

Individual Reflection: Creativity, Leadership, and Innovation: A Self-Assessment

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Part 1 – Innovative Leader Analysis

Characteristics That Inspire Innovation

Anyone can hold the position of managing partner or acting-director, but a fraction of those in these positions actually possess the capacity to move and inspire others, to spur them on to their own success, be it personal or professional. De Jong & Den Hartog (2007, p. 1) write of specific and relevant leadership behaviors which are observed to influence employees' innovative behavior when displayed by leaders. There is a fundamental difference between employers taking action at the direction of a superior and out of their own desire to follow the leader. Again, there is a distinct difference too between a team member who views himself or herself as a laborer and those who view themselves as partners in the organization. This form of inclusive leadership gives rise to team members who step up to being an active part of the company and begins with a leader who is himself admirable and innovative, but also inspires innovation in others, and that is the subject of this discourse.

Leader Characteristic Inventory

In an honest review of a colleague, whose name is Ed Clay, I found myself having to stop listing leadership qualities and characteristics because I was running out of room to describe them all. Appended hereto please find Appendix A wherein I have compiled a list of thirteen characteristics which I have found to be measurable and notable in the above named individual and which I would like to further develop, emulate, and adopt within my own life. The characteristics which I have identified are as follows, listed in no particular order: Direct, clear/concise, helpful, creative, empathetic, bold, self-sacrificing, supportive, outgoing, able to delegate, agile, influential, and gratuitous. For context, I will share that I first met Ed perhaps

just a couple years short of two decades ago where I, and many others, worked under his leadership producing recordings of church worship sets and sermons for a national television broadcast. I was a lot younger then, just a teenager, and was always mystified by his air of confidence and wealth of knowledge and experience which he seemed to draw from. He cultivated a creative environment and led a team of eight to produce recordings weekly, which he then edited in a post-production process to be broadcast. Due to the characteristics which I have eulogized above, and perhaps scores more which have remained unnamed, he led his team to perform technological tasks which, prior to meeting him, none had ever performed nor undergone training for.

Compelling Case for the Importance of Characteristics to Individual Success

He engaged stakeholders by educating, caring, and inspiring which encouraged observers to become followers. Ed developed rapport with the team and through the aforementioned traits influenced them. The team members were proud of their individual successes, content with their contributions to the project, and supportive. I remember the monthly trainings, the pizza and soda party which always accompanied them, and the effective cross-training whereby team members were led to train each other: A morale-boosting and mutually-beneficial endeavor. During one training session in particular I remember Ed bringing all of the disparate team members into the edit-bay, and there were a lot of us since we worked in shifts, and there he trained our eyes to spot broadcast camera equipment and technology workers in top quality recordings of a band's live performances. His lesson was hands-on, it was informative, and he is a leader independently qualified to lead. He was respected, appreciated, and endeared by the team. On the day he moved on to other ventures, the team mourned his leaving, but he had left us

all better than when we started; he had united several dozen individuals and made us an effective team. He promoted innovation in the organization and inspired us all; an effective leader, and catalyst.

Part 2 – Self-assessment of Dimensions of Leadership That Foster Creativity

In synthesizing the studies of Dyer et al (2009, p. 2) and their analysis of many of the business world's top innovators and their attempts to determine common traits, I assert that it is not the presence of certain *inherent* traits which separates these innovators from the rest, but that they consistently employ, according to Dyer et al (2009), nine dimensions which promote breakthroughs in creative thinking. Five of these dimensions are referred to as discovery skills, and the other four are patterns of action. The discovery skills are associating, questioning, observing, experimenting, and networking.

Discovery Skills

I have often discussed associating, but simply called it by another name: Pattern recognition. *Associating* is the ability whereby one is able to connect seemingly unrelated problems, ideas, and scenarios. It is in these moments that the mind thinks, “This is like that time when...” and it fills in the blank (Dyer et al, 2009, p. 4). Associating is the evolution of another discovery skill: Observing. *Observing* is more than just taking in new sights, tastes, smells, sounds, feelings, and emotions, but also about the mind coming up with uncommon ideas in response to common stimuli and scrutinizing what is observed. *Questioning* is the title Dyer et al (2009, p. 5) gave for what comes from scrutinizing what is observed. The questions are usually expository and hypothetical in nature and examine the ‘why’ and the ‘what if’ (Muic, 2019).

After questioning, *experimentation* naturally follows and then *networking*. Experimentation is devotion of time and energy to testing ideas. Some may think networking is about connecting with others to sell one's ideas, but to the innovator, networking in this context is meeting different people to get diverse ideas and extend one's own depth of knowledge.

Of the five discovery skills, I employ observing and associating the most. In my work and professional life I am like a sponge absorbing information. When I am being trained on a new task, I commonly express to others that if I see it done, then I can duplicate it. With this I have found that having a depth of knowledge and having experienced a lot in my life that I can better make associations. I possess a level of intuition and discernment, and I think it is a valuable attribute that aids in making correct identifications. Sadly, for many, questioning is an often excluded discovery skill. This is unfortunate, since a lot can be learned by asking the *right* questions. In last week's course material we covered similar topics. *Questioning*, the discovery skill, is about asking questions to fill voids in one's own understanding. There is absolutely nothing to be embarrassed about in asking questions. When I am at work I find myself asking many questions of my boss about *why* certain procedures are carried out. Knowing the "why" helps hone the *association* discovery skill. It is actually quite surprising how inter-related the concepts are. My principle employment these days is my work as a certified paralegal. But my greatest passion is work within the realm of information technology. When I seek to improve my paralegal skills I employ *networking* and, albeit over the internet, I am seeking the advice of those who are where I want to be and who have overcome what I am facing. In networking it is crucial to assemble diverse and inclusive teams (Coy, 2018, para. 5). The more diverse the background of the constituent team members, the more depth of knowledge they will have and the more potential they will have when associating what is being encountered with what has

already been seen. This will produce more moments of over-coming as hurdles are bypassed easily which would have befallen others more easily. In the information technology realm, I have always learned by *experimenting*. These discovery skills are all inter-connected and I find myself best able to grow through the effective use of each, depending on the scenario in which I find myself.

Patterns of Action

The other four dimensions, to wit; cultivating new thinking, comfort with change, risk tolerance, and collaboration, are each important and together help with *association*, the aforementioned discovery skill. First, cultivating new thinking is acting on the proclivity to discover new ways in which to think about a given problem (Porter, 2014, para. 10). I consider myself to be an analyzer and I satisfy my natural curiosity all of the time by examining things that happened in my life, both recent and in the distant past, and I do this periodically and often revisit thoughts, moments, and experiences in my mind. This dimension is essential to good leadership. A good leader won't simply continue in something just because it is "the way it has always been done", but will instead challenge the status quo (Dyer et al, 2009). This dimension extends into seeing problems in a circumstance which others sometimes do not even see. This is great because it protects me from uncertain risks and enables me to be effective for my organization with doing the same. Cultivating new thinking is an aspect of a good chess-player's game and it applies perfectly to the business realm. Second, comfortability with change, is a mandatory trait of a successful leader. Essentially this boils down to the fact that change is inevitable, but it goes a step further and has to do with acknowledging that change is mandatory to bring about innovation. The way in which this relates to the *association* discovery skill is that

an uncomfortability with change will cause the leader to actually stand in his own way as he rejects any new endeavors, areas where he may experience a loss of control, or opportunities for growth. All change should be seen as opportunities for growth and generally change can be embraced. Third, risk tolerance is a pattern of action which is associated with great leaders. I can improve my ability to be more risk tolerant by being more prepared which involves the application of the five discovery skills to master relevant aspects of my profession. When a leader is adverse to risk, generally he is not maximizing growth: Personally, professionally, or for the organization. A modicum of risk is expected when taking chances on new employees, trying a new manufacturing/production method, and when leading others (Rampton, 2018, para. 20). I aspire to lead and take more risks and it starts with anticipating potential outcomes and making necessary adjustments to overcome obstacles in my personal and professional life. I try to adopt an inquisitive nature and a blanket “question everything” approach. Asking the expository and hypothetical questions, the ‘why’ and the ‘what if’ leads to becoming a more innovative leader (Dyer et al, 2009). Fourth and lastly, collaboration is a pattern of action. *Collaboration*, conceptually, is akin to synergy within a team atmosphere, wherein the effect of the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. I have a couple of professionals I turn to for help when I have an IT question or problem which feels beyond my current skillset. Having that network of people to turn to is invaluable and the pattern of action known as *collaboration* works closely with the networking discovery skill to enable better leadership. Working with teams isn’t always easy for people and some do better alone with their own thoughts, but there is a certain cap which is reached when one works alone, and it can only be pierced with collaboration, when many people come together to solve a problem. I find that I work well in teams and provided everyone pulls their weight, I find the experiences rewarding personally and professionally.

Part 3 – Analysis of Findings

Main Lessons Learned About Myself as a Leader

In conclusion, I have found that through self-analysis, with respect to the nine dimensions as aforementioned that I do fairly well with the discovery skills. I am already very observant, I pose a lot of expository and hypothetical questions and I become pretty good at associating new things by connecting them to previous learning. As for the discovery skills, I could do with improvement in networking. Unfortunately my circle and sphere of influence is really not all that large. I would benefit more from bringing new collegiate influences into my personal and professional life. At times, I envy those who work for larger organizations because they have more colleagues to bounce ideas off of.

With respect to the other four dimensions, which can largely be categorized as patterns of action, I think I exhibit cultivation of new thinking and risk tolerance with regularity but would benefit from becoming more comfortable with change and more collaboration. Earlier I addressed and acknowledged the benefits of collaboration and the need to network with others in my field. As for comfortability with change, I foresee the most major setback to realizing success in this goal is getting comfortable with where I am at. If I renew the desire for reaching new heights, naturally risk will have to be embraced.

In total reflection, I would say that the main lessons that I have learned about myself as a leader include being more direct and bold. The expression someone once coined that fortune favors the bold is more than just a cute one-liner, but actually seems to be an expression of truth. Boldness can come with increased confidence in my own abilities and in believing in my own success, however being direct requires a certain comfortability with confrontation and not being

afraid or intimidated of dealing with it. Sometimes, I'd rather just avoid confrontation and thus, I take calculated risks to avoid confrontation. I have learned that I presently possess more gratitude and empathy than I did a decade ago and it has helped me with collaboration, a key pattern of action for the innovative leader.

The Most Important Dimensions

The nine aforementioned dimensions, associating, questioning, experimenting, observing, networking, cultivating new thinking, comfort with change, risk tolerance, and collaboration are very important to a leader's success in leading others and in a way that inspires innovation in subordinates. As exemplified in Dyer et al (2009, p. 3), at most companies, top executives feel responsible for facilitating the innovation process, and they do this through the discovery skills.

In all, the most important dimension to me is cultivating new thinking. It can be put into action through seeking to discover new and innovative ways to view personal and professional problems (Porter, 2014, para. 10). To this end, four dimensions become employed, to wit; associating, questioning, observing, and experimenting. I have always been a heavy analyzer and so these discovery skills have always been a little more natural to me and it contributes greatly to good leadership.

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Appendix A

WMBA 6020: *Fostering a Culture of Innovation*
 Week 7 Individual Reflection: Creativity, Leadership, and Innovation: A Self-Assessment
 Leader Characteristics Inventory

This inventory tool will help you to identify and describe characteristics of leaders that inspire innovation. You will use this form for your self-assessment part of the Week 7 Individual Reflection. Consider the characteristics of leadership that foster a creative environment and identify them in the left column. Use the right column to add a brief definition of the characteristic and an example of how it has been or is being exhibited by the chosen leader.

Leader Characteristic (Add characteristics you wish to develop in yourself.)	Description and Example of Characteristic (In this column, briefly explain the characteristic and provide an example of how it was or is being exhibited by the chosen leader.)
Direct	My chosen leader, Ed, is always direct and to the point. He does not waste time when disseminating information or repeat details unnecessarily.
Clear/Concise	Ed is always clear in his verbal instruction, questions, or statements. He does not mince words or try to pontificate or choose buzz words or use unnecessary phraseology.
Helpful	Ed is always willing to lend a helping hand. He has a balance between his professional and personal life but still seems to always make himself available.
Creative	Ed is very creative. He seems to always be able to think abstractly, and then apply realizations in the here and now.
Empathetic	Ed always believes the best in his colleagues and cares about their troubles as if they were his own.
Bold	Ed never hesitates from a moonshot idea if it is well concocted.
Self-sacrificing	Ed takes responsibility for the projects and as team leader always takes the consequence if the project is unsuccessful. He does not pass-the-buck or lay blame.
Supportive	Ed supports his team members and provides assistance as needed.
Outgoing	Ed's infectious personality always brings smiles and invites positivity. He is always able to speak to diverse audiences.

Able to Delegate	Ed is able to recognize talent in others and assign and delegate tasks to them as he sees fit.
Agile	Times change, and so does technology, but Ed is always able to adjust for inconsistencies and the unexpected, without getting mad or upset or letting these surprises take him off of his A-Game.
Influential	Ed exudes an air about him and his personality is conducive too. He has a way with people and is influential.
Gratuitous	Ed is grateful to his supportive team and always thanks those that help bring his projects toward success, no matter how minuscule their role may have been.

Type any additional notes here about the Leader Characteristic Inventory that will help you as you begin your self-assessment.

Each characteristic is descriptive of my chosen leader, Ed. I have each of these characteristics in parts and bits, but definitely have selected him as a role model for me and for guidance in developing all of these leadership characteristics, and more, to the fullest extent.