

# Creative Habit: An Oxymoron

## Helping Organizations Innovate

By Laura Pagois

**I**nnovate or die... many of us are likely familiar with the idea that organizations must innovate to stay competitive and survive. But, what does it mean for an organization to innovate?

Innovation is creativity in action. It is applied creativity. Organizations that develop a habit of applied creativity or a “creative habit” are more likely to be innovative and have long-term success: “Only cultures that can help companies anticipate and adapt to change will be associated with superior performance over long periods. Nonadaptive cultures were found to be complex, bureaucratic, usually risk-averse, and low on creativity.”<sup>1</sup>

Forming a creative habit requires an organization to change its current habits, so that all employees work from the same habit and collaborate to innovate. Creativity and change are interwoven; creativity spurs change and change requires creativity in thought and action. Creativity and change also involve uncertainty, risk, and deviance from the norm, all of which many humans seek to avoid because our habits, our normal and unconscious way of acting, are challenged. While habits help us think and act faster and specialize in various domains, they generally limit our ability to break free, make new connections, and generate novel ideas.

Therefore, to increase creativity, organizations need to exert conscious effort to overcome their

current habits. They need to move from current ways of doing business to develop a creative habit. Another habit, you say? Yes. The difference is that, with a creative habit, organizations follow a process that intentionally moves employees to continuously think and act in a way that encourages, supports, and delivers new, novel, or breakthrough ideas.

### The Importance of Change in Developing a Creative Habit

To cultivate a creative habit, an organization must become aware of its current problem-solving habits and then consciously work to modify them. Modification of habits involves change, which requires:

- Awareness that current habits are not sufficient to achieve the organization’s goals
- Analysis and development of a plan to change or modify current habits
- Conscious implementation of actions needed to build a new habit
- Acknowledgement of the uneasiness and awkwardness that may be felt during the transition
- Practice of the new habit until it is assimilated and becomes a natural part of how the organization acts

### How the BBC Worked to Develop a Creative Habit

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) has worked to develop a creative habit over the past five years.<sup>11</sup> In early 2000, Greg Dyke, the

new Director General (Chief Executive and Editor-in-Chief), found the BBC to be very hierarchical and bureaucratic. Shortly thereafter, Dyke launched a new theme, “One BBC,” to encourage employees to work together to achieve the organization’s mission. In 2001, an employee survey showed less than stellar results including low trust, collaboration, and employee appreciation. In addition, employees thought leadership lacked vision and didn’t walk their talk. In early 2002, under Dyke’s leadership, the BBC launched “Making It Happen” with the goal of becoming the most creative organization in the world over the next five years.

In order to activate the radical change needed to cultivate a creative habit, a core group of internal BBC staff, not consultants, implemented the following tactics:

- Engaged icons of the BBC to publicly act in the new way
- Utilized internal staff who “know the BBC” to create communication messages
- Used cross-functional groups to work on issues
- Conducted “Just Imagine” sessions using Appreciative Inquiry to understand commonalities and hear the stories about what makes the BBC the BBC
- Used “Just Imagine” input to determine BBC values

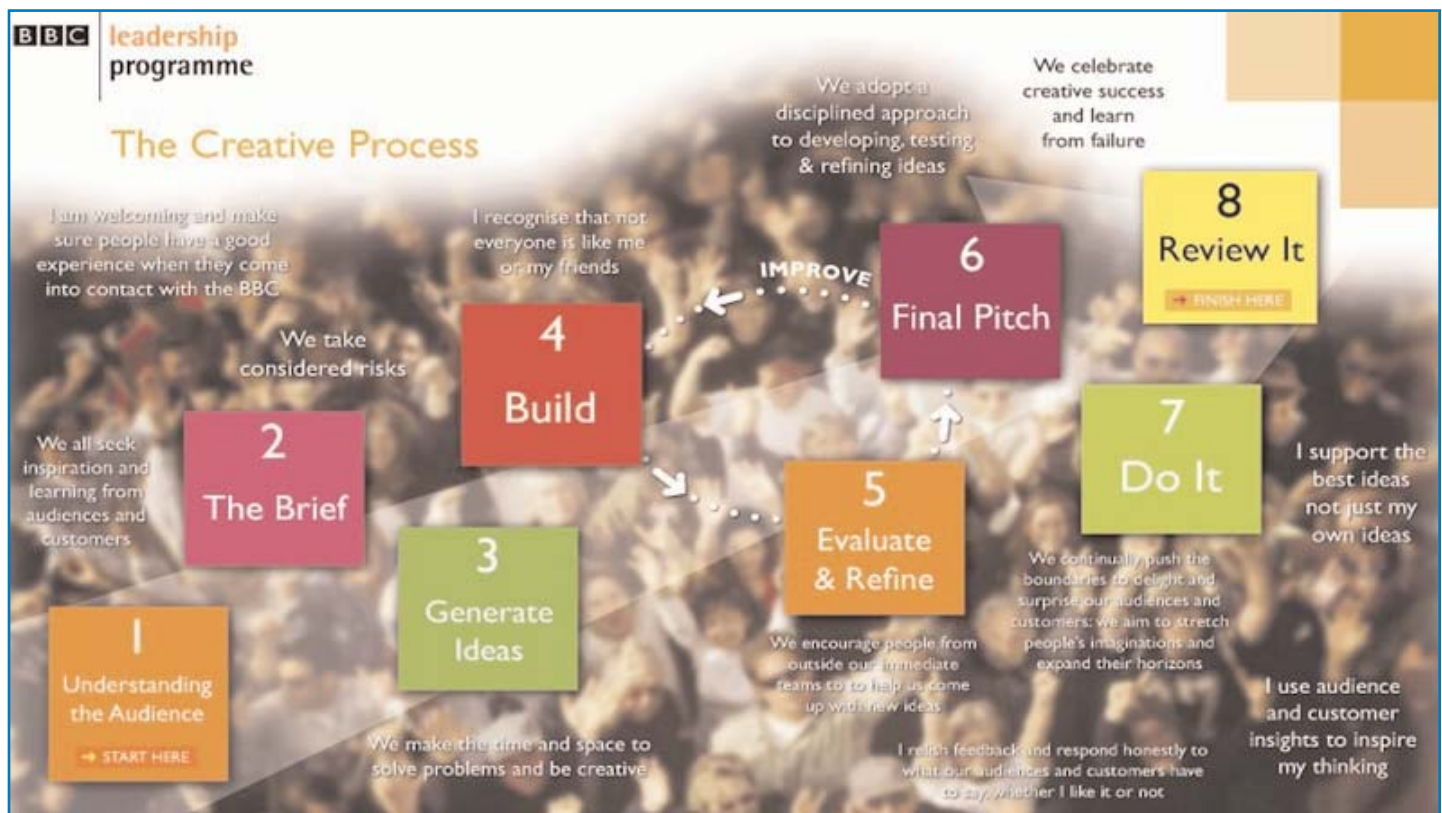
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- Created a one-page BBC-wide change plan with the following initiatives:
  - Providing great leadership
  - Making the BBC a great place to work
  - Getting closer to our audiences
  - Inspiring creativity everywhere
  - Working as One BBC guided by the BBC values
- Launched the new change plan via worldwide messaging

As part of the Inspiring Creativity Everywhere initiative, the core cultural change group:

- Invited all employees to the “Big Brainstorm” where they would learn a creative process tailored to the needs of the BBC. The creative process outlined below is based upon the six-stage Osborn-Parnes creative problem solving (CPS) model.<sup>111</sup> Three-hundred employees attended the Big Brainstorm and worked the process to generate programming ideas as part of a contest. The best idea was then implemented in the coming months, with the production team continuing to follow the creative process.



- Formed a Creative Network of 400 employees across the organization and trained them in tools and techniques to facilitate the creative process at a grass-roots level.
- Stimulated cross-divisional collaboration by encouraging teams to invite employees from various areas within the BBC to brainstorm and pitch review sessions.

## Results and the BBC Today

Several key employee satisfaction areas improved based on results from a post-launch employee survey. In addition, BBC Radio 1 has developed a new creative habit and operates fully within the new BBC process. However, in January 2004, the visionary leader of “One BBC” and “Making It Happen” left and the new Director General, Mark Thompson, does not share the same passion for creativity as did Dyke. While the employees who have already cultivated the creative habit will still continue their efforts under Thompson’s leadership, the cultural change initiative to expand the creative habit throughout the BBC organization has ceased. Only time will tell how effective the BBC will be in

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achieving its vision of becoming the most creative organization in the world by 2007, or if Thompson will take the BBC down a path towards a different vision.

## The Importance of Leadership & Risk-Taking in Developing a Creative Habit

As we see in the BBC story, leaders set the tone for how an organization acts. They own how the culture of an organization progresses, whether they want to or not. Therefore, those who champion and support creativity habits are essential to the success of an organization's innovation efforts, not only for providing the resources necessary to continue creative habit-building but also for creating an environment that allows for risk-taking and collaboration.

One organization that has developed its own creative habit through leadership is SAS. Leadership at SAS consciously works to:

- keep its employees intellectually engaged
- remove obstacles to creativity
- encourage creative thinking and collaboration amongst all employees
- remove barriers between managers and employees to promote risk-taking and honesty
- incorporate customer input into product development

Acting from its creative habit has been very successful for SAS. They have been in the top 20 of Fortune's Top 100 Best Companies to Work For list every year since the original publish date. Turnover is only 3-5%. In addition, SAS experienced its 28<sup>th</sup> straight year of revenue growth in 2004.<sup>IV</sup>

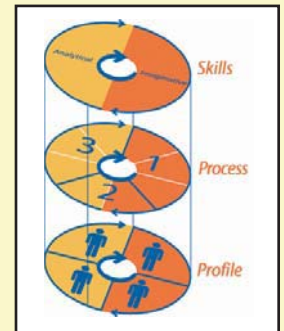
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## A Model for Developing a Creative Habit & Leading Innovation

A model for leading innovation is the Simplex system developed by Min Basadur.<sup>I</sup> The Simplex system is creativity in action or applied creativity. It combines a creative problem solving (CPS) process along with profiles of individual creative problem solving styles and imaginative or analytical skills to help organizations develop their creative habit.

The eight-step Simplex process is a modification of the Osborn-Parnes six-step CPS process<sup>II</sup> and helps individuals, teams and organizations to:

- Identify needs, issues or problems
- Determine facts and assumptions regarding the needs, issues or problems
- Define the key need, issue or problem
- Develop ideas to address the key need, issue or problem
- Assess and select the best idea(s) to solve the key need, issue or problem
- Develop an implementation plan
- Gain acceptance, including overcoming resistance
- Execute the plan



A key advantage of the Simplex process is that when organizations follow the process they flow from need through idea generation, to evaluation and selection, and then to plan development and implementation. The process delivers creativity in action.

Creativity styles, as well as imaginative and analytical skills, are integrated into the Simplex system because incorporating diversity in groups is crucial to generating, developing, and implementing creative ideas. When incorporating diversity into CPS groups, one should include a mix of people with various thinking styles, including but not limited to:

- Simplex creativity styles: Generator / Conceptualizer / Optimizer/ Implementer
- Analysis / Synthesis
- Divergence / Convergence
- Deduction / Induction
- Thinking / Feeling
- Sensing / Intuition
- Judging / Perception

While bringing disparate styles together may require greater coordination and facilitation on the part of leadership to not only encourage but manage conflicting thoughts and actions, employees and the organization benefit by being able to tap into others' specialties and increase creativity. When organizations integrate Simplex into their culture, they move one step closer to developing a creative habit, a new way of thinking and acting in order to innovate.

<sup>I</sup> Basadur, M. (2004, June 14-18). Basadur Applied Creativity Training, Toronto, ON.

<sup>II</sup> Creative Problem Solving Institute (CPSI). (2004, February 2-7). San Diego, CA.



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Without leaders who cultivate an environment that supports and rewards risk-taking and creativity, it is unlikely that innovation will consistently occur to deliver long-term advantages to the organization. Leadership plays a vital role in the successful institutionalization of the new creative habit.

### A Creative Habit Helps Organizations Adapt and Innovate for Long-Term Success

In order to grow and enjoy success, organizations must change, adapt and innovate. Becoming an innovative organization takes time and requires a new creative habit,

thus requiring a shift in how an organization's culture approaches the generation and execution of ideas. In developing a creative habit, people must follow a new pattern or process for the generation, development and implementation of ideas. In addition, organizations must alter their beliefs, norms, rules and systems to encourage and support the new process. Over time, through conscious effort and with consistent and supportive leadership, the organization will form a new habit of creativity, leading to increased innovation and long-term success. ✨

<sup>I</sup> Musante, L. (2001). Better living through culture. *Optimize*. Retrieved November 1, 2004, from [www.optimize.com](http://www.optimize.com)

<sup>II</sup> van den Brul, C. (2005, June 28). *Changing Culture: A case study in becoming a more creative organization*. Presented at the Creative Problem Solving Institute, St. Paul, MN.

<sup>III</sup> Creative Problem Solving Institute (CPSI). Next session is June 25 - 30, 2006 in Chicago, Illinois ([www.cpsiconference.com/2006](http://www.cpsiconference.com/2006)).

<sup>IV</sup> Florida, R. & Goodnight, J. (2005). Managing for creativity. *Harvard Business Review*, July - August, 125-131.

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