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Review of *Creative leadership: Skills that drive change*

Greg C. Ashley
University of Nebraska at Omaha

Roni Reiter-Palmon
University of Nebraska at Omaha, rreiter-palmon@unomaha.edu

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Review of *Creative Leadership: Skills That Drive Change*

Creative Leadership: Skills That Drive Change by Gerard J. Puccio, Mary C. Murdock, and Marie Mance, Sage Publications, 2007, 308 pp. ISBN 141291379x. $88.95

Reviewed by: Greg Ashley and Roni Reiter-Palmon, *University of Nebraska at Omaha*

The introduction and opening chapter provide the overarching theme of the book, which is to connect the constructs of creativity and leadership and to make a case why the two go hand-in-hand. Both constructs involve dealing with change. The authors are quick to point out that their book is not about creativity per se, nor is it about the nature of leadership. Rather the book discusses the nature of creativity in the context of leadership and why creativity is a core leadership competence. The idea that creativity is important for leaders is not new and has been suggested in both theoretical and empirical work (Mumford & Connelly, 1991; Sternberg, 2007). However, the authors employ a distinctly practical focus and offer advice to readers aimed at helping readers increase their creative leadership potential. In fact, the end of each chapter includes a section entitled "Applying What You've Learned," which is an aid to readers to actually apply the material in daily life.

The authors use the introduction and opening chapter to develop and clarify the meaning of creativity and leadership as used in the book. As regards creativity, they frame creativity within the context of change and note that purposeful and productive change requires creative thought. Creative thought produces ideas that are both novel and useful.

The link between creativity and leadership was demonstrated by a review of leadership literature showing what leaders do. For example, part of a leader's duty is to innovate, solve problems, and inspire a vision. These activities implicitly tap into the notion of creativity and work to expand the concept of leader intelligence beyond just analytical skill to also include creative capacities previously perceived as the exclusive purview of artists and musicians.

The main focus of the book is the creative problem solving (CPS) approach to generating optimal problem solutions, a model that originally was developed by Alex Osborn. Although there are various conceptualizations of the CPS model, the book authors view CPS as having three conceptual stages that (a) work to understand the problem (labeled *clarification*), (b) select and develop the best solutions (i.e., *transformation*), and (c) make an action plan (i.e., *implementation*). Each of these three stages has two process steps designed to add structure to the problem solving process and consequently increase effectiveness. Much of the book is dedicated to the explanation of how the conceptual stages and attendant process steps function within the CPS framework. In addition to the three conceptual stages, they add an executive step as a superordinate guide for the CPS process. This executive process is labeled *assessing the situation*. Their view of the entire CPS model is shown in Figure 1. After a situation

assessment has determined that a given problem should to be solved, CPS typically, but not necessarily, flows from left to right using the processes located in the lowest row of boxes in Figure 1.
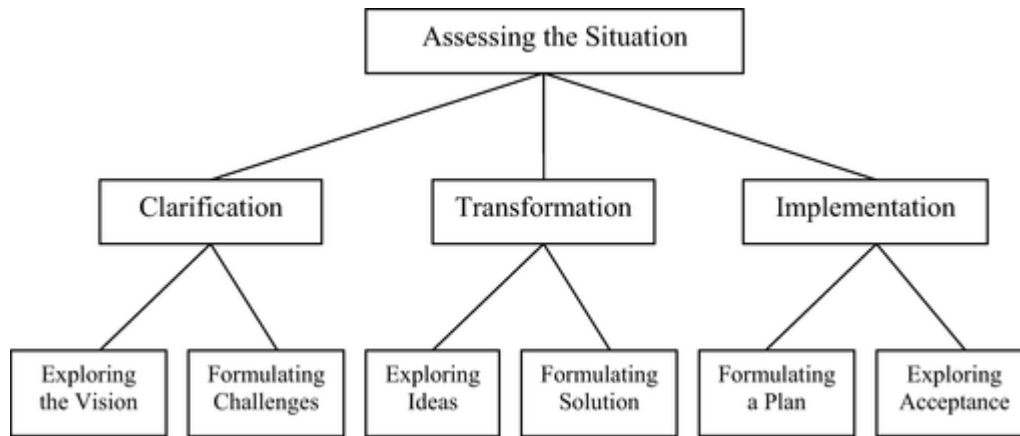
To function effectively, CPS requires both divergent and convergent thinking in nearly all of the process steps shown in Figure 1. At a high level, these thinking styles relate to the generation of many alternative solutions (divergence) and then to reaching conclusions regarding which of the generated options are best to pursue (convergence). Puccio et al. view divergent thinking as composed of four principles. The first principle of divergent thinking asks problem solvers to avoid premature judgments and criticisms of new ideas (labeled *defer judgment*). The second process encourages problem solvers to generate as many solutions as possible (labeled *go for quantity*). The third principle challenges problem solvers to expand and build on others' ideas (labeled *make connections*). Last, problem solvers are asked to develop new and original ideas that have not been considered before (labeled *seek novelty*). They also provide a number of practical, real-world examples to illustrate how divergent thinking works and show its positive outcomes.

Convergent thinking, on the other hand, is designed to reduce the large number of options generated in the divergent thinking phase so as to select only ideal and workable options. Convergent thinking also has four principles that Puccio et al. label as (a) apply affirmative judgment, (b) keep novelty alive, (c) check your objectives, and (d) stay focused. Affirmative judgment speaks to critical thinking. They discuss novelty with the goal of keeping original and yet untried ideas as viable options, so that the advantages gained from the divergent thinking phase will not disappear. The principles of managing to objectives and remaining focused are self-explanatory. The concepts of divergence and convergence are used repeatedly to enhance the functioning of the various process steps, including the executive step of assessing the situation.

Much of the book is spent illustrating the benefits of applying divergent and convergent thinking skills to each of the six process steps in the CPS model. Puccio et al. do a thorough job of providing a structured format and tools, which are specific to the divergent/convergent thinking style in each process step as well as provide research support for their suggestions. In other words, practical application of

divergent/convergent thinking is tailored specifically to each process step. A detailed listing of all the tools would consume too much space in this review, but as an example consider the tools associated divergent/convergent thinking in the assessing the situation phase.

The purpose of situation assessment is to circumscribe and understand all data pertinent to the problem, and to determine the future course of action, which may include not addressing a given problem. Puccio et al. encourage problem solvers to begin the assessment process using a divergent thinking tool that the authors label as *5 W'sand an H*. This tool's name is an acronym for who, what, when, where, why, and how. In addition, they suggest adding the word *else* to each of the 5 Ws and H to draw out more information. Therefore, once an initial round of questions is complete, a second round of question asks "who else," "what else," and so forth. Another suggested tool is the why/why diagram. As suggested in the name, a why/why diagram asks a series of "why" questions (e.g., why is this problem important) to generate a set of responses. A second round of "why" questions is started using responses generated in the first round. The two divergent thinking tools work to create many different pieces of data that can be reviewed for optimal choices.

The convergent thinking process also has two suggested tools, hits and highlighting. The hits tool is conceptually simple in that problem solvers are asked to put a check mark next to ideas that appear most promising. The number of check marks each problem solver is allowed to use is dependent on the volume of data generated in the divergent thinking process (usually 3 to 10). Highlighting involves clustering data into similar groups based on which ideas are similar or have something in common. The highlighting process works to make the divergent thinking data more manageable.

In addition to tailored tools for the divergent/convergent thinking process of each component of the CPS model, Puccio et al. discuss both cognitive and affective skills involved in problem solving for each of the process steps. In short, they believe that solving a problem involves a combination of effective cognitive and affective skills. They define cognitive skills as a mental activity related to the understanding and/or solving of an issue or problem. In contrast, an affective skill refers to the emotional aspects of problem solving, for example, joy or frustration, which also can help or hinder the creative process. The provided taxonomy regarding thinking and affective skills maps well onto the various process steps of the CPS, and provides an easy way to view the nature of the respective process step. The inclusion of affective skills in the problem solving model made intuitive sense, however, some of the affective skills listed appear as being mostly cognitive in nature. For example, they list dreaming, sensing gaps, sensitivity to the environment, and tolerance for risks as affective skills. Some might argue that these so-called affective skills really are more cognitive in nature.

In addition to the step-by-step approach set out in the CPS model, Puccio et al. also discuss two supplemental factors that influence creativity in leadership. These factors pertain more to the environment or team structure in which creative activity takes place and specifically address the kind of supportive circumstances that a leader should create to optimize creative output. Here they move from a focus on the leader as a creator to the leader as supporting creativity in his or her subordinates. They describe the first factor as *psychological diversity*. Typically when diversity is mentioned, most people probably default to such things as age, ethnicity, gender, and so forth. They suggest that other dimensions of diversity also are important to maximize creative output. Psychological diversity is described as the different ways in which people process and organize information. These psychological differences are placed in the same

category of so-called secondary dimensions of diversity that includes things such as work experience and educational background.

An exemplar of psychological diversity is Kirton's Adaptor-Innovator theory (Kirkton, 1985). Puccio et al. support Kirton's theory that individuals can be categorized as either preferring to improve existing ideas or products or preferring to work developing new and novel ideas and products. The adaptor/innovator concept supplants the traditional view of creativity in which individuals are believed to fall on a simple continuum between the anchors of low versus high creativity. In contrast, adaptors and innovators have distinct characteristics that should be aligned congruently with the nature of the problem being solved. They discuss empirical support for Kirton's theory and suggest that leaders should be mindful of this kind of diversity both in others and themselves.

In addition to the adaptor/innovator distinction, another example of psychological diversity pertains to the enthusiasm people have for different phases of the creative process. For example, some people like to generate ideas, whereas others like to analyze data, and still others might want to drive toward a solution or even actually implement a solution. As in the adaptor/innovator example, leaders should be mindful of which creative phase people prefer, including the leader's own personal preference.

Another factor related to creativity in leadership involves creating a climate for creativity. Although they go into detail regarding the definition of organizational climate and how it differs from psychological climate and organizational culture, the important point is that the context in which creativity occurs can greatly affect outcomes. In short, the general work environment can be supportive or obstructive of creative processes. Coercive and authoritative leaders, for example, tend to be less effective regarding creative output than the transformational leader. Leadership style makes a difference. If leaders want creative output then they should be open to change, support new ideas, allow autonomy, encourage risk taking, and be supportive of failures.

In summary, the book was an easy, enjoyable read with plenty of empirical support for many of the propositions and tenets put forth. Puccio, Murdock, and Mance did a good job of pointing out that creative leadership is not just for the chosen few, but rather can be practiced by anyone. Plenty of practical advice is offered with numerous real-world examples. The book is a good choice even for individuals without any formal education in creativity or leadership.

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