7   JAMIE LEITCH & LARRY KEISER

CREATIVITY AS A BRIDGE FOR SYNERGIZING THE GOALS OF BUSINESS AND ACADEMIA

In attempts to partner with one another, business and academia often find themselves at odds with goals that are not often aligned. Academia seeks to pursue the enrichment of the academic body of knowledge and business seeks to advance its strategic objectives. In such situations, these two entities share a commitment to working together to enhance the common good. Such is the case that exists within the American Creativity Association, which provides the background for this article and the opportunity to demonstrate how creativity can serve as the mechanism with which both entities can come together to not only accomplish this shared commitment, but also to accomplish their individual goals. Strategically using "creativity" can foster a synergy where the goals of each entity actually complement vs. conflict with one another. The goals of each entity become more holistic in nature; taking on more of a strategic focus with a shared purpose. As such, each entity is able to more effectively accomplish its own goals and to work together to enhance the common good.

For over two decades, the American Creativity Association (http://becreative.org) has been a primary resource for learning and applying creativity, innovation, problem-solving, and ideation theory, tools, and techniques. The organization is comprised of a global network of creative professionals and students in disciplines—the arts, academia, corporate and business, military, government, science and technology, and trainers and consultants. Its membership's collective expertise provides a wide range of problem-solving methods, from simple idea-capture techniques to complex problem-solving methodologies. Above all, American Creativity Association members benefit from personal interaction with top experts in the field of creativity and innovation worldwide. The organization takes deliberate steps to have its membership "rub brains" with members in different fields for cross-disciplinary interaction. As can be imagined, the rubbing of brains often results in friction; primarily from those members with a business/corporate background and those members steeped in academia.

This friction occurs because members from these factions primarily approach issues from two very different mindsets with frequently oppositional goals. Members from the business community are in search of time sensitive creative solutions

that net the greatest gain. Their primary goal is to minimize cost and maximize benefit. Members from academia on the other hand wish to forward time-tested, deliberate, scientific creative methodologies as well as to create new ways of theorizing, assessing, and applying creativity in order to build new knowledge; however, the minimization of cost is not so critical an issue. The schism between these two mindsets can promote feelings of frustration and mistrust. This, in fact, is ironic as more and more businesses and organizations are recognizing the important and pivotal role that creativity has within in the corporate sector. In the May 2010 published report, *Capitalizing on Complexity*, a survey conducted by IBM of over 1,500 CEOs worldwide, found that "creativity" was considered the most important leadership quality.

> Creative leaders expect to make deeper business models changes to realize their strategies. To succeed, they take more calculated risks, find new ideas, and keep innovating in how they lead and communicate. (p. 8)

It is important to note that the behaviors of creative leaders cited in the report are in line with 6 of the 11 creativity factors of the Reisman Diagnostic Creativity Assessment (RDCA), a mobile self-assessment app that scores an individual's perception of their own creative strengths and weaknesses based on a 40 item Likert-type questionnaire. Specifically, "…take more calculated risks…" aligns with1) Risk Taking (taking smart risks), "…find new ideas…" aligns with 2) Originality (coming up with new ideas), 3) Fluency (generating many ideas), and "…keep innovating in how they lead and communicate…" aligns with 4) Tolerance of Ambiguity (being comfortable with the unknown), 5) Resistance to Premature Closure (keeping an open mind) and 6) Flexibility (generating many categories of idea). The other 5 creativity factors are touched upon in the statement, but not overtly, i.e., Elaboration (adding details verbally or to a drawing), Convergent thinking (analyzing and evaluating solutions to come to closure), Divergent Thinking (thinking of multiple, new solutions), Intrinsic Motivation (acting upon a situation due to inner drive or self-satisfaction), and Extrinsic Motivation (acting upon a situation to obtain an external reward).

In order to provide a supportive atmosphere for its members, the American Creativity Association takes great care to not be didactic in its view of creativity. In general, the organization operates on the basic consensus that creativity is the generation of new ideas and innovation is the ability to implement new ideas. There also seems to be apparent agreement between the business members and the academic members that institutional processes put in place to encourage and improved innovation should be research-based. From the authors' experiences, friction seems to develop between the business members' need and want for immedi-

ate solutions and academic members' view that an innovator's understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of creativity and innovation is crucial in order for the innovator to take full advantage of creative theories and practices.

In embracing a more "open" philosophy toward creativity, it may seem that the American Creativity Association has created a structure that promotes a continual friction which impedes the ability for business and academia to "team" together to accomplish both individual and shared goals. Gratton and Erickson (2007) indicate that this may indeed be the case as they relate:

> …although teams that are large, virtual, diverse, and composed of highly educated specialists are increasingly crucial with challenging projects, (these) same four characteristics make it hard for teams to get anything done. To put it another way, the qualities required for success are the same qualities that undermine success. Members of complex teams are less likely—absent other influences—to share knowledge freely, to learn from one another, to shift workloads flexibly to break up unexpected bottlenecks, to help one another complete jobs and meet deadlines, and to share resources—in other words, to collaborate. They are less likely to say that they "sink or swim" together, want one another to succeed, or view their goals as compatible. (p. 3)

In order to obviate these challenges and enable members from business and academia to better team with one another to accomplish shared business goals, the American Creativity Association has turned to creativity itself as a vehicle to promote increased collaboration trust, and commitment. Creativity has taken the form of creative collaboration, ideation, and creative problem-solving and work practices. An excellent illustration of these practices in action can be drawn from the organization's methodology employed during meetings between its board members. Frequently board members from academia will employ creative ideation and creative problem-solving techniques such as divergent and convergent thinking exercises, i.e., generate as many different solutions/ideas as possible in a brainstorming-type session to solve the issue and then cull the ideas down to the best. The divergent/convergent process (aka the Creative Problem Solving method) process can then be repeated on the "best" ideas over several iterations to see if better ideas are generated until the group is satisfied with a final solution or idea. This practice allows the group to forward shared goal accomplishment and relieve fixation during these meetings. As related by Paulus and Nijstad (2003):

> The term fixation, in the present context, refers to something that blocks or impedes the successful completion of various types of cognitive operations, such as those involved in remembering, solving problems, and generating creative ideas (e.g., Dodds & Smith, 1999; Smith, 1994b,

> 1995b; Smith & Blankenship, 1989, 1991; Smith & Vela, 1991). For example, fixation can obstruct memory retrieval of well-learned names or words, such as the names of famous celebrities or politicians. The same fixating forces can likewise block solutions to puzzles or math problems, such as Luchins and Luchins's (1972) famous water jar problems or common anagrams. The ways that fixation can cause such blocks can also limit the directions taken in creative idea generation in such tasks as divergent thinking and brainstorming (p. 16.).

Other strategies employed include temporarily diverting group thinking to another activity and then revisiting the issue at a later time thus allowing the group to return to the issue with "fresh thoughts" (Reisman & Hartz, 2011). Reisman and Hartz (2011) emphasize the importance of providing adequate time for incubation of ideas and that when not allowed, these organizations are less innovative.

The American Creativity Association's business and corporate members bring a sense of urgency and real-world adaptation to these creative practices. As they say, "Time is money." These members provide the tension and helpful balance that keeps the creative process moving. At some point, analysis and discussion must end and action taken. The business members are able to assist academic members in streamlining extraneous processes in order to maximize benefit and minimize cost. The resulting solutions are a more effective and efficient accomplishment of shared goals obtained through the contribution and collaboration of both factions.

Through its employment of these practices, the American Creativity Association has enabled its members to effectively "team" together to accomplish shared goals. As an added benefit however, these practices have also enabled the organization's members to more effectively accomplish individual goals. One example of this phenomenon is the adoption of creativity practices initiated by academic members, utilized within American Creativity Association meetings, and then ultimately utilized by business members within their work operations. Another example is applying a more real-world business focus to creativity practices within the academic environment. This continual practice of creative collaboration between members of the American Creativity Association has also created a synergy where the goals of each entity actually complement vs. conflict with one another. Members look to one another to bring a specific mindset or focus to the entire creative process; this results better and more well rounded solutions. The goals of the business members and the academia members have become more holistic in nature; taking on more of a strategic focus with a shared purpose. As such, each group is able to more effectively accomplish its own goals and to work together to enhance the common good.

It is the opinion of the authors of this chapter that creative synergy is realized through creative practices that cause the release of cognitive dissonance. When

mutually engaging with one another, American Creativity Association members go through divergent and convergent thinking exercises in order to arrive at more creatively synergistic solutions. Cognitive dissonance theory suggests that people have a strong desire to seek consonance between their expectations and reality. Festinger (1985) relates that this "dissonance reduction" can be achieved through lowering the importance of one of the discordant factors, adding consonant elements, or changing one of the dissonant factors. Through these practices American Creativity Association members are working together to accomplish shared goals, individual goals, and to enhance the common good. There is every reason to believe that these practices can be transported to other organizations comprised of similar constituents.

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Authors' brief bios
Jamie Leitch has experience in a variety of areas of workplace learning and performance, including instructional design; delivery and facilitation; assessment, measurement and evaluation; and organizational change. She is currently the Director of Organizational Development & Training for American Infrastructure, the largest heavy-civil construction company within the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Within that role, she manages the strategic design, development, delivery and evaluation of learning for more than 2,000 employees. She holds a Senior Professional in Human Resources certification and certificates in both executive and performance coaching. She possesses an MBA, a Masters Certificate in Adult Learning and a Master's Degree in Human Resources Development. She is also set to receive an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and Management in 2014. Jamie currently serves as a board member on various construction industry organizations and is president-elect of the American Creativity Association. She has also

served as a member of the Pennsylvania Governor's Subcommittee on Adult Learning. Through Jamie's leadership, her current organization has been awarded a variety of training and development awards. These awards include, the ASTD Best award, the Chief Executive Magazine Best Company for Leaders award, the Associated Builders and Contractors Contractor of the Year award, the Training Magazine Top 125 award, and the Training Magazine Top 125 HR score award. Jamie is proud to attest that her current organization attained a Top 10 designation for the Training Magazine Top 125 award in 2013 and the Training Top 125 Top HR Score award for the 2nd consecutive year (2012 & 2013). Jamie and her organization have also been featured in a variety of training and development industry publications highlighting best practices in learning and development. In her spare time, Jamie is a United Way volunteer and enjoys sailing and travel.

Larry Keiser, serves as Director of Special Projects for Drexel University's School of Education in Philadelphia, PA, in the US, as well as the School's Certification Officer. He has served in various capacities for the School of Education including Director of Records and Finance, Director of Teacher Education and Coordinator of Academic Advisors over the last 28 years. Larry has assisted in the development and implementation of externally funded projects (e.g., National Science Foundation, US Department of Education, PA Department of Education, Philadelphia Department of Human Services, etc.) totaling upwards of $18M USD. He has presented nationally in the US on the topic of creativity and its relationship to teaching, academic achievement and academic advising and is currently finishing up his doctoral program in Educational Leadership.

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