

# Seven Drivers of Creativity



by Jacqueline Byrd and Paul Lockwood Brown

IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO WANT TO BECOME more creative and to take more risks. To do so means challenging yourself, your team, and the organization. Moving out of our comfort zones is something we rarely do. Yet when we do, we gain insights into our own character. We can then reshape ourselves to the way we want. This is also the case with organizations and teams. But it means changing the culture.

The culture is reflected in what the organization or team values and how it does its business, as well as its propensity for risk taking and creativity. How does your organization view risk taking? Does your culture punish or reward people for taking risks? How willing are you to take risks at work?

Your propensity for risk taking is, in part, a function of the culture. If your boss doles out punitive measures for anyone who fails at a task, you play it safe. Or, if eyes roll when you offer an idea at a brainstorming session, you think twice about offering ideas.

The creativity or risk taking in a culture is consistent with the characteristics of one of seven orientations: Challenger, Innovator, Dreamer, Sustainer, Planner, Modifier, or Practicalizer. This composite profile becomes the group's norm. Changing the group norm is difficult.

We need to focus on what we can influence directly: our immediate work teams and ourselves. Our efforts in these areas can yield powerful results.

Use these drivers of creativity and risk taking to build innovative capacity:

**Creativity driver 1: Ambiguity and its opposite, predictability.** Operating in an ambiguous situation means dealing with uncertainty and vagueness. Those who function effectively in ambiguous circumstances don't require highly structured situations, goals, or objectives to accomplish or create things, ideas,

services, or products. Growth in this area yields innovative solutions. Since dealing with ambiguity is challenging, many people try to control variables, chart alternative courses of action, and eliminate the impact of uncertainty. The opposite of ambiguity is predictability. People who demand predictability require structure, clarity, and definition.

**Creativity driver 2: Independence and its opposite, dependence.** Independence means not being subject to the control, influence, or determination of others. People who are independent will not subordinate themselves to others. They don't like to be managed by others. They



are self-empowered. They don't have to be given direction. They don't like to ask for help, believing their way to be the best way. Dependent people need direction from someone. They do not take action without prior approval.

**Creativity driver 3: Inner-directedness and its opposite, other-directedness.** Inner-directed people and teams feel a great sense of purpose. They often have a clear vision of the future. People who are inner-directed believe that they are responsible for determining their own destiny, expectations, and norms. They are guided by their own set of values. They sometimes believe that no one really understands them. Often, they have difficulty reconciling personal agendas to corporate directives. People who are other-directed are always concerned about what everyone else thinks or is doing. Other-directed people don't take the lead without input from others.

**Creativity driver 4: Uniqueness and its opposite, conformity.** Uniqueness is appreciating and valuing differences. People and teams that value uniqueness look for creativity in themselves and others. They foster it. They first look for the differences, not to accentuate them, but appreciate and take advantage of them. The opposite of uniqueness is conformity, acting in ways that conform to current styles, norms, or expectations.

**Risk-taking driver 1: Authentic and its opposite, political.** Authentic means being what you purport to be. Authentic people and teams live by their core beliefs; they mean what they say and say what they mean. Their actions are congruent with their espoused values. They "walk their talk" and "tell it like it is." They take stands on issues. They are true and genuine. Its opposite is being political. Political people don't communicate with others directly. They are always navigating or positioning for self-advantage.

**Risk-taking driver 2: Resiliency and its opposite, rigidity.** Resiliency is the ability to rebound, adapt, and learn, even in the face of adversity and stress. Resilient people pick themselves up after being knocked down. They believe that something good always comes out of a bad experience. They create options. They persevere. They get the job done, sometimes by the force of their will. Its opposite is rigidity or inflexibility in response to change, rejection, or setbacks.

**Risk-taking driver 3: Self-acceptance and its opposite, victimization.** Self-accepting means to be approving of one's own behaviors or actions. Self-accepting people like themselves and their situations. They exhibit self-confidence. They are unlikely to say they're sorry about much, because they have few regrets. They don't try to be perfect. They like themselves, in spite of themselves sometimes. Its opposite is victimization. Victimized people complain and blame others.

If everyone on your team cultivated these drivers, your innovative capacity would accelerate rapidly. EE

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*Action: Make it your goal to truly embody the nature of one of these drivers.*