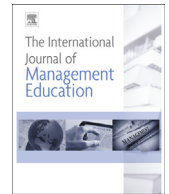




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Teaching Resource

Managing and fostering creativity: An integrated approach



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ABSTRACT

After years of seeking students with leadership skills, companies today are putting similar levels of emphasis on those with creative capabilities. Such companies need creative people to help solve their most pressing problems, and to help generate new sources of value creation for firms that have suffered years of stagnant growth. A quick glance at recent business books and magazines shows that the need for such individuals is strong and growing, as global competition becomes the new normal and economies around the world become increasingly connected. As business educators we need to reflect on how we should go about designing classes and curricular that develop creative capabilities in our students. This paper outlines an integrated approach to enhancing creativity at the individual, group, and organizational levels that is used in a Creativity Course taught at a large University in the United States. In doing so it is presented in two parts. Part I describes the conceptual underpinnings of the course and the three module framework that is used to structure content. Thus, Part I focuses on describing what is taught and explaining why. Part II illustrates how the course is implemented through a series of both individual and group projects. Additionally, it reflects on key learning outcomes that have occurred through the delivery of multiple iterations of the course. Together Part I and II combine to create a complete learning resource for anyone interested in developing and delivering a course on creativity.

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1. Introduction

Some have suggested that Western society has been dominated by reductionist and analytical thinking for nearly a century (Pink, 2006). This type of thinking is shaped by an assumption that the whole is nothing more than the sum of its parts, and that we understand or build new systems by breaking them into many pieces, addressing the impact that each part has on the system and improving it in isolation, and then putting it back together (Gharajedaghi, 2011). This way of thinking has been useful for continuously improving existing systems and enhancing parts and products that already exist, but, arguably, it has been less beneficial for facilitating the creation of completely new systems, products, processes, and services that do not yet

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exist (Dunne & Martin, 2006). Furthermore, since much of the western world's education system has been shaped by a similar set of reductionist assumptions and rational decision-making paradigms, the importance of creativity today must not be underestimated and we must work to develop this important skill in our students (Armstrong, 1999). In fact, according to a recent survey by IBM that included responses from over 1500 CEO's from 60 countries and 33 industries, creativity is the essential attribute they are looking for in their leaders today.²

Fortunately, creativity might not be as rare of a capability as some believe: in fact, it exists within all of us. We just must learn to tap into and cultivate it (Seelig, 2012). Unfortunately, even though creativity is crucial to business and management success, higher education generally does not devote sufficient attention to it (Edwards, McGoldrick, & Oliver, 2006; Schmidt-Wilk, 2011). Fortunately, the course design that is presented in this paper seeks to assist in filling this gap. It is designed to encourage students to see that creativity and analytical thinking do not have to be mutually exclusive, and that creativity (like analytical thinking) can be developed and enhanced within ourselves and our organizations. To do so we need to think about creativity at multiple levels of analysis (individual, group, and organization) and show how one reinforces the other. Furthermore, creativity is not just something that you have, but it is something that you do. For this reason we present the following course that is in equal parts conceptual and applied. Students learn tools and techniques, as well as engage in the necessary self-reflection, to foster and manage their own creativity and the creativity of the organizations where they work. They discover how to generate great ideas, sharpen them to align more effectively to market opportunities, and move ideas forward through disciplined action.

The purpose of this paper is to illustrate an integrated approach for teaching creativity as part of a business school curriculum and to give insight into how such a course can be delivered. In doing so, we will present two key parts. Part I presents the conceptual framework that describes what is taught and why. Just as the course is structured, this section is structured along three core modules (Drivers Shaping the Need for Creativity, Enhancing Creativity, and Executing in a Creative Environment). After concluding Part I we will discuss how such a course can be implemented in Part II. In this section we discuss the experiential approach that we adopt for teaching this course, as well as offer reflections and key learnings to help instructors that might teach such a course in the future. We conclude by summarizing our paper and approach.

2. Part I. The conceptual framework: an integrated approach

We believe strongly in the importance of having a clear course road map that describes the journey that students and instructor will undergo as part of the course experience. Doing so helps students see the big picture, and recognize how individual units fit into the larger whole. Recent research has shown that students that partake in courses that employ such meta-structures made better connections with key concepts and were able to utilize the material in more applied and critical ways (Cast, 2008). As Fig. 1 below illustrates, the course is structured along three core modules. In module one, we investigate why creativity is so important in today's world and the drivers that increase its importance. In the second module we explore how to enhance creativity at three levels (individual, group, and the organization). Finally, in the third module we investigate how to be productive in a creative environment through disciplined action and execution.

2.1. Module 1: The drivers

The first book we read in this course is "A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers will Rule the Future" by Daniel Pink. This is an excellent book that the students really enjoy. The first three chapters of "A Whole New Mind" coincide with the first module of this course: Drivers Shaping the Need for Creativity. The point of these chapters is to explain and describe the many forces that have combined to create a situation where, more than ever before, people, organizations, and social institutions need people that can think creatively. As the author notes, logical, analytical, left-brain thinkers have been most rewarded up to this point. But, as he will argue, things are changing. After a rather thorough discussion related to the science behind "Left" vs. "Right" brain thinking, Pink suggest there are three key drivers shaping the need for creativity today: Abundance, Asia, and Automation.

In terms of *abundance*, Pink argues that we are inundated with "things". Having a product at a low price is no longer enough. Now, to be competitive, companies can no longer just... "create a product that is reasonably priced and adequately functional. It must also be beautiful, unique, and meaningful" (pg. 33). As Pink argues, developing products and services that meet these criteria requires right-brain thinking. According to Pink, analytical work has continued to migrate to other parts of the world, such as Asia, leading to huge numbers of people that can perform this type of work for a much lower cost. Consequently, competing with Asian workers on the dimensions where they most excel might not make the most sense. Finally, computers and information technology continue to automate organizational processes. The more standardized a process is, the easier it is to automate. Yet, creativity and innovation are hard to standardize and therefore automate, leading to yet another reason that Pink argues for the importance of creative thinking in today's world.

² <http://www-03.ibm.com/press/us/en/pressrelease/31670.wss>.

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