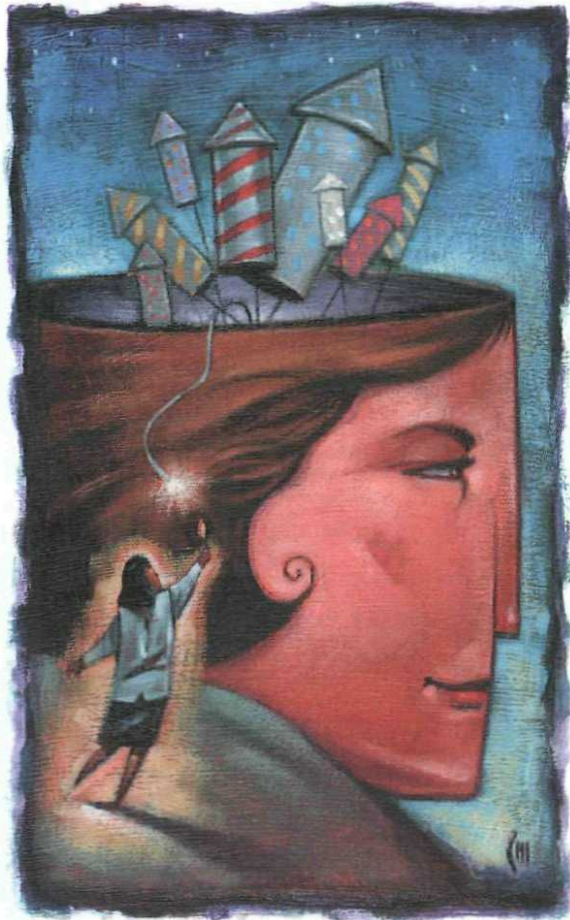


Executive **EDGE**



FOSTERING CREATIVITY

In business and work environments, creativity is stifled more often than supported. Work environments established to maximize coordination, productivity, and control do little to foster and reward the creative process. But creative business ideas—those that are original as well as useful and effective—can benefit every function of an organization.

Creativity has three components: expertise, creative-thinking skills, and motivation. Expertise refers to knowledge—technical, procedural, and intellectual. Creative-thinking skills indicate how people approach problems—do they think “out of the box” or in tried-and-true patterns? Finally, motivation propels creativity, and intrinsic motivation—an inner passion to solve the problem—leads to more creative solutions than extrinsic motivators, such as salary or the threat of losing one’s job.

Managerial practices that can affect creativity fall into six categories.

Challenge Match people with the right assignments, those that align with their expertise and creative-thinking skills.

Freedom Allow people the autonomy to decide how they will meet goals.

Resources Creativity takes time and financial support. Organizations routinely kill creativity with fake deadlines or impossibly tight ones.

Work-Group Features Build mutually supportive groups with a diversity of perspectives and backgrounds.

Supervisory Encouragement Recognize creative work by individuals and teams, even those ideas that don’t pan out; habitually negative or overly critical reactions to new ideas will smother creativity.

Organizational Support Make it clear that the organization values creative effort. Support collaboration and information sharing.

From Teresa M. Amabile, “How to Kill Creativity,” Harvard Business Review, September-October 1998, pp. 77-87.

ALIGNING WITH THE CORPORATE CULTURE

Yams are important culture symbols if you live on certain Pacific islands. A man on Pohnpei will be praised for his supernatural powers and given an important position for growing a 9-foot yam. On the Trobriand Islands, quantity and quality—not size—determine status. And even halfway around the world, Western corporations have their own “yams”—things valued for the meaning the culture assigns to them rather than their inherent qualities.

Before signing on with a new company, your chances of survival will be better if you can identify the “yams” and see if you line up with the corporate culture. Ask Kathy Wheeler, who learned a tough lesson in 1992 when she left Hewlett-

Packard for Apple Computer. Hewlett prized collaboration, consensus seeking, and engineering ability—all areas in which Wheeler excelled. Apple, however, valued those who were bold marketers of its products, a role in which Wheeler did not fit. Deeply unhappy, Wheeler returned to Hewlett 14 months later.

How do you figure out a corporation’s culture? Look at the people who thrive at the company and learn what personality traits they share, says Jennifer Chatman with the University of California at Berkeley’s Haas School of Business. Chatman discovered in a study of accounting firms that new employees whose personalities matched their firms’

cultures were about 20 percent less likely to leave than employees who did not mesh.

Other steps can help you ferret out a company’s shared values. Check for published reports on various firms by Wet Feet Press (www.wetfeet.com) and Vault Reports (www.vaultreports.com), which sell dossiers geared to job applicants. When you visit a company, look at how work spaces are arranged, how employees dress, and what they are doing. And interview people at all levels in any department where you’ll be expected to spend significant time.

From Matt Siegel, “The Perils of Culture Conflict,” Fortune, November 9, 1998, pp. 257-258, 262.

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