

A woman with long, wavy brown hair, wearing a white long-sleeved blouse and a black skirt, is shown from the side. She is holding a paintbrush in her right hand, reaching up to paint a yellow wall. In her left hand, she holds a bucket of paint that is half yellow and half black. The background is a solid, bright yellow wall.

# Creativity at work

McCabe Photography

Organisations should be encouraging creative thinking and giving free rein to employees' creativity, says Sally Blyth. She's coined the term 'creativation' for a combination of creativity, inspiration, innovation, motivation and intuition, and says that when all these parts are operating it's a very powerful equation.

**I**magine if one of the very best ideas for your company's future was floating around inside the head of one of your employees, forever trapped because that person felt too inhibited to offer their creative idea—a travesty, wouldn't you say? That wouldn't happen in my company, you might respond. But how do you really know?

There are many reasons why someone hangs onto a great idea without sharing it. Perhaps their normal role doesn't involve initiating creative ideas and they don't trust themselves to do it well. Maybe they lack self-belief and are not certain about how to present their ideas. The culture of your company may not invite (ie, actively encourage) or welcome (ie, be accepting of) innovative ideas and the person may feel intimidated, or unsure about how their idea might be received. It may be that managers are not receptive to new ideas being presented out of the blue by staff, believing that they are the only ones capable of coming up with innovative ideas to take the company forward?

### What messages are you sending out?

Think about your own workplace. Does it tend to stifle creative drive, albeit unintentionally, thereby shutting down potentially useful ideas? For many people, particularly in those industries where it is not considered a key factor, creativity just doesn't come into the workday equation. Staff may believe that work is not an appropriate forum to display zany, creative flair and behaviour, unless a requirement of the job.

What exactly is 'zany creative' and is it okay at your workplace? If you're not sure, it probably isn't happening. Think wacky, imaginative, off-the-wall, inventive, unconventional and original, and envisage that within your organisation. Do you encourage and accept this sort of behaviour? Do you merely tolerate it? Or are your staff receiving a silent message through the office airwaves that such behaviour is not okay, which in turn leaves them unable or unwilling to allow their creativity free rein?

The stifling of creative expression can only serve to suppress the potential of people, and, ultimately, the organisations they work for. However, when a person can let their creative flair loose, whether outside or inside the workplace, those jobs that didn't seem to require creativity can either become much more creative and/or take on a new appeal when looked at through creative eyes.

Take the office clown, for example. Do you have someone who loves to lark about with their jokes and story-telling, taking people off task? Such people may be regarded as irritating time-wasters, but they are also likely to be full of creative energy. If all that energy was harnessed and channelled in the right way, with clear boundaries, how much value could they add to your team? Humour and craziness ought not to be underestimated within the workplace.

### Encouraging creative flair at your workplace

Most organisations require a certain amount of creative flair to keep ahead of their game, but how many organisations have leaders and managers who actively encourage and truly embrace creative input from all levels of staff? So how might you get people's ideas out in the open rather than having them stored away in their minds?

An initial step would be to create a culture where new and fresh ideas are absolutely welcome from anyone, at any level within the company. Perhaps you could set up a forum where people can share their creative ideas freely—a suggestion box, an intranet system, a gathering of some sort (this could be a special meeting, an offsite session, or a retreat). Such a forum could reveal something as simple as a practical suggestion for sprucing up the lunchroom, or it could produce something as significant as a great idea for an advertising campaign. Who knows what the receptionist, customer services representative or project analyst may dream up in the middle of the night, which could ultimately help improve and/or promote your product or service. After all, they know your business and its people pretty well.

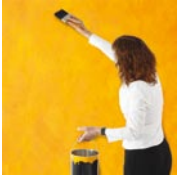
Remember to celebrate successful ideas when they have taken shape and become reality. Even if an idea isn't taken on board, it ought to be acknowledged and given value for its very existence, so that more ideas will keep on flowing.

### Investing in creativity is resource well spent

Investing in creativity for staff, as a form of personal and team development, can help to set creative thinking alight. Some people lament that they don't have a creative bone in their body. I say that's impossible. Creativity is often perceived as an end result, the production of something to be validated and measured. But true creativity is the intangible exploration, the indefinable sense of play, the flexible process itself.

I use the word 'creativation'—a combination of creativity, inspiration, innovation, motivation and intuition—to describe my philosophy around creativity. When all these parts are operating, it's a very powerful equation, and one that's vital in the workplace.

Spending dedicated time together, as a team, purely to explore creativity, not necessarily with a specific end result, can enable your staff to start operating from a new perspective. Being creative, both individually and collectively, in a fun and open way, can help a team to gel. At the same time people will begin to realise—often to their own surprise—how creative they really are. They will understand creativity better in an environment that encourages creative fun and play without pressure or expectation. Effectively, they will hook into their own 'creativation' and their intuition will come alive, thereby igniting their individual creative passions.



Having time and space to be truly innovative and imaginative together is a precious gift that few employees get the chance to enjoy. Organisations that genuinely embrace creativity have no need to measure its value.

For those who would ask, '... and just how does art benefit my business?', I would offer, "If your business has important, pioneering work to do, then develop artful capabilities in your associates just as well as technical skills, else you'll work at half-strength at best, and risk losing all the benefit of their passion." Now, there is a connection between art and the bottom line.

—Albert Gibson, R&D manager, US-based multi-national food & beverage company. From [www.creativityatwork.com](http://www.creativityatwork.com)

Creativity in the workplace must be nurtured and cultivated for it to flourish. This means creating a culture of trust and having the freedom to express new ideas without being ridiculed, allowing room for mistakes, and developing the radar to spot opportunities in unexpected places. Many of the inventions that are now commonplace, such as 3M's Post-It notes, started out as "mistakes."

—Linda Naiman, *Creativity and the Meaning of Work*

So how might you invest in creativity for your staff? Firstly, recognise that creativity comes in many forms. Perhaps you could organise a workshop to explore colour, painting and perspective in an abstract way. Or maybe an afternoon having fun with drama, dance or music. Drumming, singing, acting, painting—there are plenty of creative people ready to share their passions and talents with your staff in a valuable and productive way. A few hours may be all it takes to get the creative juices flowing. In turn, your staff may be inspired to explore and develop their own newfound creativity in some way. This could lead to new hobbies being pursued in their own leisure time, fulfilling a void they may not have even realised existed, and possibly having positive repercussions for your organisation in the future.

Leaders and managers could undertake an outcome-focused workshop which incorporates a creative genre as a whole new way of looking at vision, values, strategies and other business tools. Looking at the fundamentals and essentials of business in a creative way can encourage new outlooks, invite new viewpoints and support a different way of approaching the day-to-day business aspects. It can also bring leaders and managers closer to each other and open up powerful personal connections that may not be apparent, or even exist.

Alas, there is a perception that it's not okay to spend valuable resources on something as seemingly frivolous as 'creative play'. It can be viewed as insignificant, unproductive, and indulgent, and not seen as contributing to the company's bottom line. However, it can have huge impact on how that company and its people flourish. Having time and space to be truly innovative and imaginative together is a precious gift that few employees get the chance to enjoy. Organisations that genuinely embrace creativity have no need to measure its value.

### From chaos, you can create

Often, the things we fear in business—change, imbalance, conflict and chaos—are the main sources of creativity.

The sign of a creative person is chaos. Creative people often work beautifully in constructive chaos. Observe chaos that achieves results, and you have found a creative person. Order and neatness don't mean someone isn't creative, but you can be fairly certain that the person who works in chaos is a naturally creative one.

### Child's play for adults

A creative place is, by its very nature, a thriving place. Take schools for example. These days creativity has its valid place alongside the academic work. Most kids love to paint, act, play games, and most will have an opportunity to participate in such activities at school. Some parents feel that creative pursuits in the school setting, while all very nice, can encroach upon the basics of learning, but I believe that it's the creative elements of the day that actually enhance the children's desire and ability to enjoy school and learn well. With skilful guidance, creative play needn't detract from getting the groundwork done. Creativity includes elements of academic subjects, albeit in a much more subtle way than sitting at a desk with an exercise book. It also gives a sense of enthusiasm, enjoyment and pride which is not so apparent when it comes to poring over schoolbooks.

I still vividly recall much of what I learnt about the Middle Ages when I was at primary school, mainly because the learning process incorporated ongoing role play and real immersion into that world. The classroom became a medieval land, full of knights, lords, nobles, serfs and peasants, rather than 10-year-old Kiwi children. Walls covered with castles and shields we had made completed the magic, and our teacher, possibly without realising it at the time, set up a very strong memory bank and a great reference point.

Imagine creating such memories and reference points for the people who work in your organisation. There's nothing stopping this, except perhaps the fear of what might be created. I cherish such memories of organisations I have worked for in the past. As one of those zany, creative people, I have often been the initiator of things creative, but the important thing was that I was able to.

So, how much more industrious, fun and successful is a creative and vibrant school environment, full of art, play, colour and motivation (a pointer to the future), than a dry uninspired one of exercise books, words, monologues and expectations (a reflection of the past)? The same should go for the workplace. But does it?

The child grows up and gets a job, and the creative play in their day can come to a grinding halt. The day becomes all about paper and words on computer screens, meetings and reports, people telling them what to do and deadlines to meet. What happened to the



art and play and colour? Where has the motivation and inspiration gone? Within society, and the workplace, do we allow our ideals to falter because they don't conform—and what are the consequences of this?

Surely, just like in the classroom, a good day's work can still be done with a little formal creative play along the way. Linda Naiman, founder of Canadian organisation Creativity at Work, points out that "Research shows that everyone has creative abilities. The more training you have and the more diverse the training, the greater potential for creative output. The average adult thinks of three to six alternatives for any given situation, yet the average child thinks of 60. The longer the list of ideas, the higher the quality of the final solution. The best ideas appear at the end of the list, so a child's idea can be truly magnificent."

**Be intentional about capturing the magnificence**

How can we, as adults, capture this magnificence from the adults within our workplace? Creative play could happen at a regular Monday morning meeting. Instead of keeping it solely work-focused, allow your staff to share stories and ideas and viewpoints about their lives and passions. Let them share as many ideas and solutions as they can. Encourage them to laugh and connect and concoct off-the-wall ways to solve problems. This will set up the day in a truly creative way. You need never have a dull Monday morning meeting again if you allow a bit of creative play into the room.

Enabling people to feel comfortable contributing their innovative thinking and creative ideas, no matter how bizarre, to the bigger picture of the company is important. Think about what value such ideas might have. Work out ways to encourage and appreciate innovative contributions from your staff. Don't let time and pressure deny your people the opportunity to let those ideas out of their heads. Create the forum to welcome them.

Research proves that traditional brainstorming can be ineffective because of fear of social disapproval. There will always be someone who sits back and doesn't speak up. But that's not to say the ideas are not flowing through their brain at a great rate of knots. A group situation is great for selecting ideas and making decisions from the options available. Be careful to ensure that all the options are on the table first. Enabling the generation, sharing and exchange of ideas is the important first step.

**Encourage creativity, enhance your organisation**

Exploring creativity is an effective personal development tool that not only enhances people's self-belief, strengthens peership and stimulates innovative thinking without limits, the practical benefits that can stem from this are bountiful. Organisations should be

encouraging kaleidoscope thinking and harnessing the ideas that radiate from it.

Your company's latest greatest promotional idea may be floating around in someone's head right now, sharing mindscape with spreadsheets, monthly reports and client information. Capture that idea now, before it floats away into oblivion.

*When you're inspired and motivated to tap into your intuition ... innovation and creativity will abound.*




*Sally Blyth is a facilitator, coach, Creativationist™ and artist. Her company, Beyond, offers workshops and programmes designed to take individuals and groups beyond their expectations. Visit [www.beyondlimits.co.nz](http://www.beyondlimits.co.nz) or contact Sally on [sally@beyondlimits.co.nz](mailto:sally@beyondlimits.co.nz)*



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