



Team-level creative skills

Reflection exercise

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Team level creativity¹

What happens when we combine our creativity? And in particular what happens when we interact, not simply adding our individual approaches together but combining them? We are all different in personality, experience and approach and these differences mean that we see problems and solutions from different perspectives. Combining our approaches, sparking ideas off each other, building on shared insights are powerful ways of amplifying creativity. The old proverb that ‘two heads are better than one’ is often true; think about creative partnerships in the musical world like Lennon and McCartney, Rogers and Hammerstein, Rice and Lloyd Webber, the Gershwin brothers. Look at the world of theatre and film and see how much of the success is not the product of a lone genius but a team of co-creators front and back stage who help make it happen. Look at business ventures and very often you’ll find a more than one person involved – Eric Schmidt and Sergei Brin (Google), Bill Gates and Paul Allen (Microsoft), Andy Grove and Gordon Moore (Intel), Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak (Apple).

Teams matter

It’s not just pairs but teams that are important – groups of individuals who come together to create something on a shared basis. Teams matter for many reasons – not just because they assemble a diverse mixture of skills and background but also because being in a team creates ways of working which are not possible alone. Diversity amplifies our openness, different cognitive styles increases the chance of novel associations, groups can provide support for the perseverance skills when the going gets tough, and feedback within the group can help us develop self awareness. Not for nothing do organizations focus on the team as the core unit to deliver innovation.

Whether it is project teams working on new product or service development or shop-floor teams helping to improve quality and productivity through their shared ideas and efforts, whether it is a special task force set up to drag the organization ‘out of the box’

¹ You can find out more about these skills and their importance for [creativity and innovation in our book – details here](#)

or a dedicated community of practice who work together to bringing their different insights to a common problem – the picture is still the same. Shared effort, shared creativity and a higher outcome.

And it's often at the heart of entrepreneurial start-ups. By now we have enough stories to recognise a pattern – the small group of friends huddled round pizza and coffee late into the night, the excited experimentation and review in the incubator, the full-on shouting matches which lead to the flash of new insight. High energy groups bringing (and often clashing) their ideas and enthusiasm to create the next cool thing.

This question has occupied researchers for a quite some time now and the good news is that there is quite a lot of common ground around the answer. In particular four key skills are important at the team level:

- Creating and sharing a vision
- Building psychological safety
- Supporting ideas
- Pushing the frontiers (with constructive conflict)

Creating and sharing a vision

Creating and sharing a vision involves developing a shared picture which has meaning for the team members. The skills described below are not just about generating a vision or a goal but about communicating it, sharing it and finding a common understanding of it.

Creatively successful teams are solution-oriented and driven to reach the goal together. In a team setting it is not about an individual reaching the goal - the whole team has to do so in order to be successful. So, measuring only your progress does not make sense. You have to find ways to measure the team progress, see the contributions of the individual team members to it.

It's also important to avoid the 'blame game' when things go wrong – and a key part of this is having shared approaches to how the team will deal with the surprises, roadblocks and pitfalls on their journey.

Below is a skill self-check on creating and sharing a vision. It will help you think about your own approach, your strengths and weaknesses and where you might wish to develop skills further. We suggest you rate yourself with a five-point rating scale:

1= not like me at all

2= not much like me

3= I cannot decide if I am good or bad at it, just doing ok

4= describes me to a good extent (but not exactly)

5= describes me exactly

Try to give some specific examples from your past behaviour to help you decide where to score yourself

Self-check: Creating and sharing visions

#	Core behavioural skills	Your score (1-5)	For instance <i>write at least one example of your own</i>
1	I have a clear idea of the future state of our projects and assignments		
2	I often talk with my colleagues and team members about our vision and ensure that everybody understands it		
3	I am able to cascade down a vision or strategy into specific goals		
4	I discuss my visions and goals		

	with others to achieve a mutual understanding		
5	I see clearly the gaps between the current state and the desired state and find actions/strategies to reduce them		
6	I discuss the gaps with my colleagues		
7	I discuss strategies and contributions for each team member		
8	I can focus my attention and energy on the activities related to achieving our vision and goals		
9	I encourage my colleagues and team members to focus their attention and energy on the activities related to achieving our goals		
10	I measure our mutual progress not just mine		

And here is a team-level skill-check on creating and sharing a vision in your team]. We suggest you rate your team with a five-point rating scale:

1= not like us (my team) / I do not agree at all

2= not much like us / I disagree to a certain extent

3= I cannot decide if we are good or bad at it, just doing ok / I neither agree nor disagree

4= describes us to a good extent (but not exactly) / I agree somewhat

5= describes us exactly / I completely agree

You can use this ‘fitness check’ in a number of ways. You can try and fill it in on your own, guessing at what the others might say. Or you can try to get them involved in completing it – which is likely to give a much more helpful picture. There are several ways you might do this – for example:

Do it as an anonymous team check. Hand out the team check to every team member, let them fill in the questionnaire, find a way to gather the results in an anonymous way (so it is not possible to reconstruct which answer is by whom), and then discuss the results openly in a team meeting.

Rate publicly and discuss in a team meeting. A variation of the procedure described above is rating together in a team meeting with sticky dots and then look at the results and discuss what is your general opinion in the team and what to do with it.

Team-check creating and sharing visions

#	Team behaviours	Score (1-5)	For instance <i>write at least one example</i>
1	The team vision and goals are transparent for all team members		
2	Team members participate in formulating a compelling vision		
3	The team has a mutual understanding about the vision and goals		
4	The vision is energizing for all team members		
5	The shared vision is a cornerstone of the teams goal setting process		
6	The team goals are considered worthwhile by all team members		
7	The team members are committed to the goals		
8	The team finds concrete actions closing the gap between current state and goal		
9	The team members are motivated to contribute to achieve the vision and the goals		
10	The team members measure the mutual progress towards reaching the goals.		



Psychological safety

Psychological safety is about feeling safe in a team environment to take interpersonal risks. As a single person one acts as a role model for psychological safety, either enabling or limiting it. Team members respect each other, sharing know-how and being prepared to admit errors. It depends on building a sense of mutual trust and provides a platform on which it is safe to engage in ‘constructive conflict’ – something which is a key resource in creative teams.

Once again there are questions for you as an individual and as a team member.

Self-check: Psychological safety

#	Core behavioural skills	Your score (1-5)	For instance <i>write at least one example of your own</i>
1	I give my team members a leap of faith		
2	I take risks in my team (and be a role model)		
3	I respect the work of other team members		
4	I'm ready to admit when I'm wrong or when I have made an error		
5	I speak up in the presence of others and encourage others to do so		
6	I try to get to know other team members to build up a strong relationship		
7	I'm happy to share my know-how with others in the team		

8	I'm happy to offer help to others and to ask for it when needed		
9	I accept that mistakes are made and do not hold them against my fellow team members		
10	I value and try to use the (unique) skills and talents of the other team members		

Team-check psychological safety

#	Team behaviours	Score (1-5)	For instance <i>write at least one example</i>
1	It is safe to take a risk on this team		
2	It is easy to ask other team members for help or to get them to accept it from other team members		
3	Members of this team are able to bring up problems and tough issues without raising objections		
4	Mistakes made by team members are not held against them		
5	No one on this team would deliberately act in a way that undermines the efforts of another team member		
6	Team members accept differences and value distinct talents of team members		
7	Team members are eager to share information about what does and does not work		
8	There are good relationships between the team members		
9	On this team, it is easy to speak up		
10	There's a high level of trust in this group		



Supporting ideas

The competence supporting ideas includes two modes of support: ideally (mostly via communications) and physically. In our self and team check we focus mostly on the communication side of support: sharing your own ideas and asking others explicitly for their ideas. It is about mutual exchange of ideas but also about helping this exchange take place. Another quite different facet of this competence is reflection about what's going on in the team creative process in order to become better. Giving and receiving feedback is an important part of it.

Once again there are questions for you as an individual and as a team member.

Self-check supporting ideas

#	Core behavioural skills	Your score (1-5)	For instance <i>write at least one example of your own</i>
1	I promote the mutual exchange of ideas		
2	I build on the ideas of others		
3	I let others participate at my ideas		
4	I do not criticize the ideas of others during ideas generation		
5	If needed, I moderate our process of moving forward to foster support for ideas		
6	I help actively to implement our ideas		
7	I actively support creativity and make it clear that it is a desirable behaviour		

8	I reflect upon our way of approaching idea generation and implementation		
9	I support team reflection		
10	I acknowledge other team members for their ideas		

Team-check supporting ideas

#	Team behaviours	score (1-5)	for instance <i>write at least one example</i>
1	Team members engage in mutual exchange of ideas		
2	Team members interact to develop new ideas together		
3	Team members assist each other in developing new ideas		
4	Team members help each other to implement new ideas		
5	Team members provide and share resources to help in the application of new ideas		
6	Team members provide practical support for new ideas and their application		
7	In this team the time needed to develop new ideas is taken		
8	Ideas are seen as property of the team not of individual team members		
9	Team members engages in team reflection to become better in creative settings		
10	Reflection is seen as a necessary way to improve creative output		

Pushing the frontiers

There are two main areas of this competence: searching for excellent ideas and constructive decision-making. Searching for excellent ideas is about refining, elaborating and improving ideas, be it one's own ideas or others. It is the commitment to not stop before there is an excellent idea. This has similarities with the 'willpower' competence we saw in the individual section but pushing the frontiers is also about the commitment to high standards (not just going on).

The second facet of pushing the frontiers is about constructive decision-making. This involves the idea of not always agreeing but instead enabling 'constructive conflict'. It is about fighting together for the best ideas and not against each other in a team.

Once again there are questions for you as an individual and as a team member.

Self-check: Pushing the frontiers

#	Core behavioural skills	Your score (1-5)	For instance <i>write at least one example of your own</i>
1	I monitor the work in our team to achieve a high standard of work		
2	I question the work in our team in order to become better		
3	I search for more information and ideas on our problem		
4	I critically appraise potential weaknesses in what we are doing in order to achieve the best possible outcome		
5	I care about the outcome of our work		

6	I measure our progress not just mine		
7	I explore different point of views		
8	I fight for the best solution without hurting fellow team members personally		
9	I try to integrate different opinions		
10	I push for the best idea with all my abilities		

Team-check: Pushing the frontiers

#	Team behaviours	Your score (1-5)	for instance <i>write at least one example of your own</i>
1	The performance in the team is constantly monitored to achieve a high standard of work		
2	Team members question the basis of what the team is doing without being reproached		
3	Team members share a high concern to achieve the highest standards of performance		
4	Team members appraise potential weaknesses to achieve the best possible outcome		
5	Team members are committed to a high standard of work and outcome		
6	Success and failure is assigned to the team as a whole		
7	Different opinions are thoroughly explored in the team		
8	Constructive conflict is the way to move forward for team members		
9	Team members integrate different opinions		
10	The complete team is stretching in order to get to a “wow” idea		

