

# Acquisitional Creativity: Improving Impact in Deliberate Organizational Change

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## ABSTRACT

Of all major change efforts within organizations, 70% fail to achieve their objectives. For a large part, this is caused by the mismatch of the strategy and the work culture of the organization that undergoes the change (Kerber & Buono, 2005). To successfully implement change in organizations, it is key to match the plans to the needs and wishes of the people within the organization and gradually guide the steps of change towards the future goal. In the business community, the popularity of creativity has increased greatly. The use of creativity techniques can target participants' motivation, readiness for change, and acquire insights on different perspectives within an organization. This paper discusses how these benefits can improve not only a design process, but also client acquisition activities.

**Purpose** – This paper describes the power of using creativity techniques to improve the succession rate of planned organizational change.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Using the research by design approach, the Discovering Desire toolkit was designed. Three iterations of the proposed design were performed. This paper presents the results of a study of how these different versions of the creative approach to a sales process were experienced by employees of a Dutch consulting firm and their clients. The concept was tested in four rounds in which the interaction was experienced by a total of 13 different participants, from both a consulting -and a non-consulting background.

**Originality/value** – This paper will propose an approach on how creativity techniques can be used within a sales process to improve the impact of planned organizational change. Studying the iterative design process, new insights and perspectives towards balancing the playfulness and formality of a session and balancing the leading and serving role of the facilitator arose.

**Keywords:** Creativity Techniques, Research Through Design, Acceptance Finding, Client Acquisition

## 1 Introduction

Of all major change efforts within organizations, 70% fail to achieve their objectives. For a large part, this is caused by the mismatch of the strategy and the work culture of the organization that undergoes the change (Kerber & Buono, 2005). To successfully implement change in organizations, it is key to match the plans to the needs and wishes of the people within the organization and gradually guide the steps of change towards the future goal. Creativity can be used to map the needs of individuals, understand problems, and explore future possibilities (De Bono, 1993). In a business context, creativity trainings are increasingly popular (Plucker *et al.*, 2020). These programs, part of the field of Creative Facilitation, can be used to engage participants in the change process and help organization members to stimulate their creative potential (Buijs & Van der Meer, 2014). Addressing the challenge presented by Kerber and Buono (2005), creativity shows potential for a possible solution and can increase the impact of planned change initiatives. Creative sessions can stimulate and excite participants, improving their motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity, fueling an organization's innovations (Plucker *et al.*, 2020).



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This paper describes the power of using creativity techniques to improve the succession rate of planned organizational change. A tool is developed from the perspective of consultancy firms to help their clients with their organizational change in the most effective and successful way. To engage the employees of an organization in an early stage, the creativity techniques should be embedded as early as possible in the project. During this project, in which a *research through design* method was used, it became clear that this can even be done already prior to the collaboration between the consultancy firm and the organization: namely in the sales process. This paper will propose an approach on how creativity techniques can be used within a sales process to Improve the impact of planned organizational change. This paper will also present the benefits of integrating creativity techniques in the sales process. In addition, this paper will share learnings on how to optimally implement the proposed approach.

## 2 Literature

### 2.1 Organizational Transformation

Organizational transformation is a process that enables organizations to operate differently in support of their business strategy (Deloitte, n.d.). These processes may occur in the entire organization, in business units, or on a functional level, leveraging behavior, skills and knowledge to drive change. This means that, no matter how big or small the change may be, all people in all organizations are involved and concerned with the change during a transformation (Senior & Flemming, 2006).

The importance of change has been widely recognized in both literature and practice. Due to the constant fluctuation of both external factors, such as demand and supply and customer needs, and internal factors like employee expectations, change is essential (Senior & Flemming, 2006). However, many present-day companies struggle to create meaningful, sustainable change (Stouten, Rousseau & Cremer, 2018).

To gain understanding and plan a structured approach to organizational change, decennia of research has been done on planned organizational change models (POCM's). Lewins theory forms the basis of many currently used theories (Rosenbaum *et al.*, 2018; Heijne *et al.*, 2018; Burnes, 2020). This model describing the process of change consists out of three steps (Lewin, 1947):

- Unfreezing (if necessary) the present level
- Moving to the new level
- Refreezing group life on the new level

The first step: unfreezing, addresses the fact that social habits and the needs, and wants of those involved have great influence on the success of change initiatives. Lewin states that some type of “inner resistance” may hamper change processes (Lewin, 1947). This resistance should be eliminated by “breaking the habit” and therefore unfreezing the status quo, before being able to move towards the future situation (Burnes, 2020). The simple 3-step process describes how change occurs and addresses the complexity of human behavior (Burnes, 2020) but does not describe the implications for change management and the complexity of it (Heijne *et al.*, 2019).

In 2009, Armenakis and Harris introduced a new key player in the process: the change recipient. This important role derives from the belief that a good strategy will only be successful when employees embrace and support the change effort. As change recipients are ultimately the ones to implement the change, understanding their motivations and incorporating their experiences into the change process will provide important insights into how to best approach the transformation process. The change model described by Armenakis and Harris consists out of 3 steps:

- Diagnosis
- Creating readiness

- Change adoption and institutionalization

The first stage, *diagnosis* focusses on recognizing problem symptoms to identify the root of the problem. Misdiagnosis can lead to addressing the wrong problem to solve and then initiating inappropriate change. Targeting the right problem also helps with the first steps of getting the change recipients on board. The employees should believe that a discrepancy (a need for change) exists for the tackled problem. The goal of the proposed change should be clear and achievable in the eyes of the entire organization (Armenakis & Harris, 2009). *Creating readiness* is to sell the benefits of the change to the change recipient and thereby ignite the implementation stage of the transformation process. Readiness is defined as “the cognitive precursor of the behaviors of resistance to or support for organizational change” (Armenakis *et al.*, 1993). As proven by Harris and Cole in 2007, change recipients should embrace and recognize the importance of change before being able to implement it. Key in the final step, *change adoption and institutionalization*, is to change commitment to the current state to commitment to change (Armenakis, Harris & Field, 2000). Agreeing with Lewin’s theory, the creation of new habits takes time. Until the institutionalization is complete, pressure on the change should still be performed (Kotter, 1995).

## 2.2 Organizational Culture

Organizational culture plays a great role in the implementation and success of change initiatives. An organizational culture can be seen as a set of shared mental models, based on values, habits, rules, and traditions (Schein, 1995). Informally, one could describe it as “How things are done around here” (Martin, 2002). Smollan and Sayer (2009) have proven that the employee’s experience of the existing organizational culture can shape their response to strategic, cultural, or operational changes. When the culture within an organization fits an individual’s values and beliefs, the resulting organizational commitment can result in a positive attitude towards proposed change. Therefore, it is important to take the culture of a company or team into account during all stages of the transformation process.

Next to improving the response to initiated change, the culture of a company can fuel the desire for change. When an organizational culture is purposefully built to stimulate a proactive attitude and celebrate innovation, the environment can let both the company and the employees thrive and shine (Vandermerwe & Birley, 1997). The research of Ekvall (1996) also shows that the organizational culture, described here as organizational climate, can either stimulate or hamper processes such as creativity and innovation.

## 2.3 Readiness for Change

Another important factor that influences the impact and success rate of innovation and change within an organization is the readiness for change. Armenakis and Harris describe this as: “the cognitive precursor of the behaviors of resistance to or support for organizational change”. The resistance to change is one of the most frequently mentioned hurdles in relation to the organizational acceptance of new ideas and change initiatives (Buijs, Smulders & Van der Meer, 2009). This also resonates with the “inner resistance” that must be overcome by breaking social habits (Lewin, 1947). Readiness for change is the exact opposite. Readiness for change has a positive mediating effect on the success of innovation processes within an organization (Jones, Jimmieson & Griffiths, 2005).

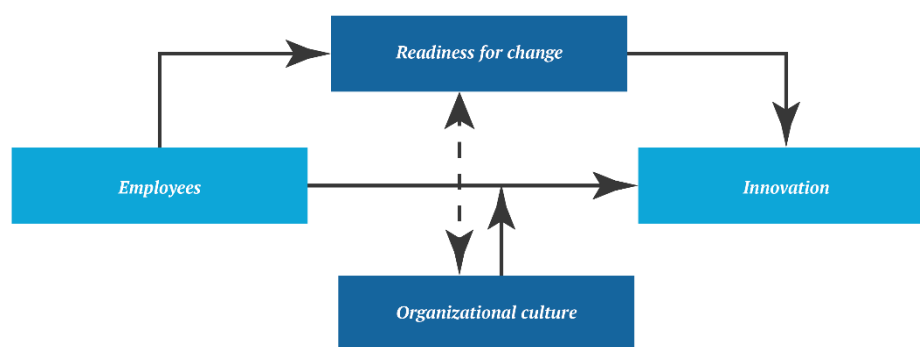
Weiner (2009) defines readiness for change as “psychological state in which organizational members feel committed to implementing an organizational change and confident in their collective abilities to do so”. This distinguishes two important elements: The capacity and the commitment to change. The *capacity* refers to the organizational processes needed to implement the change: e.g. task demands, resource availability, and situational factors (Weiner, 2009). The *commitment* refers to the readiness in a more emotional way.

Commitment gives the change recipient the confidence that change is needed. It also includes the feeling that the initiated change is right for the company and will be supported (Combe, 2014).

Armenakis, Bernerth, Pitts and Wakler (2007), define five aspects of readiness for change, which they call the five beliefs:

- *Discrepancy*: Employees must believe that a need for change exists. A difference between the current reality and the desired situation helps legitimize the need for change.
- *Appropriateness*: The change recipient believes that the change initiatives tackle the root of the problem rather than simply fighting the symptoms.
- *Valence*: The initiates change, and the outcomes associated with this shift are attractive from the change recipient's perspective.
- *Efficacy*: The change recipients believes that they can implement the initiated change and therefore capable of reaching this attractive goal.
- *Principal support*: Employees must believe that the initiated change is supported by them who matter for making this into a success.

To improve organizational change processes, change agents could address as many of these beliefs, if not all. They can be used to address the root of change resistance and facilitate a more fluent change adoption. Organizational culture and readiness for change have a proven effect on the success of change initiatives (figure 1). The organizational culture has a moderating effect, meaning that the influence of this factor can be conditional (Ekvall, 1996). The readiness for change has a mediating effect (Jones, Jimmieson & Griffiths, 2005). Organizational culture also has a slight effect on the readiness for change. Culture can drive the commitment levels and capacity to change within an organization (Combe, 2014). On the other hand, organizational change, fueled by the employees' readiness for change, alters organizational structures and habits which are part of the organizational culture. These factors are interconnected (dashed arrow in figure 1).



**Figure 1:** The effect of readiness for change and organizational culture on innovation and each other.

## 2.4 Creativity

Organizational change processes and creative processes are strongly intertwined. According to Basadur (1997), organizational change can be improved by “encouraging employees to master new thinking skills which increases their creativity, motivation, and commitment”. Not only does the individual creative capacity of employees play a critical role in the survival of an organization through reinforcing change processes, it also has great influence on the company's productivity and efficiency in daily operations (Liu, Jiang, Shalley, Keem, & Zhou, 2016).

De Bono (1993) defines five important objectives for which creativity can be of great help. First and foremost, creativity can be used to improve a situation, product or process. A key point in this process is to rethink the status quo. In a context without any defined errors or limitations, the need for creative

problem solving is high, as logical problem-solving techniques will no longer suffice, and completely new ideas should be opened up.

A problem-solving process also needs creative influences when the standard approaches cannot provide a fitting solution (Gronau, Ullrich, Weber, Thim, & Cegarra, 2012). In addition, even when standard approaches can succeed, an organization can greatly benefit by using creative techniques to find an even better solution (De Bono, 1993).

Thirdly, whereas companies can simply wait for opportunities to occur, a better competitive position is obtained when opportunities are created. Using the creative ability of the organization and its members can put the company ahead of the game. This goes hand in hand with the fourth use case: envisioning the future. To embrace innovation and the changing world, companies are required to envision future scenarios and consequences of choices. With the uncertainty of the future, it is wise to lay out a variety of possible futures, preparing for multiple alternative realities. This use of different perspectives is why thinking about the future should always incorporate creative thinking (De Bono, 1993).

Lastly, creativity can be a source of inspiration and motivation. Creativity can increase people's interest in their actions and challenges. The interaction between motivation and creativity goes both ways. People are more likely to perform creatively when they are personally interested and challenged by a task or problem (Amabile, 1988; Amabile 1996; Lui *et al.*, 2016). Lui *et al.* (2016) describe 3 factors to this motivation:

- *Intrinsic motivation*: the level of engagement caused by their personal interests, enjoyment and perception of challenge.
- *Creative self-efficacy*: the belief that one can produce creative outcomes.
- *Prosocial motivation*: the engagement caused by the desire to benefit others.

Efficacy shows to be both important for enhancing the creative capacity of an individual as to improve the readiness for change concerning an organizational change initiative. Plucker, Runco, and Simonsen (2020) point out that design activities and training programs can be used to excite, stimulate, and increase curiosity which in turn improves the intrinsic motivation of people. A creative session could be an example of such a design activity used to improve the intrinsic motivation and thereby increasing the creativity of the individual, fueling innovation.

## **2.5 Problem Evolution**

Research marks the problem definition as the most important component in a creative process (Okuda *et al.*, 1991). New angles, or frames, shape the perception of a problem or situation. Considering the use of different frames allows change agents to gain fresh insights and new perspectives on a problem (Spencer, 1990).

Dorst and Cross (2001) state that the problem space and the solution space co-evolve together. There are always surprising elements within a change -or design process. These surprises make for the necessary interchange of information between the formulation of the problem and the creation of ideas for a solution. Gaining more insights into the context or possible solutions throughout the proceedings of the change process allows you to develop and refine the problem as you go. A more refined problem statement again makes for a more refined and fitting solution.

This ability to change one's approach to a problem is often defined as a key element of the creative process (Amabile, 1988; Franco & Assar, 2016; Basadur & Basadur, 2011). It allows change makers to redefine problems or aspects of it to see beyond the immediate situation and obvious solutions (Franco & Assar, 2016). This cognitive style also allows people to easily understand complexities. Using creativity, people can tap into alternate ways of thinking and unblock old patterns or habits. This idea has similarities with the POCM of Lewin (1947), emphasizing the importance of unfreezing patterns before moving towards a

desirable future. In practice, this means that the formulation of a problem will be an iterative process throughout the complete creative process, constantly questioning the direction, resulting in new problem statements as a process proceeds.

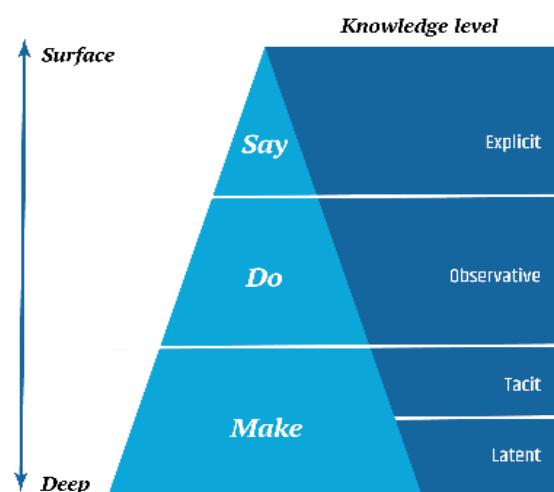
## 2.6 Creativity Techniques

Being able to perform the process of creativity can be considered a skill (Gaut, 2010) and therefore be trained and facilitated (Runco & Nemiro, 1994; Dong *et al.*, 2017). In the business community, the popularity of these creativity training programs has increased greatly (Plucker *et al.*, 2020). Creativity sessions and workshops can be used to help organization members to use and stimulate their creative potential (Buijs & Van der Meer, 2014). These sessions are often led by professional creative facilitators. These services make use of creativity techniques to assist organizations and teams in their creative processes (Meinel & Voigt, 2017; Buijs & Van der Meer, 2014). The most renowned creativity techniques is Osborn's (1953) brainstorming. However, a great diversity of techniques and tools exists (Meinel & Voigt, 2016; Buijs & Van der Meer, 2014, Heijne & van der Meer, 2019).

The facilitator should aim to use "the right technique, considering elements such as the stage in the creative process, the context of the problem, the skills of the participants and the time at hand.

In addition, the choice in technique may need to nurture participation (Sjolie, 1997). With the sensitive subject of organizational change, not all participants will have a positive attitude towards a proposed change initiative. Sjolie (1997) points out that the higher the level of communication, the greater the common knowledge and empathy towards other perspectives, the deeper the trust, and eventually, the more successful a change process. Managing the deeper levels of knowledge, especially the tacit knowledge, presents to be a challenge in the business world (Leonard & Sensiper, 1998). By exploring other levels of knowledge through doing -and making activities with creativity techniques, tacit knowledge can be expressed and shared (Sanders & Stappers, 2012). The resulting recognition of the experience and expertise of others can help increasing empathy, team bonding, and even allows to consider more perspectives to the problem or situation (Leonard & Sensiper, 1998).

Creativity techniques and active listening can then be used to turn a pessimistic attitude more positively and openly. Furthermore, the use of creativity techniques can increase productivity when time is of the essence (Barzilović, Stojanović, Djerić, Velojić, & Milošević, 2011).



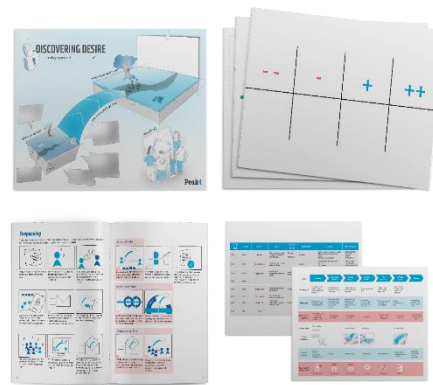
**Figure 2:** The levels of deepness of knowledge reached by different research activities. Adaptation of Sanders and Stappers (2012).



### 3 Method

To enhance a projects impact, a tool is to be designed, fitting the research area of this project and the context of the researched company. As an initial concept, the Discovering Desire toolkit was designed, based on the learnings and insights from the literature review. This toolkit consists out of three separate parts: a session, a canvas, and a facilitator manual.

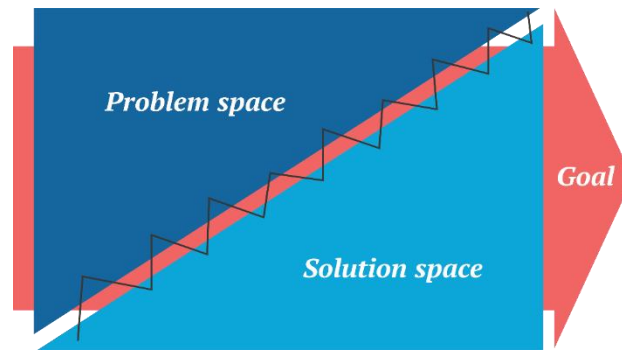
During the session, a consultant and its client really get to know the problem, build trust in oneself, each other, and the process, and increase commitment and drive to the initiated change. After the session, both parties are left with a tangible product in the form of a filled in canvas, summarizing the patterns that underlie the client's problems, a shared vision statement, and suggestions for possible first steps to move towards the desired future. The manual assists the consultant in using the tool and discusses the greatest learnings of this design process.



**Figure 3:** *The Discovering Desire toolkit.*

The further design and optimization of this concept was done through research through design. Using this approach, design activities were performed in the process of generating knowledge (Stappers & Giaccardi, 2017), where found theory is immediately tested in context and used as new data to improve future prototypes. The process of this kind of research, is iterative: multiple cycles of designing and testing are done in a cycle of continuous improvement. The number of cycles needed are not predetermined. They depend upon the findings after each round.

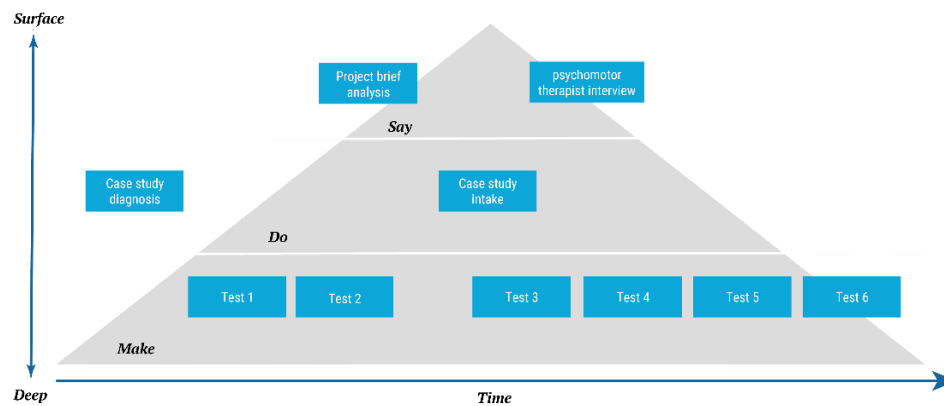
To make sure that this process of learning by doing is guided, while still embracing the process of the co-evolution of problem and solution (Cross & Dorst, 2001), a more recent version of this model is used.) An important element in this new model by Storm, van Maanen and Gonçalves (2019) is the goal. Essential to a well-executed creative process is to have a clear project goal. Storm, van Maanen and Gonçalves (2019) state the importance of “the consciousness of where you currently are and where you want to go” can even assist in a well-performed co-evolution of the problem and solution space. For this project, the projects goal as stated in this paper's introduction is used as a guide.



**Figure 4:** *The framing model. An adaptation of Storm, van Maanen, and Gonçalves (2019).*

### 3.1 Design Cycles

For this research, 6 cycles were performed and combined with some additional research on the context and current approach of the company. All activities are visualized in figure 5.



**Figure 5:** *All design and context research activities plotted through time on the different levels of deepness of knowledge.*

The first two tests were performed to shape the initial concept, try out the match of creativity techniques with the company and experiment with the first creativity techniques. These explorative tests were done with employees of the consulting company and fueled the discussions on the current approach of the participants.

After the three-part concept (session, canvas, and facilitators manual) was designed, all parts were tested and optimized in four design cycles. The first round was again performed with consultants of the researched company and mainly focused on the session and the used creativity techniques.

The fourth test assisted a project team of one of the company's clients in a project brief reframing session. This round focused on the refining of the canvas and session style. To fit a broader and more realistic context, the more refined concept was tested with 4 members of an external organization in cycle 5.

For the final round, the manual and balancing of the style was put to the test with an internal session, facilitated by one of the researched company's consultants.

## 4 Results

The prototype test gave insights into points of improvement to feed the iterative process of the tool development. Many creativity techniques were tested on effectiveness and fit to both the company and the other used techniques. The designed canvas was optimized to create a strong and appealing summary displaying all found perspectives. And the manual was developed to provide a clear explanation of the tool

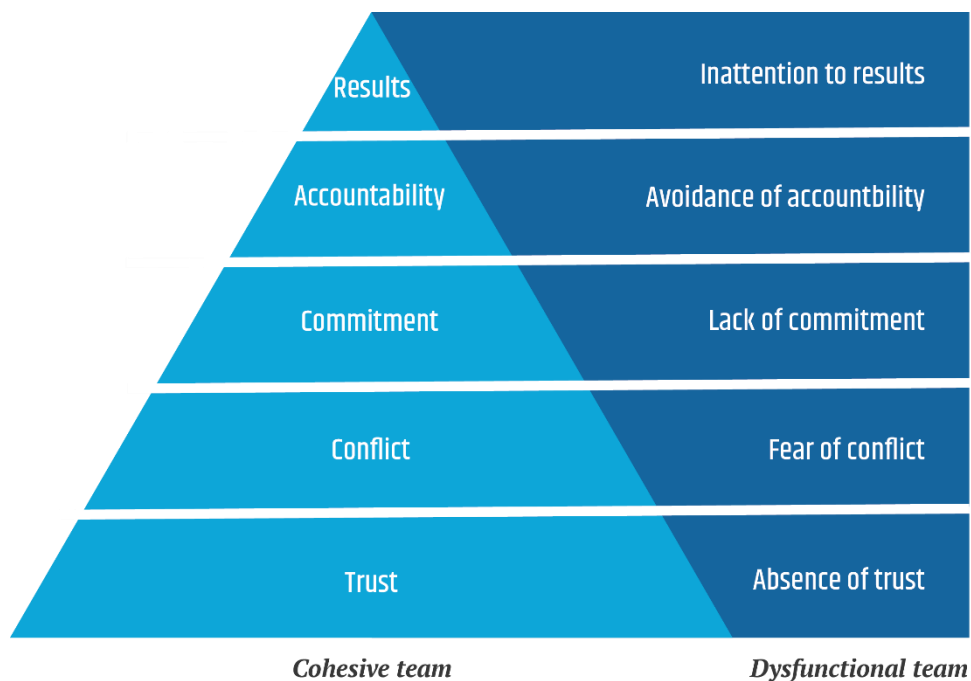


including argumentation for certain design choices and useful tips and tricks. Major findings were done on the topic of acquisitional creativity and the facilitation style which is discussed below.

#### 4.1 Acquisitional Creativity

During the prototype cycles, the power of creativity and its fit to the sales process of a consultancy project were emphasized. Following the current approach of most consultancy firms, project proposals and pitches are based on a basic inquiry, set up by the potential client. To be able to interpret an inquiry correctly, a consultant should get to know the company further and familiarize themselves with the perspectives present within the client company. Creativity is powerful in discovering and combining these different perspectives. Implementing creativity at the start of a project allows for a first iteration and alignment on the posed problem.

Besides this first step of reframing, it also targets the important subject of building trust. According to Patrick Lencioni (2012), trust is the basis for a functional team at the workplace. Without trust, the layers above, conflict, commitment, accountability, and result, cannot be achieved.



**Figure 6:** *The 5 (dis)functions of a team. Adapted from Lencioni (2012).*

In clinical psychology, it is believed that before starting a change process, getting to know one another, and create a fertile soil for change and vulnerability is of the essence. In a first meeting, it is important to really get to know each other, share expectations, and set shared goals. A sensitive process can only succeed when this foundation is solid (J. ter Riet, personal communication, April 21, 2022).

The inspiration for this project was the following statistic: From all major change efforts within organizations, 70% fail to achieve their objectives (Kerber & Buono, 2005). What if the error does not lie with the implementation of change initiatives, but rather with the objectives set at the start of the process? The client inquiry is often the base for quotations, propositions, and project planning, but this often does not capture the real problem, complete project size or envisioned goal of the problem owners. Before signing a deal or committing to an assignment, it is important to question and align on the problem and the goals. This alignment should not be made by agreeing on the set goals of one party (now often the client), but by co-creating them before the start of the project.

## 4.2 Facilitation Style and Company Fit

Two major dilemmas for the facilitator came to light. Firstly, a facilitator must find the right balance in playfulness and formality when designing a session. The style of the activities has a great influence on the result of the creative session.

Secondly, a facilitator should balance the leading and serving aspects of their role during the session. Both dilemmas are widely discussed in literature but seem to have different implications when focusing on these workings in practice.

## 5 Conclusions

### 5.1 The Design

The aim of this project was to investigate how creativity techniques can be used to improve the impact of change initiatives. This project was placed into the context of Dutch consultancy company Peak4. During the literary research, readiness for change was found to be an important factor in the implementation of planned change initiatives. The use of creativity techniques also proved to be a great way to target the client's motivation, or readiness for change and acquire insights into the situation and different perspectives within the client's organization, targeting knowledge of multiple levels of deepness. Creativity showed to be especially powerful when implemented in the early phases of a consultancy project as it can be used to build trust, initiate an iterative process, and incorporate and create understanding on all important perspectives by reframing the inquiry into a shared project goal.

The iterative approach and testing with different projects, participants, and context raised questions on two important dilemmas concerning the facilitating style of a creative session: playful vs. formal and leading vs. serving. The findings on these two dilemmas are discussed below.

## 6 Discussion

### 6.1 Discovered Dilemmas

The iterative approach and testing with different projects, participants, and context raised questions on two important dilemmas concerning the facilitating style of a creative session: playful vs. formal and leading vs. serving. The findings on these two dilemmas are discussed below.

#### 6.1.1 Playful Versus Formal

Concerning the first dilemma, playful vs formal, many researchers in the field of creative facilitation are advocates for a playful session style. Play drives creativity (Hautopp & Nørgaard, 2017; Tan, Vezanni & Eriksson, 2020; Wheeler, 2020; West, 2015) and creativity fuels innovation within organizations (Heijne *et al.*, 2021; Hautopp & Nørgaard, 2017; Tang *et al.*, 2020). Tang *et al.* (2020) and Wheeler (2020) state that the use of playful activities can support the exploration and acceptance of new perspectives. This enables organizations to remain open to new opportunities and findings (Wheeler, 2020). It also stimulates to engage, experiment and question their preconceptions (Tang *et al.*, 2020). This playful approach stimulates a mind that is suited for high-level problem solving, creativity, flexibility and the ability to allow for constant change (Hautopp & Nørgaard, 2017). Furthermore, the use of play can make sensitive subjects and complex problems more abstract, sometimes even funny, making them more accessible. Creating some distance between the reality and the participants can lower the threshold for discussing these topics.

Playfulness can stimulate openness, intrinsic motivation and can assist in building collaborative relationships that go past organizational hierarchies (West, 2015). This openness together with taking the time to truly listen to other's experiences and perspectives makes for these close, sustainable bonds. Playful

techniques have a positive effect on the ability to work and converse in teams, which in turn influences the patience of the participants and their ability to listen actively to others (Tang *et al.*, 2020).

During the prototype tests, some participants expressed to be hesitant to use some of the techniques themselves as they were concerned that they were too playful. Play could have a negative effect on the organizational transformation. This mainly depends on the receiving end of the change process: the client company. The aversion to play is often derived from bad experiences from the past. Previous experience with poorly executed play can create resistance that is not easily relieved (West, 2015). To turn this attitude around, it is advisable to slowly progress from more formal and structured approached to more playful activities (Nixon, 2004). Starting a session with a more structured activity can ease the group into a more playful way of working. In the tested prototype, this idea was also implemented by starting the session with Metaplan, a fairly structured approach. A misconception is that systematic techniques fit more technical, corporate fields, and more abstract techniques fit more creative sectors (Baillie, 2006). Baillie (2006) has proven that the acceptance of a more playful approach is not related to the field of work, but rather dependent on the personality of the participants, and the organizational culture.

Key for the approach to preparing a Discovering Desire session and balancing the playfulness and formality is the constant reflection on the process and results (Schön, 1983). The fear of going against the expectations and skeptical attitude of some clients can be legitimate in some cases, however, the power of play tends to be slightly underestimated by many consultants. Their pre-conceptions that a corporate client will be better served by a more structured approach is not necessarily true.

An important aspect that has received little attention in literature on the playfulness of a creative session, is the character of the company facilitating the creative sessions. In the context of a consulting company, and especially considering the implementation of the creative session into the sales phase of a process, the presentation of the personality of the consulting party is important as well. With the aim to select future clients on their fit with the consultants strategy, staying true to the company's character is especially important. During the tests, some consultants expressed hesitance towards the playfulness of some session elements. Important to consider in the future use of the tool is to balance not only the playfulness and formality, but also to balance the fit to the client company and the consulting company. In the preparation of the session, the consultant needs to recognize the power of play and emphasize company's style.

### **6.1.2 Leading Versus Serving**

The role of the facilitator has been a topic of discussion since the early beginnings of the field of creative facilitation. Many researchers define the role of the facilitator as serving, having the main objective of supporting the group's behavior and the creative process to be as effective as possible (McFadzean, 2002; Wheeler & Valacich, 1996; Isaksen, 1983). In Isaksen's 1983 model, the division of content and process are clearly visible. It emphasizes that the facilitators knowledge on the subject should only be capitalized from the content and information provided by the resource group. Parnes (1985) even states that a good facilitator can guide a session without having any content-related expertise on the subject. This neutral position towards the content is seen as essential to allow the client to keep ownership of the content and produced result (Isaksen, 1983). The process and chosen activities should make participants feel empowered (Baillie, 2006). This fits the belief the importance of efficacy, one of the 5 aspects of readiness for changes.

Others, however, argue that a neutral positioning as described above is impossible as facilitators will always bring bias and preconceptions into the session (Tang, 2020). The author of creativity technique brainstorming Osborn (1953), even advised facilitators to think about own ideas and suggestions before the start of the session to keep the flow going during the session. Buijs and Van der Meer (2014) build on

to this idea as they advise facilitators to use knowledge on the subject to inspire participants and guide the process towards a deeper level of knowledge. According to Heijne and Van der Meer (2019), knowledge on the content is essential for steering the group into the right direction. For correct interpretation of the discussion, the facilitator should understand the problem (Heijne & Van der Meer, 2019; Gordon, 1961). The Delft iCPS model emphasizes a balanced integration of both process and content, serving and leading (Buijs & Van der Meer, 2014). In this search for balance, important to decide is when to let the process flow as it goes and when to interrupt to guide the group through the process. The amount of support needed, both process and content wise, depends on the design phase, the team composition, and team members' relationship with the facilitator (Becuwe, Tondeur, Pareja Roblin, Thys, & Castelein, 2016). These differences were also found in the different prototype tests of this design project. However, the findings of this project would suggest that other factors could influence the desired role as well. In the fifth test, the participants had little to no experience with creative sessions and therefore needed more guidance and interference during the session to come to results. In test 4, the group had more experience in these activities, and there the neutrality and distance of the facilitator towards the content was explicitly mentioned as positive in the evaluative interview. The experience of the participants could have an effect on the role of the facilitator as well.

When focusing on the sales process, the positioning of the consultant is very important. The consultants can use this opportunity to show off their qualities in building connections and getting to the root of the problem. Contradicting the literary focus on using own knowledge to keep the flow of the ideas of the participants going, the researched consulting company wishes to showcase its own creative capacity as well. By asking deepening questions, submitting provocative statements, and sharing initial ideas, it hopes to convince the client that they are the right party for the change process. This suggests that the goal of a creative session should not always be formulated only from the perspective of the resource group or problem owner, but can also incorporate the objective of the facilitator. Nevertheless, the output of the session should always feel like a creation of the client to keep ownership of the content and produced result (Isaksen, 1983). This goes hand in hand with the theory on readiness for change, which plays a leading role in this project.

## **7 Further Research**

Although this project is specifically directed at the Peak4 context, some findings could be used for further research to benefit the field of creative facilitation. The solution could not be generalized but should be interpreted as a case study. The two dilemmas found in the prototype tests provide some new insights and perspectives towards balancing the playfulness and formality of a session and balancing the leading and serving role of the facilitator. This study suggests further research on the influence the character of the company facilitating the creative sessions has on the style of the session and its activities. Furthermore, from a consultancy perspective, the goal of the consultancy agency itself should not be forgotten when considering the role of the facilitator in a session. Current research mainly focuses on the effect of the objectives of the client and session itself but leaves out another important party: the facilitator.

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