com.au.

What Would Happen If You Lost Your USB?

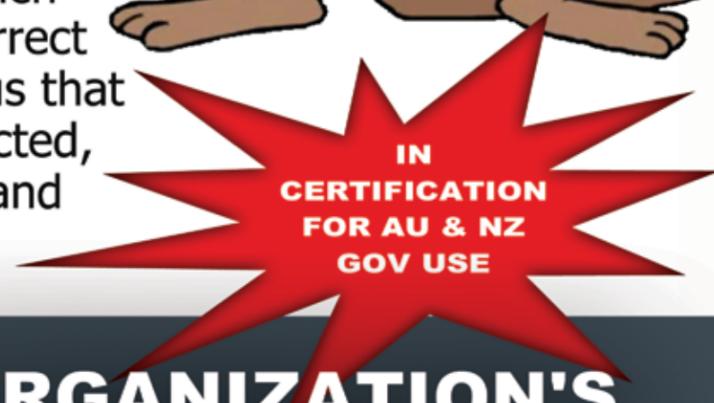


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