



on creativity.

Paul Sewell
Lessons Learned Analyst,
JCID, JWC

We all want to be inspiring or unique; there is an app for everything in our digital age, but not for the muse of creativity. Or is the “muse” one of the myths surrounding creativity?

CREATIVITY IS REGULARLY CITED as one of the top three traits of successful *FORTUNE 500* companies.⁽¹⁾ Exxon Mobil, Hewlett Packard, Google, Apple: all are market leaders because of their constant ability to innovate in ever changing markets. Despite this recognition given by the world’s most profitable companies, creativity is something that is rarely taught in our education systems. Who among us could say that we have been educated in this vital skill?

Part of the reason is because creativity is seen as one of those “soft” skills that only some are born with. Also, creativity has been severely mishandled in the popular literature. Bookstores and libraries are full of books on the topic with titles like, “1001 ways to be creative” or “500 tips for being creative at work”.⁽²⁾ These books give empty, useless hints like “wear different coloured socks to work”, or “walk backwards to get a different perspective”, all with the belief that if you are “wacky” or “off the wall” you will attract groundbreaking ideas. This view of creativity has caused many understandably to run in the opposite direction. At the core though are a number of enduring myths about creativity, which are to blame. These myths have done so much damage to our culture’s approach to creativity.

⁽¹⁾ TED Talks, Ken Robinson.

⁽²⁾ A general rule here: any book with a big number in the title should be avoided. Especially, when the advice is followed by lots of exclamation marks.

Myth 1: You have to be born creative

This is the idea that your genes dictate your creativity. This could not be further from the truth. There is no evidence to prove that this is true, but it still persists. Rather, this is confused with the fact that creativity functions differently to the normal functioning of the mind and so may seem alien. *The truth is that anyone can be creative.*

Myth 2: Creativity is just for the arts

Another widely held myth is that only those who paint, sing, dance, write poetry or wear colourful clothes are allowed to be creative. So, it does not leave much hope for the traditional view of the military! This is a huge misconception, which focusses on a perception of creativity needing to be loud, bright and colourful. In reality, creativity can be found in every domain. In fact anyone who is at the forefront of their discipline uses creativity to some degree: footballers (Messi), engineers, physicists (Einstein and his train of thought experiment), chemists (Jonas Salk), architects (Zaha Hadid) etc. *The truth is creativity is available to anyone regardless of their interests or profession.*

Myth 3: You have to wait for creativity to strike

Unfortunately, even those who believe they are creative are still blocked by another myth. This is the belief that you

cannot be creative all the time; instead you have to wait for it to arise. This idea has been firmly cemented in the world of art with talk of satisfying one’s muse. While some may believe this to be true, it does not need to be. As this article will show, creativity can be reduced to simple techniques, which can be used *at any time*. There is no need to wait for the midnight hours, or when you are in the shower. By learning simple techniques (described in the next article) you can actually generate creative ideas within minutes. *The truth is that creativity can be employed at any time to help with any task based on need.*

TO SUMMARIZE, here are the truths about creativity:

- Anyone can be creative;
- Creativity is available to anyone regardless of their interests or profession;
- Creativity can be employed at any time.

Where to from here? More specifically what does this mean for an organization such as NATO? The next article will follow through on these by giving you a handful of techniques, which you can add to your toolbox. However, before we move forward, it is important to address the biggest obstacle to your creativity: your dull mind.

The mind serves a powerful function and one of its main roles is to protect us. Since birth, it has worked to identify what was safe (the face of our



■ ■ Creativity can be found in every domain.



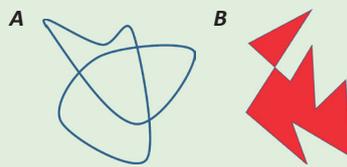
mother) and what was dangerous (fire, the cold, loud noises, PowerPoint). And since then it has continued to refine the spectrum of safe and dangerous by recognizing patterns. Your mind is constantly scanning our environment, identifying what it senses, and categorizes it into the patterns or “boxes” it has. So for example, if it sees a dog, it identifies it with the “dog” box in our mind. This is important such that we do not have to learn everything anew each day.

This makes our life as automatic as possible. Think about all the things you do without thinking every day: showering (hopefully daily), brushing your teeth, driving to work. Ranging from the mundane to the complex, our mind works hard to ensure we do not have to concentrate on every single step. Think back to the first time you drove a car. You were probably a nervous wreck as your mind struggled to pay attention to your hands on the steering wheel, the pressure of your foot on the brake and acceleration, while checking the road ahead, the side and rear mirrors and on and on... Now compare this with how you drive to work (while sending a text message and brushing your teeth at the

same time). This is the mind at its best, making our live as automatic as possible. There is no doubt that this is a vital function of the mind. However, for this reason, it also reduces our ability to be creative. This is because the mind is constantly trying to fit in what we see, hear, feel, etc., into those pre-existing boxes we have in our heads. There is however a big danger here. But first as an example, answer the following question:

Which is which?

1. *Bashumba*
2. *Gnashklak*



If you are like 99 percent of people who see this, you will say that **Shape A** is **Bashumba** and **Shape B** is **Gnashklak**. Why? Both of these words and shape were newly created by the author⁽³⁾, and so you have never seen them before. Yet, most people who look

at these will have the same response. This is your mind at work, trying to categorize these into pre-existing boxes. Second example: Take a moment to look at the picture below and answer the first question: *How are these blades of grass similar?* Chances are you will come up with typical responses: they are all green, they are grass, they point upwards.



Next, look at the picture again and answer the second question: *How are they different?* What did you see now? That perhaps there are different shades of green, the blades of grass are different lengths, some are growing in different directions, some are frayed at the end and so on. This simple example shows that by simply asking how things are different, your mind literally finds

⁽³⁾ Apologies, if accidentally, I am swearing in your language.



new associations rather than relying on the pre-existing boxes in our minds. So, here, we see already that the simple conscious act of asking how is this case different, literally opens our minds to see things that most do not see. This is the essence of creativity.

This simple example has enormous implications, as this kind of scenario plays out all the time every day. Take for example, you are given a task. Your mind then automatically thinks about how this is similar to all the other tasks you have done in the past (similar blades of grass). This is why we suffer from the “cut and paste” syndrome in NATO, we simply run our old programmes in the mind and do the same work again. Racism is another, more extreme example of this function of the mind. This is where

we judge someone new we see from Nation X to be the same as every other person from the same Nation X and so treat them accordingly.

What is creativity?

So, if these are true, what actually is creativity? There are many definitions but the one which empowers the individual and banishes the myths we spoke about earlier is the following:

The ability to break out of pre-existing ideas, habits, tendencies and create new ideas and concepts of value.

— Edward de Bono

This definition however, while useful in giving us an initial direction, is not enough. If we want to actually make

creativity a part of our daily functional lives, we need actionable techniques, which we can use to generate more creative results. **THE NEXT ARTICLE** will give you a selection of hands-on techniques, which you can apply immediately. Techniques which do not require creative jeans, bright clothing, or a blessing from your muse. Instead these techniques will be more tools you can add to your toolbox. †

Contact the author by email on:
paul.sewell@jwc.nato.int



LEFT: AFGHANI DESIGNER, MINE KAFON, HAS TAKEN THE IDEA OF A TUMBLEWEED AND USED IT AS ARTWORK FOR MINE CLEARANCE.

CDI 2012

This year's Civilian Development Integration (CDI) Course was held between 14-16 August 2012 at Rosenkildehuset in Stavanger. The course, which marks its third year, provided functional and inspirational presentations and discussion topics focusing on participants' personal and professional development skills. The course had 18 NATO civilian attendees, including two guests from Allied Command Transformation. CDI co-founder Mr. Garry Hargreaves said the main takeaway is that we don't have to be a genius like Steve Jobs to achieve enduring success in our jobs. "We can never perfectly transform to meet the future but we can try to close the gap between where we are today and where we might be tomorrow. To do this, we have to identify our top goals and priorities and build an organizational culture of common understanding, positive mind-set, trust, openness, motiva-



tion and respect. We also have to create a more effective social network to understand each other's concerns and desires better. Highly effective organizations consist of people who believe in what they do and who value the contribution their organization makes," he said. Lieutenant Colonel Mark McMillion who gave a presentation about the impact of Emotional Intelligence on behaviours, said: "When someone volunteers to attend the CDI, when they agree to spend extra time in

a work environment without extra pay, I know those are solid people who are committed to improving themselves and making the JWC more effective. The CDI is helping to create a specific culture for NATO civilians, which in turn will make us better. It will help us deliver better training opportunities to our Training Audiences."

— Inci Kucukaksoy, JWC PAO

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