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How to Foster a Creative Culture within a Further Education Setting

ABOUT FETL

FETL is the sector's first and only independent think-tank and was conceived to offer sector colleagues the opportunity to spend time thinking, on behalf of us all, about the concerns of leadership in today's complex education and training system and to do so in order to advance knowledge and ideas for the sector's future.

As an independent charity and think-tank, FETL works to build and promote a body of knowledge, to inspire thought and to help prepare the FE and Skills sector for the challenges it faces now and in the future.

Our vision...
...is of an FE and Skills sector that is valued and respected for:

- Innovating constantly to meet the needs of learners, communities and employers
- Preparing for the long term as well as delivering in the short term
- Sharing fresh ideas generously and informing practice with knowledge

Our mission...
...is to provide via opportunities, research grants, Fellowships and other opportunities, building the evidence base which the FE and Skills sector needs in order to think, learn and do, to change policy and to influence practice.

Our value proposition
We are loyal to the future, focused on developing the leadership of thinking in FE and Skills, as well as making a difference through scholarship that adds value for the sector as it moves forward.

Our values
As an organisation we strive to be:

Bold
We encourage new ideas to improve all aspects of FE and Skills leadership

Valued
We are creating a body of knowledge to transform both leadership learning and learners' lives

Expert
We use evidence, networks and resources sensibly and impartially

Proactive
We provoke new ways of working to deliver excellence in learning within FE and Skills

Responsible
We use our voice and assets wisely at all times

RUTH ALLEN

*FETL Fellow and Development Manager
for The Cornwall College Group*

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Ruth Allen is Group Development Manager with the Cornwall College Group, a major provider of further education which comprises seven main campuses and four satellite sites, and attracts around 30,000 learners each year. Her research focuses on leadership strategies which 'foster a creative culture in further education', a critical issue in a sector in which pressures of policy turbulence and accountability make the creation of collaborative, imaginative workplaces particularly challenging. The Cornwall College Group has made serious strides towards addressing this challenge. In 2014 it launched a new 'Strategic Intent', designed in consultation with key stakeholders through a 'Big Conversation' which succeeded in engaging students, staff, governors and the local business community. An internal restructure followed, with the introduction of new leadership styles and new opportunities for development and the encouragement of creativity. The aim is to cultivate creativity throughout the organisation.

Foreword

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This research advocates everything that the Further Education Trust for Leadership (FETL) stands for: A clear vision, leadership that provides autonomy and passion, freedom to think, a forum for discussion (including my fellow Fellows). I thank you for giving me this opportunity.

With thanks also to The Cornwall College Group for your support and expertise.

And finally, to everyone in Further Education. Never stop.

#IamFE

Introduction

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The purpose of this research was to establish what the indicators of a creative Further Education (FE) college are and how FE leaders can harness the creative ability of their staff in times of increasing complexity. Furthermore it seeks to identify cultural and practical indicators that might aid an FE college in determining and enhancing its creative capacity.

In his 2004 paper 'Leading others to think Innovatively Together', Basadur suggests that worldwide, organisations face a common challenge: *"the need to improve their performance to capitalize on rapid change"*. This view was supported by the 2010 IBM report 'Capitalising on Complexity' that found that the world's private and public sector leaders believe that a rapid escalation of 'complexity' is the biggest challenge confronting them; and that it will continue and accelerate in the future. They identified that creativity is the most important leadership competency for organisations trying to seek a path through this complexity.

Since leaving school at 16 I have spent my education and working life in the Further Education Sector. My role focuses on development and research, supporting The Cornwall College Group in its journey through these challenging times. In doing so, I frequently observe and reflect upon the rewarding nature of our work as a college and as a sector and have seen the passion in the eyes of those pursuing a common purpose. This research will act as a conduit for me to give something back to colleagues, the College and the sector – a framework for those in the sector to harness and enhance its creative capacity.

Context Analysis

The FE sector is one of the most complex in education. The definition of the sector is not well understood by the general population (Panchamia 2012) and yet for those working within it, its value and contribution to our society and economy is unarguable.

FE's complexity is driven in part by the vast array of influences on individual colleges and these are summarised in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Influences on the FE Sector

The stability of FE has been greatly impacted by these layers in the past three decades; changing governmental policy and shifting departmental responsibilities, lack of 'organisational memory' regarding past policies, the constantly changing skills debate, and lack of coordination and agreement of responsibilities between departments (City and Guilds 2014).

However, despite the complexity and instability of the FE sector, its ability to offer choice and opportunity whilst equipping the population with all the skills to meet future needs, ensures its place in the education offer of the UK (Panchamia 2012).

Literature Review

Defining Creativity

This study adopts Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's definition of creativity: "creativity is any act, idea, or product that changes an existing domain or that transforms an existing domain into a new one" (1997, p.28).

Csikszentmihalyi's work on 'flow' covered key aspects including the process of creativity, the need for expertise, and the need for the field to be the validator of creative ideas. This thinking extends the process of applied creativity - the actual process of being creative (Basadur 2004) - further by recognising the receptivity of the field in which you are creative as a limiting factor in the fruition of creative ideas.

Features of a creative organisation

In its 2010 research IBM identified organisations that had turned increased complexity into financial advantage over the previous five years. These 'standout' organisations share and embody three characteristics:

- Embodying creative leadership – innovative, effective engagement with customers, partners and employees.
- Reinventing customer relationship – rethinking existing practices of service.
- Building operating dexterity – becoming more flexible to use complexity as an advantage.

Carmeli et al. (2010) also considered that an organisation requires efficiency and adaptability in order to pursue and reap the rewards of a sustained competitive advantage. Whilst adaptability is crucial, the balance of the two is a key determinant of a creative culture. For an organisation to be adaptable it needs a foundation that allows 'new' developments to be integrated back into the organisation and become the norm. Amabile, in a landmark paper entitled 'How to Kill Creativity', suggests that creativity is "undermined unintentionally every day in work environments that were established – for entirely good reasons – to maximise business imperatives" (Amabile 1998, p.77).

Many researchers (Basadur 2004; Amabile 1998; Pink 2001) have noted that the key for an organisation was the articulation of its mission, purpose and/or values, and this must be core to all decision making. Without it, methods for gaining efficiency can result in 'chasing the money' or reactive compliance (ETF et al. 2014). Creative ideas, in this context, will not steer or help the organisation achieve its mission and strategy can suffer from both external and internal misfit (Carmeli et al. 2010).

Politis (2010) suggests that employees' creativity makes an important contribution to organisational innovation, effectiveness and survival. For employees to be creative there must a work environment that supports the process of creativity (Politis 2010).

Creative Leadership Styles

Sternberg et al. concluded that leadership is not "creative or not creative" (2003, p.471). It can be creative in different ways and types depending in part on leaders but also on organisational environments.

A number of models of creative leadership have been proposed under different names. These models include transformational leadership, emotionally intelligent leadership, visionary leadership and charismatic leadership. Which of these models are congruent with our understanding of 'creative leadership' has been the focus of much research, and whilst the findings have shown no singular definition, there is a set of characteristics displayed by leaders who are considered to be creative, and the success of such leadership is determined largely by the organisational environment (Sternberg et al. 2003).

Politis (2010) found that participative leadership styles foster creativity and that employees are more creative when they are given high levels of autonomy (Amabile 1998; Pink 2001). It was for this reason that Politis used the self-management style of leadership for his own research, suggesting "it is reasonable to expect that the leadership style that focuses on specific techniques that encourage employees to develop greater autonomy, shared commitment, and self-motivation … is essential to influence the behaviour of employees in creating a creative work environment" (Politis 2010 p.5)

Innovation leadership, by providing the necessary guidance and atmosphere, can assist and encourage employees and managers to adjust to new changes (Yukl 2008). A critical aspect of these leaders' behaviours relates to getting managers and employees involved in the change process. Yukl also discussed that transformational leadership provides both social and idea support which should encourage followers to explore their individual creativity. According to Jaussie and Dionne (2003) transformational leadership, when combined with role modelling creativity, produces greater individual creative performance than either of these two leadership styles alone.

Finally, the propulsion model of creative leadership (Sternberg et al. 2003) recognises the importance of leaders using the working environment or culture as a determiner in taking an organisation forward. This model differentiates between leaders who accept the current paradigms of an organisation and those that do not. Creative leadership that accepts current paradigms is often found in organisations with strong, winning cultures and as such the leader does not attempt to defy the crowd, merely move it to a new location. Leaders who do not accept current practices, and who propose new paradigms are referred to as charismatic

and transformational, and are most likely found in organisations that believe that they must change to survive.

Sternberg et al. also suggested one further type, a category that attempts to integrate existing paradigms to create a new one. Looking at competitors or their own history, these leaders select the best elements to create a new paradigm. These are the 'Synthesisers' (Sternberg et al. 2003).

Creative Leadership within an Organisation

In complex organisations leadership is often shared, with a growing body of evidence suggesting that "the top team, rather than the top person, has the greatest effects on organizational functioning" (Carmeli et al. 2010, p.341).

'Leading in Volatile Times' (ETF et al. 2014) advocates leaders who aim for non-hierarchical management structures to ensure that leadership is distributed through the organisation, with top executives ensuring that relevant systems and corporate cultures are in place. Employees must understand how every challenge fits into the strategy of their department and organisation. Key challenges for customers must also be understood to translate them into the solutions that will help the organisation meet its own strategy (Basadur 2004).

Drawing on the work of Politis (2010) and Amabile (1996) eight determinants of the work environment for creativity have been suggested. The eight dimensions are:

- organisational encouragement (+)
- supervisory encouragement (+)
- work group supports (+)
- freedom (+)
- sufficient resources (+)
- challenging work (+)
- workload pressure (-)
- organisational impediments (-).

These conditions evolve out of the context, social and work conditions of the organisation, and Politis (2010) suggests that their impact is conditioned by the perceptions of individuals and their work history.

Amabile (1998) suggested that employees will be creative when they are given adequate resources to conduct their work, when their work is intellectually challenging, and when they are given high levels of autonomy over their own work. Organisational support and evaluation of new ideas is also necessary to encourage employees' creativity. Rewards and bonuses, particularly those that drive an individual's intrinsic motivation,

were reported as essential ingredients in the process of creating a creative work environment (Amabile et al. 1998). This is supported by the work of both Csikszentmihalyi, (1996) and Pink (2011) whose work on 'Flow' and 'Drive' (respectively) identified the balance between sufficient challenge and skills capability as a driver for an individual's creative input.

Systems and structures can improve efficiency and process reliability (Basadur 2004) and ensure that common activities are carried out in a uniform way across the organisation, thereby enhancing the effects of leadership behaviours. Yukl (2008) discusses how encouraging innovative thinking is more likely to increase innovation when organisations have a programme to facilitate ideas, a climate of safety for risk-taking, and appropriate rewards for creativity.

In the absence of such a programme, employees may doubt that innovative ideas will be supported and eventually adopted by the organisation. Striking the balance is critical; programmes can also limit the use of leadership behaviours, as Yukl (2008) stated it is difficult to empower employees who must follow complicated rules and standard procedures.

Research by Basadur et al (2004) suggests a multi-stage model for the process of creativity that has proven effective in enabling people in organisations to increase creative performance and communicate more efficiently throughout the process.

Stage IV
IMPLEMENTING
Creating options in the form of actions that get results and gain acceptance for implementing a change or a new idea

Stage I
GENERATING
Creating options in the form of new possibilities – new problems that might be solved and new opportunities that might be capitalized upon.

Stage III
OPTIMIZING
Creating options in the form of ways to get an idea to work in practice and uncovering all the factors that go into a successful plan for implementation.

Stage II
CONCEPTUALIZING
Creating options in the form of alternate ways to understand and define a problem or opportunity and good ideas that help solve it.
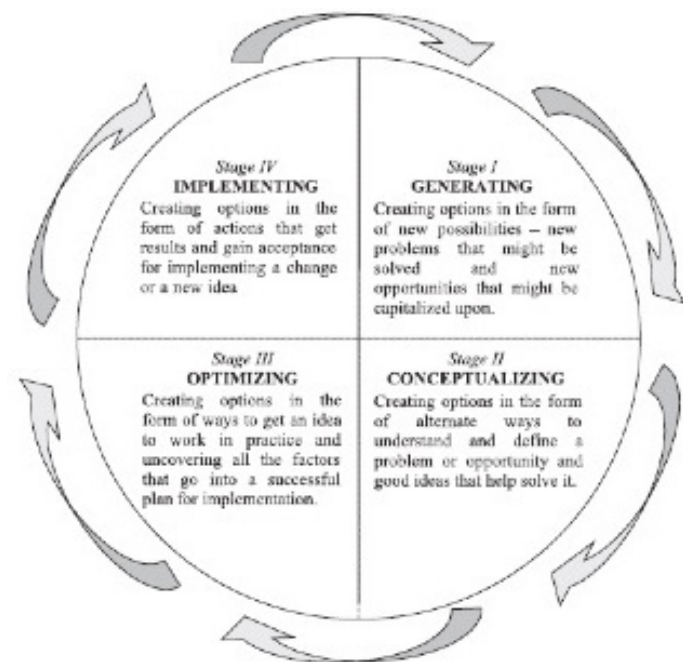
Figure 2: The Creative Process (Basadur, 2004)

Basadur's research demonstrated that teams were more innovative when they had heterogeneous preferences for the different stages of the process than when they demonstrated homogenous preferences (2004). This was supported by the paper 'Leading in Volatile Times', which concluded that leaders should consciously build difference into their teams as this can "support innovation and help manage risk" (ETF et al. 2014, p.26).

The research by Basadur (2004) offers more than a tool to achieve adaptability. He suggests that the process offers a way to bring creative performance in to the mainstream of an organisation's way of life. Recognising the multi-stage characteristics of the process aids in the implementation of another aspect of the research: incubation. Amabile et al (2005) found a 'next-day' boost in creativity during their research on affect and creativity, and proposed that creative insight can be fostered by incubation periods ranging from one night to considerably longer.

Training and development is an essential component of applying this process. It helps to shape colleagues understanding and appreciation of the different styles and capabilities needed at critical points in the process (Basadur 2004; 157 Group and ETF 2014). Building this activity into leadership programmes further enhances the culture, and when combined with aspects of competency models can be a valuable tool in establishing the development needs of current and future leaders (Hollenbeck et al. 2006). Commitment to change can be improved by a collaborative creative process. Basadur (2004) observes that individuals who are asked to implement predetermined solutions without understanding of how they came to be are less committed to success that those who feel they have a degree of ownership of the solution.

The research of Stoll and Temperly (2009) found that creative leadership was not successful where issues such as feeling undervalued, trust, collective responsibility, professional learning, and time and space were not dealt with. This was supported by the work of Basadur (2004), Amabile (1998) and ETF et al. (2014).

The following figure displays the recommendation put forward by IBM (2010) in order to craft a creative organisation and encapsulates all the aspects discussed.

Figure 3: Crafting a Creative Organisation (adapted from IBM 2010)

Research Approach

This research was designed in accordance with a pragmatic approach, ensuring that a flexible design method could be used (Robson 2011), and allowing the freedom to utilise different ways to access data as the research matured. In particular this approach allowed for movement between quantitative and qualitative methods with inductive reasoning aiding the conversion of observations into theories (focus groups) and then assessing those theories through action (survey) (Morgan 2007).

Research Questions

The primary question explored *"how to foster a creative culture in a further education setting"*.

This allowed the freedom and flexibility to consider perceptions of creativity within one institution, and how to enhance, or create, the culture the FE sector needs as a whole to challenge complexities.

Data Collection and Analysis

Primary data was gathered from one FE College: The Cornwall College Group (TCCG). A collaborative research approach was used to engage staff in the process. In gathering primary evidence it was essential to explore the ways in which participants defined creativity, what they believed the enablers and disablers of creativity to be and their views on organisational creative cultures.

Data was collected through an online survey open to all staff, which provided both qualitative and quantitative data. The survey was designed using key findings on creativity and creative leadership from relevant literature (Stoll and Temperley 2009; Politis 2010). Four focus groups were held to gather further qualitative data. The focus groups had three elements. The first was to ask participants to consider photographs of global figureheads and select those perceived as having the necessary characteristics for leadership in FE. In the second element participants chose from provided words to construct sentences that resonated with TCCG. Finally a group discussion considered the enablers and disablers of creativity within the organisation.

An inductive approach was used to analysis the results of the survey. The survey response was insufficient to be statistically significant (275 out of a population of 2000). However, each question was analysed to discover trends. The definition of creativity was analysed for the most commonly occurring words or phrases, the enablers and disablers were both analysed for the popularity of answers and in the case of enablers the need for multiple stimuli. Questions regarding the organisational culture were analysed to indicate how agreement (or disagreement) altered as you moved away for 'personal' indicators to 'organisational' indicators.

The focus groups gave a much richer depth of conversation that provided a story behind these results.

Limitations and Ethical Considerations

This research was limited by the survey response and in a wider context, by the focus on one institution. These limitations were mitigated by considering the findings in the wider context of available literature and both evidence bases contribute to the recommendations.

Anonymity of the participants was the largest ethical consideration. Individuals cannot be identified within the results. The methodology for this research was written in accordance with, and agreed by, the ethical approval process provided by the Institute of Education.
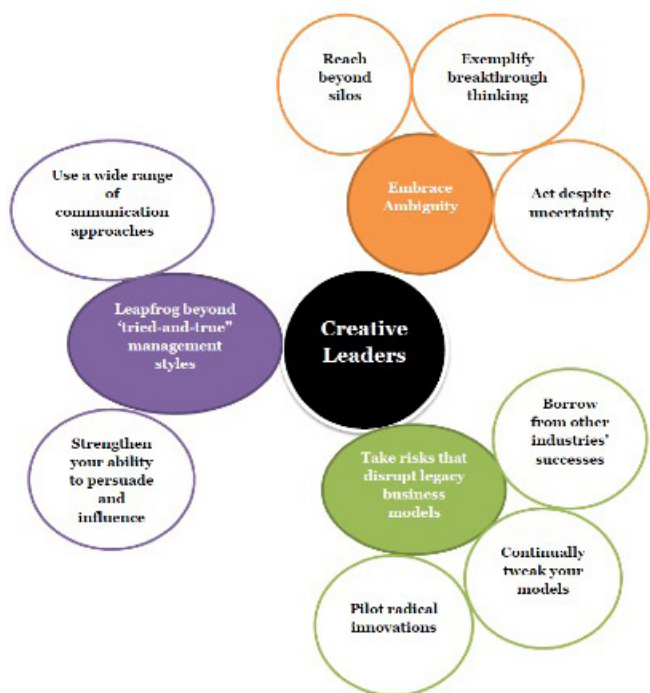
Findings and Discussion

The findings are based upon a faithful reporting of participant views expressed in the questionnaires and focus groups.

Defining Creativity

The focus on this aspect was to discover how participants interpret the term 'creativity' with respect to their place of work.

Figure 4: Word Cloud of most frequently used words

- A number of responses indicated that creativity is a process; not a thought, but an action in response to a stimulus resulting in something innovative or alternative.
- The use of 'Ability' suggests that participants believe creativity is something you have or don't have.
- The use of 'Autonomy' and 'Freedom' suggests a conception that these are a pre-requisite to being creative.

The Enablers

The results of the survey suggest the majority of participants require a varying set of stimuli in order to be creative, with 87% of respondents signalling a need for two or more stimuli (Figure 5).

Not needing to always be around other people or always needing personal space - they require a mixture of both. This view fits well with the understanding that creativity is a process and that individuals will require different stimuli at different times.
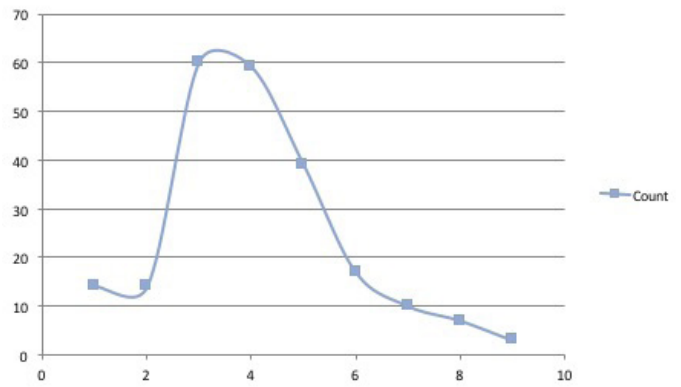

Figure 5: Counting the number of enablers required

When the organisation seeks to join people together to solve a problem or challenge, they should be aware that certain spaces may not be conducive to creative thinking for all participants. Freedom to use different physical spaces at different times within the creative process can enhance an individuals or teams outputs.

Whilst pressure and urgency can be stimuli for creativity, not everyone can respond. Those participants line managing indicated that pressure and urgency were stimuli (42% agreement versus 24% of non-line-managers agreeing). This may be a result of a desire to be viewed able to work under-pressure; a trait that may be considered a good working ethic.

'Time' is a word that was used repeatedly within the open comments and whilst some participants felt that given too much time individuals are compelled to overload themselves with information, clouding their ability to see the big picture and therefore make decisions. Others felt that there was no 'time' available in order for them to think creatively or act upon creative ideas.

The focus groups allowed in-depth conversation around the enablers. Within the groups there was a sense of organisational culture being the biggest enabler of creativity. It was considered that a culture that breeds confidence and stability, with staff understanding the vision of the leadership team will be rewarded with staff investing their time, taking ownership and driving the vision forward.

Common to the questionnaire responses and focus groups was the belief that clarity is key; clarity of vision, of ownership, processes and boundaries enables staff to be creative:

> *"Empowerment and trust needs boundaries."*

> *"Clear vision helps people to focus - then it's easier to innovate."*

> *"In FE you have to be innovative, an enabler and take people along with your vision and direction."*

The Disablers

The survey responses offered few insights into what the key disablers to creativity within the organisation were. Participants considered themselves to be creative individuals; unafraid to take risks and confident to assert their ideas. There were less positive responses regarding being encouraged by the organisation to be creative, knowing how to move ideas forward, and availability of resources.

There was a small difference between participants who have line-management responsibilities and those who don't, with those having line management responsibilities feeling more encouraged and knowing how to move ideas forward. This may be attributed to the complex communication networks in the organisation, where staff 'higher-up' in management are more likely to receive timely communications; they may also have been with the organisation longer.
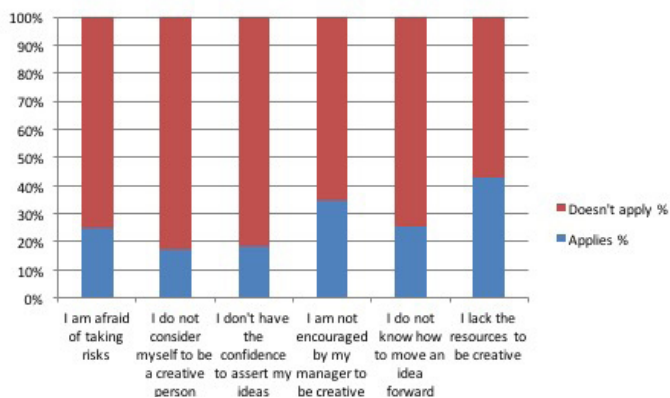

Figure 6: The disablers

The focus groups concentrated their discussions on cultural disablers and were particularly focused on the 'silos' of staff, the detachment of leaders from the 'floor', the overload of administrative work, fear and blame: *"We feel insecure - and that breeds fear"*.

The complexity of an organisation can create the perception of lack of community amongst its staff. Participants in the focus groups felt that communication and visibility of senior leaders is essential for staff to feel engaged and take ownership: *"There has to be ownership - otherwise there is no investment"*.

Understanding how to take ideas forward without fear must be role-modelled through the leadership network and should be a sustainable part of any organisation.

"We talk about innovation and empowerment but there are too many barriers."

"We do innovative work but it gets blocked by committee and then it's too late."

The Creative Culture

The response of the survey suggests that the culture amongst staff within the organisation is creative. Participants saw themselves, their colleagues, their managers and the organisation as creative and were able to provide examples. There was however a drop in positivity as the questions moved away from the individual, with participants wanting the organisation to engage more with staff to be creative and help them find solutions.
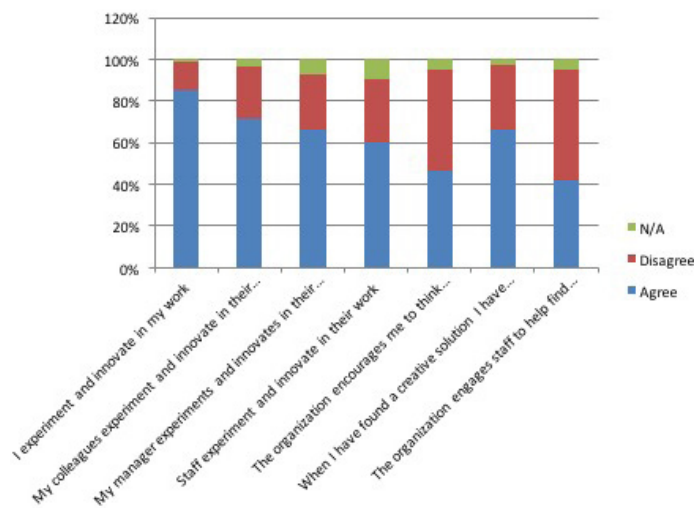

Figure 7: The Creative Culture

This interpretation is supported by the given examples which decreased in number as they moved away from the individual.

Examples of organisational creativity given by participants in the focus groups were recent and focussed primarily on the new Strategic Intent of TCCG, organisational developments, specific partnerships and the new Brilliant Learning Strategy, and approaches to students.

In the focus groups, the sentences constructed with provided words (emboldened below) gave a clear insight into the positivity of staff working at the organisation. They believe they are a part of a loyal, passionate and committed staff base.

*"Our staff are **passionate, knowledgeable, loyal** and **caring**."*

They believe that the organisation isn't a secure place to work and understand that this is driven by external forces.

*"Our ability to be **courageous** is controlled by **government policy** and **budget**."*

The feeling of participants is best summarised by this sentence:

*"**Leaders** need to be **inspirational** and show **determination** in driving forward our **shared values; empowering staff** and **students** to be **courageous, controversial, creative, innovative** and **visionary**."*

Discussion

Vision

In order for an organisation to be creative there must be a vision and strategy that are clearly understood and believed by staff, students and stakeholders (Basadur 2004, Amabile 1998, Pink 2001). The values that accompany the vision are just as critical and are at the heart of the culture of an organisation. Leaders need to be able to "remind people why we do what we do: tell a compelling story" in order to continuously shape the vision and ensure that a strong organisational focus remains (ETF et al. 2010).

The research carried out within TCCG demonstrated that whilst the strategy and vision for the Group could be clearly articulated by survey respondents, the practical implications for different parts of the organisation were less understood at lower levels of the leadership hierarchy. The key message in this is that it is incumbent on lower-level leaders and managers to systematically engage with their teams on what that strategy means for them.

Distinguishing clearly between the vision and strategy of an organisation will be of great benefit to leaders. Typically vision, particularly in the education sector, has longevity but strategy is more likely to change. When vision and strategy are combined, and changes occur, it is more likely that staff will view this as negative – *"another change"*.

Understanding that altering aspects of a strategy is not only normal, but essential, to being a creative organisation, will help staff articulate the authenticity of the vision (IBM 2010). Perhaps unexpectedly this approach may also create a sense of stability for staff who recognise it is not *what* we are doing that is changing, but *how* we do it.

One of the characteristics of IBM's 'standout' companies was the inclusion of creative leadership that set the stage for innovation. Helping to engage more effectively with customers, partners and employees, as well as reinventing the customer relationship, thus rethinking approaches to better understand, interact with and serve customers. Drawing upon research (Hodgson and Spours 2013) that suggests the sector works as an ecosystem helps us to re-visualise the relationship between this network of staff, leaders, governors, stakeholders, potential 'customers' and our learners.

The 'College', its vision and strategy should not be the result of one 'ego'; everyone in the locality of the college is a stakeholder, whether they work or learn within it or not. Involving these stakeholders in the creation of a vision is a straightforward process and can be critical if the vision or strategy will ultimately lead to change. But after the creation, regular feedback to stakeholders on how we are delivering is just as important. It is a story to tell.

Leadership

Participants within this research understood that a leader must harness many qualities and do not expect a leader to be of one style; they expect a leader able to authentically adapt (maintaining trust whilst potentially changing strategy) in order to maintain and drive the organisation forward.

The role of the Board of Governors is the critical foundation in this process. They must champion the values of the organisation by understanding its past and recognising the future. When recruiting new leaders it is essential that the Board recognises where it is and where it needs to go. Does it need a paradigm acceptor or paradigm changer? By considering this question they can ensure that, although dependent on the situation, they are considering the needs/requirements of entire the Local Learning Ecology (Hodgson and Spours 2013) in bringing in a leader that can take all stakeholders with them in their journey.

The leadership team should encompass different styles, and in creating a team the leader should recognise that there is more power within a team that can openly discuss and challenge, than a team that agrees with everything the leaders says (Basadur 2004). Schwab-Pomerantz (President, Charles Schwab Foundation, 2015) asks leaders to recognise that "being a leader isn't about you - it's about them" and by helping those around you achieve great things (Schwab-Pomerantz 2015, p.1).

A core leadership programme needs to be in place that allows all managers/leaders within the organisation to be developing to the same set of objectives regardless of their level in the hierarchy of the organisation. Training in the creative process should be included within the leadership programme if the organisation wishes to foster the creative culture (Basadur 2004).

Proactively engaging staff to solve problems or respond to opportunities, further embeds the strategy and vision of an organisation at all of its levels and this engagement shouldn't be the domain of the senior management team. As Mary Barra (CEP of General Motors Company) quotes: "good ideas don't have hierarchy" (Barra 2015, p.1). Her work at GMC epitomises an example of how involving employees in the ideas process can drive forward quality and performance through a core set of values that underpins every individual's decision-making process.

Furthermore, research (Pink 2001; Csikszentmihalyi 1996) has been undertaken on how truly understanding your employees, their motivations and capabilities, will enhance creative output.

Communication and Networks

The creative process requires differing skills-sets and talents (Basadur 2004) and staff therefore need to be able to identify and access each other on this basis. The formal bringing together of staff is easy to manage and most colleges will engage staff through corporate events or training days. However, with time at a premium, creating an informal way for staff to access each other, based on skills and talent, is an investment worth making.

Informal networks can be created in a variety of ways: online there should be capacity for staff to add details of their particular areas of interest and skills and this database should be searchable by those attributes. Networks can be created online through easily accessible communication tools where staff can post to forums.

Systems and Processes

Systems and processes for taking ideas forward are critical. These systems and processes should allow for ideas to come forward outside of the 'normal' planning process used by the organisation so that staff are able to respond quickly to opportunities or problems (see Appendix 2 for an example).

A formal process can also ensure that the idea coming forward is well thought out, deliverable in principal, and meets the strategic direction of the organisation. The participants involved in this research spoke of the need for boundaries and processes. Boundaries they saw as a necessity – *"how can we push them if we don't know what they are?"*. Participants believe that the FE sector is not a secure (in terms of employment) place to operate within and that this breeds insecurity within the organisation.

However, they think that TCCG should be able to mitigate this insecurity by communicating a clear vision and operating a sustainable system, providing clarity on how they should move their ideas forward.

"We have had five leaders in seven years, the strategy has changed each time and the core stability and boundaries that we had have slowly diminished. Without knowing vision and the boundaries – how can we push against them?"

Processes that sit outside the formal planning timetable gives structure and speed and allow staff to take advantage of the opportunity in front of them, particularly when their ideas are not something that is managed by themselves or within their area of the organisation. Participants in this research identified that this also mitigated the risk of having to rely on one person - their manager - who themselves could be a barrier to creativity through a creative bias.

These two insights created another: internal stability. A well understood vision and strategy, a clear process, and a desire for the organisation to hear the ideas of their staff, creates this channel of stability through the complexity of changes either internally or externally and does not, and should not, change with changing people.

Feedback, integration and results awareness

Receiving feedback demonstrates the value that an organisation places upon the ideas of its staff and will encourage more if this is done openly. The online tools that have been discussed can facilitate this, as can utilising newsletters and communications to showcase forwarded ideas.

Most processes are reviewed on an annual basis but measuring the impact can be difficult if the idea is not a product or service. Impact can be, and should be, measured by indicators that are a mix of core (increase in enrolments, improved success of students, reduced turnover of staff, a financial saving etc) and specific indicators (feedback mechanism from those benefiting). These indicators could be included as part of the process of submitting an idea.

Recommendations

The question "How to foster a creative culture in a Further Education setting" suggests a set of recommendations to enable an organisation within the sector to consider where they are, and how they can move their institution forward with creativity.

1. The survey used within this research can be used by an organisation to benchmark the current perceptions of their staff base (appendix 1).
2. That the organisation takes time to consider their performance in the following areas: Vision, Leadership, Communication and Networks, Systems and Processes, Feedback, Integration and Results Awareness.

Conclusion

This research offers an insight into how to foster a creative culture in a Further Education setting. In times of stress it can be tempting, and easy, to revert to a command and control style of leadership. However as this research has demonstrated, by embedding a culture of creativity with in an FE setting, the capability of an organisation to steer its way through, and even capitalise on the complexity, is much improved. By doing so, those working in FE can impact positively on their local learning ecology, driving organisational evolution for the benefit, and wellbeing, of all stakeholders.

Future Research

This research lends itself to a longitudinal study to measure the impact of the implementation of these recommendations. The results of this research will also be used to create a tool that FE Colleges can use to determine and enhance their creative capacity.

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Appendix 1: Survey

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1. How would you define creativity?

2. When do you consider yourself to be at your most creative? Please tick all that apply to you:

- I am at my most creative away from my normal working environment
- I am at my most creative when I am engaged with others
- 'Head space' allows me to be creative
- I need 'quiet time' to think creatively
- I am creative when I am engaged in conversations with colleagues and peers
- I think more creatively when I am engaged in other activities (such as in hobbies or pastimes)
- I have or am aware of 'tools' that can help me think creatively
- A sense of urgency helps me think creatively
- I am at my most creative when I am under pressure to find a solution
- When I am under time-pressure to find a solution I find it difficult to think creatively
- I am at my most creative when I have access to all information and/or data that I need
- None of the above – other

3. Please consider whether you agree with the following statements. (options – Strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree)

- I experiment and innovate in my work
- My colleagues experiment and innovate in their work
- My manager experiments and innovates in their work
- Staff experiment and innovate in their work
- The organisation encourages me to think creatively
- When I have found a creative solution I have been able to take it forward
- The organisation engages staff to help find solutions
- None of the above – other

4. Please rank the list below with 1 being your biggest barrier to being creative

- I am afraid of taking risks
- I lack the resources to be creative
- I do not consider myself to be a creative person
- I don't have the confidence to assert my ideas
- I am not encouraged by my manager to be creative
- Other

5. Can you give an example of when you have had a creative idea?

6. Can you give an example when your team has been creative?

7. Can you give an example of when the organisation has been creative?

8. If you wish to expand on anything or to provide any commentary, please do so.

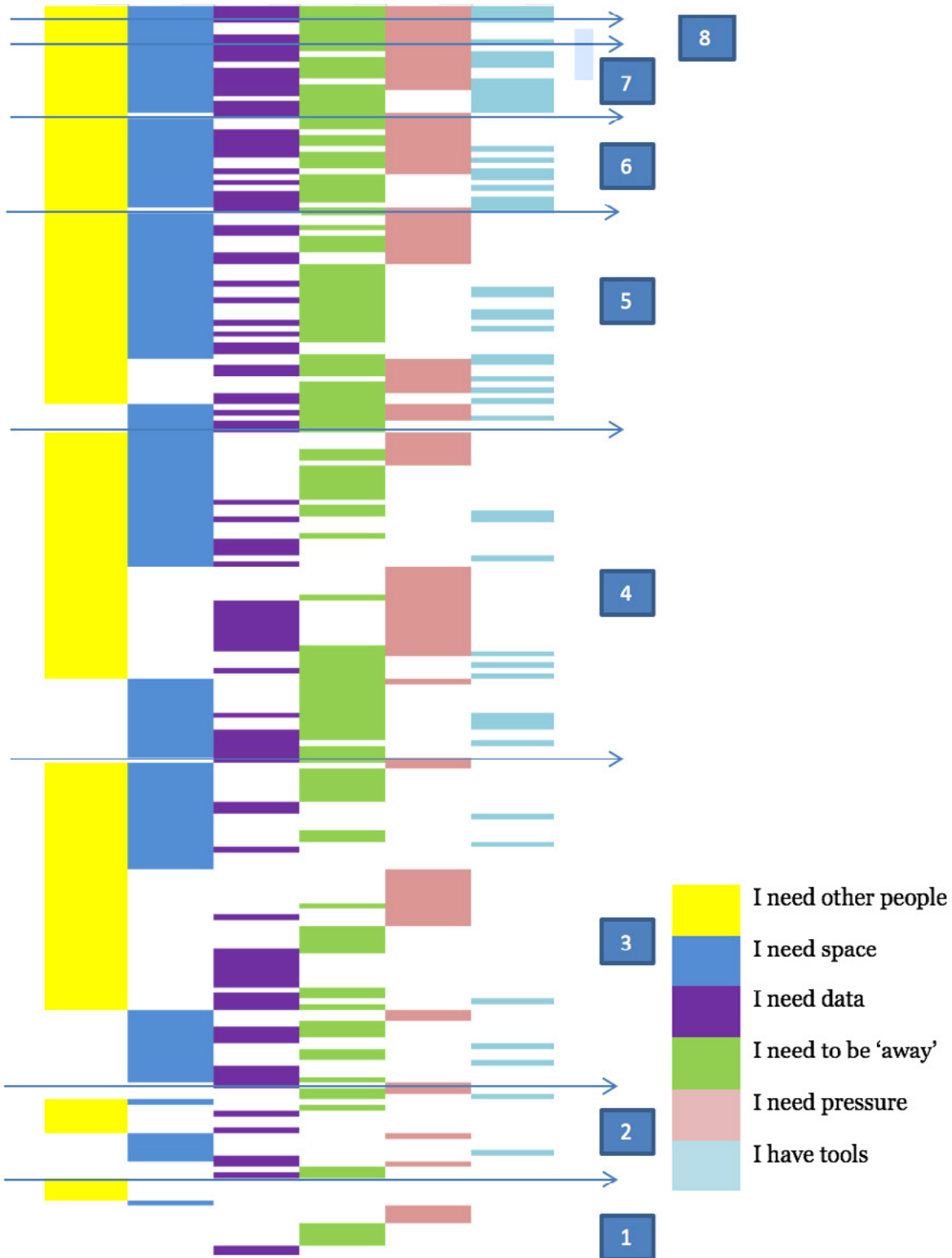# Appendix 2: Example of employee led mechanism for ideas and problem solving

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In his paper 'Leading others to think innovatively together' Basadur (2004) gives one example is provided by an employee suggestion system used by some top Japanese companies. Intended to get employees in to the habit of continually coming up new problems, solutions and implementation, the system makes it easy for them to find problems and work with others towards solutions and implementation. Workers can write their dissatisfactions with their jobs and company products on a wall poster under a column called 'problems'. Co-workers who read about a particular problem that interests them can then join forces to help solve it. Once they solve the problem, they post the solution in the second column on the chart. In a third column, the group chronicles its implementation. Only when all three columns are complete - when the individual or team has carried out problem finding and problem solving and has implement a workable solution (or at least have proven the solution works) can works submit the idea as a suggestion. At this point, it is automatically accepted by a supervisor; with about 90% of suggestions immediately put into practice, employees get a clear message that the organisation really values their ideas (Basadur, 2004).

Appendix 3

To visually display this information enablers were colour coded and ranked by the need for multiple stimuli. The figure demonstrates how the majority of participants need multiple stimuli and that they needed the mix of space and quiet time (blue) and to be with other people (yellow).

I need other people

I need space

I need data

I need to be 'away'

I need pressure

I have tools