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INTRODUCTION

Creativity is intelligence having fun. ~Albert Einstein

Creativity is not fluff. It’s real. And it’s important to the health and vigor of your project team, and to your company. Creative people can change your business, give it new perspective, re-envision it—and perhaps, even disrupt it completely.

In a highly competitive, global economy, creativity is rocket fuel. You can use it to zoom past competitors, and gain strategic advantages.

In a list of what makes really great employees leave a company, and ranking high on that list, is management that will not allow its employees to engage in creativity. Even worse, some employers place severe restrictions on creativity, and don’t recognize the need to promote it.

Strictly speaking, creativity is not something you manage. It is something a manager should foster, cultivate, promote and mentor. Executive leaders and managers should teach their employees about creativity, and demonstrate personal, positive and consistent examples, for creativity to take effective hold within their companies. Mentors and team leaders have the province, and bear the responsibility for, individual and team creativity. But, you don’t have to be in charge to create, or to make creativity happen.

Creativity is a visceral passion, an essential critical corporate process; and team members should take part in it—without thinking or fanfare. It is, and should be, ingrained into the corporate DNA. Its application in everyday problem-solving activities should be expected, welcomed, and never second-guessed. Chances are, if your company takes great pains to talk about creativity, then it is lacking within the company. It must be that visceral to be effective, an autonomic response to any problem-solving challenge.

Throughout your life, you will be exposed to creative techniques from many different experiences. Think of these experiences as life lessons and hard knocks—and many of those occasions may even be serendipitous—downright joyful. Sometimes, even our children teach us some really great lessons. Be on the lookout for all the creativity this world, and your life, has to offer.

In this brief volume, we will explore some creativity techniques you can use with your team.
LEARNING ABOUT YOUR TEAM

Creativity takes courage.  
~Henri Matisse

Having worked within an R&D function for most of my career, I have had the good fortune of interacting with colleagues from all over the world. We have always talked about big issues, those beyond what we were trying to accomplish within our local problem-solving work. We enjoyed continuous exposure to different cultures, and the opportunities to observe how people viewed problems and challenges—a great way to get to know each other. We also had a wonderful mix of disciplines—engineers, scientists, physicists, chemists, mathematicians, statisticians, and many others. Our team was broad and deep, affecting the rich way we viewed problem-solving, and the variety of metrics we took into account when solving problems.

Diversity was a constant in our R&D world. It made a huge and important difference in how we worked as a team and solved problems, compared to traditional operating divisions in the company. In addition, our work often required us to interact with people in national/international venues, such as committees, working groups and joint research projects. Such diversity enhanced our team creativity even further.

One thing I did notice—with regularity—my creative colleagues drew sustenance from a rich variety of things—like music, poetry, hobbies, sports, and even politics. Their minds were multiply engaged, always learning. It was not only about work. My colleagues and I came up with ideas from seemingly unrelated sources. Many of us enjoyed travel, and meeting people from other cultures.

How well do you know your team? What makes them tick? What motivates them? What brings them to work every day? Do you realize having such different life experiences can be a great benefit to every one of your team members? Do you think it will promote creativity? Following are some things you can do to get to know your team members’ interests and passions.

I strongly encourage you and your team members to share information about each other’s interests, passions, hobbies, favorite topics, leisure pursuits, etc. Cross-learning about each other can spur unexpected creative thinking, and cause potential friendships to blossom. You can lead such interactions throughout your tenure with the team—at lunches, staff
meetings, off-site gatherings, and social events. By all means—interact with one another—on both a professional and personal level. Take the time to really learn about each other.

I once engaged fifth grade teams at a local school to create some new board games. They pursued this challenge with passion and creative insights. At the end of the week-long exercise, I asked them what they enjoyed most about the challenge. I was amazed and delighted to find that nearly all the children took great satisfaction in their team members’ creativity—and in the new friendships they made. Years later, I am still processing that information. Unleash this kind of passion in your team members!

Discuss how each member approaches problem-solving. What explicit and implicit techniques do they like to use to solve them? What solution matrix do team members tend to draw from? What are their criteria for success?

Problem-solving is both an art and a science, honed through:

- Previous experience
- Successes and failures
- Cultural values
- Many other factors, including age

You can learn so much from one another. Some members may be strictly sequential or deductive learners; others may forage here and there; and some may mix all sorts of deductive and lateral thinking together. These techniques may be suitable for different kinds of problems. If someone comes up with a unique solution to a problem, ask them to discuss how they arrived at that solution: how did they see a connection between things?