

# Book Excerpt: *Creative Conspiracy: The New Rules of Breakthrough Collaboration*

by Leigh Thompson

## Chapter 1: Debunking Myths about Creativity

*Several years ago, I was on sabbatical at the Center for Advanced Study in Palo Alto, California. I worked alongside about 50 other scholars from various behavioral sciences. As part of the sabbatical arrangement, each of us gave an evening “talk” on our research. I spoke about creativity. My opening sentence that evening was, “Several decades of research have unambiguously found that teams are demonstrably inferior to individuals when it comes to brainstorming and idea generation.” I thought that such a statement in the presence of academics would not cause too much commotion. However, I was wrong. One of the scholars was a lead consultant for a major Silicon Valley company that prided itself on creative idea generation, particularly in teams. This led to a spirited debate between the two of us that lasted through the evening and the next couple of months. I eventually dug up more than 50 peer-reviewed articles and put them on his desk. Every single article indicated that teams were inferior to individuals when it came to brainstorming.*

I'd like to say I won the debate. However, companies do not want to stop brainstorming. The research evidence – as powerful as it is – is not well disseminated. The research studies have been carefully orchestrated to include sophisticated methods for ruling out the effect of different personalities, differences in intelligence, and differences in industry experience. Further, the studies have been replicated several, if not dozens of times and they show a clear

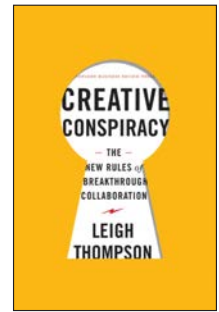
causal pattern. And, to summarize succinctly in the words of organizational psychologist Adrian Furnham, professor of psychology at University College London, “the evidence from science suggests that business people must be insane to use brainstorming groups.”

In my work with clients, companies, and students, I find that they are often operating with very specific beliefs about human creativity. Some of which are correct. And many of which are wrong – at least according to scientific studies. In this chapter, I expose several of these key myths about creative teamwork. As you read, think about which of these myths is central to the way you work with your creative teams, and, how you might better structure your team so as to capitalize on the strengths of the team members. Many of the messages in this chapter are paradoxical, or even downright contradictory to what is considered common practice in organizations (and even common sense). So, we've been careful to provide data to back up these assertions.

## Once upon a Time.... Creativity Mythology

There is probably more mythology surrounding creativity than nearly any other topic in social science. Many companies have constructed a fairy tale about what sparks human ideation that is just well, completely misguided. As a start, each of the statements below has been endorsed by people in the business world. When you read each statement below, think about whether you believe it is true or false.

- ❶ Teams are more creative than individuals.
- ❷ If you want to enhance creative teamwork, get rid of rules, guidelines and norms.
- ❸ Striving for *quality* is better than striving for *quantity*.
- ❹ We need to be actively brainstorming to generate ideas.
- ❺ Brainstorming teams should work closely together and tear down boundaries.
- ❻ You should brainstorm together first to get the creative juices flowing, then work alone.
- ❼ People who are pro-social (team-oriented) are more creative than those who are pro-self (individually-oriented, or just downright selfish!).
- ❽ Calming, relaxing, peaceful deactivating moods (e.g., sadness, relaxation, serenity) led to more creativity than activating moods (e.g., anger, fear, happiness).



## When Myth becomes Pseudo Science

If you are like most people, you have probably agreed with about 75% of the statements above. In fact, all of these statements are false. At this point, you may be ready to throw this book on the floor and get back to running your business. Before you do, pick the statement above that you hold closest to your heart and read the research evidence. (I'll point to some of this.) You can test your creativity competence by reading the rest of this chapter where

we step through each of the myths above. The rest of this chapter delves into the myths that have morphed to become pseudo-science in the business world – which we do our best to debunk.

### **Myth #1: Teams are more creative than individuals.**

As I touched on in the Introduction, the assertion that “Groups are more creative than individuals” has been scientifically tested more than a great many claims in social science. We know that it is controversial to argue that teams are less creative than individuals. And, there is not a person on the planet who has not had the feeling or the experience that creative magic has indeed happened in their group. Yet, the data are painfully clear on this all-important question. So, why are so many teams and their companies under the powerful illusion that they are more creative. Well, for most of us, it just feels good to be part of a team and so, we think that magical things like creativity must be present when we are working with our team.

It all began when an enterprising business man, named Alex Osborn published a book and coined the term, brainstorming. Osborn was a staunch believer in the power of teams. He was convinced that if teams did four simple things, they would easily outperform individuals. Apparently, this sage advice was enough for most organizations to adopt his belief and attempt to institute best practices.

Sometime later, the academics asked for proof. Since Osborn did not have data, much less conduct controlled experiments, a flurry of research programs were launched on the question of whether teams or individuals were more creative. Hundreds of studies were conducted that compared in-tact, face to face brainstorming teams with

the same number of people working completely independently. As noted earlier the same number of people working independently came to be known as a “nominal group” (i.e., a group in number only). Nominal groups outperformed real groups in terms of quantity as well as quality.

Yet many executives and managers reject these ideas outright. This is akin to dismissing the surgeon general’s report that smoking causes cancer. I often invite my students and executives to do a simulation of the now-classic experiment. For example, in one class of investment bankers, consultants, and managers, we randomly assigned people to work in small teams or work individually. Then, we gave everyone 10-15 minutes to perform a creative task. The nominal groups kicked the butts of the real groups. In one of our recent simulations, the nominal groups generated over 20% more ideas and more than 42% more original ideas! It is nearly impossible to not get this effect!

The reason that people think teams are more creative is that they believe in synergy. They believe that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, but it does not appear to be – at least under typical conditions. It is certainly possible that synergy can take place in teams, but more often than not, it does not. For example, teams who build on each other’s ideas neither create more ideas, nor are the ideas that build upon previous ideas better.

What are the implications? Well, on nearly a daily basis, leaders and their companies make decisions as to whether to assign group projects or individual projects. This raises the question of whether we are efficiently using the talents of people in companies or whether we are falling far short of our potential by insisting that people work in groups, when they might be

well-advised to work individually – at least for some period of time—on a problem.

The solution, however, is not to do away with teams, which are essential to reach organizational objectives. Rather, we need to re-think and re-structure how teams work creatively. Left to their own devices, teams are usually poorly-structured for the creative process. However, with a few key insights and simple best practices, teams can dramatically improve their performance and generate creative conspiracy.

### **Myth #2: If you want to enhance creative teamwork, get rid of rules, guidelines and norms.**

Most people think this is true because they don’t like rules and think that rules are bureaucratic. Let’s face it. Most adults don’t like rules. We got fed up with them in grade school and we looked forward to the day when no one would tell us what to do or when to do it. We embraced the idea that no rules freed our mind. Well, unfortunately, we were probably better off in grade school or at least more creative in grade school. The data in this case are more than painfully clear. Groups that don’t have rules or guidelines are distinctly less creative than those who have rules and guidelines.

How do we know? Paul Paulus and his team at University of Texas, Arlington carefully contrasted teams that followed guidelines versus those that were set free to guide themselves. Teams with instructions and rules humbled the laissez faire teams!

There is also evidence that groups have difficulty functioning without rules. They often respond by making rules! For example, one provocative field investigation conducted a long-term study of the effects of removing rules and regulations in a team. The

well-meaning CEO of ISE Communications made a commitment to restructure the organization into self-managing teams. Literally overnight, he reconfigured the physical workspace and created several work teams called Red, Blue, Green, Orange, and so on. Before the change, three levels of managerial hierarchy existed between the vice president and the manufacturing workers. After the restructuring, the reporting rules were removed with the idea that removal of rules would empower workers and ideas. However, over the following 4 years, a curious thing happened: the teams spontaneously developed more rules similar to ISE's old bureaucratic structure (e.g., if you are more than 5 minutes late, you're docked a day's pay). The social rules were even more rigid. And workers nostalgically recalled the good old days of bureaucracy. J. Barker's ground-breaking study points to two simple truths about rules and creativity: First, removing rules in no way liberates people; and second, some rules are actually adaptive for groups.

The principle seems to hold for individuals, as well. One recent investigation compared how "intuitive" people and "systematic" people behaved under "structured" conditions. Overall, creativity was higher under "structured" task conditions.

### **Myth #3: Striving for quality is better than striving for quantity.**

We've been told all our lives by everyone—teachers, employers, friends, and family that quality trumps quantity. As a case in point, one study examined four different types of instructions: no stated goal, a quality goal, a quantity goal, as well as a joint quantity and quality goal. The results? Those who had the quantity goal generated more ideas and better

ideas than any other goal.

What's the problem with focusing on quality (to the exclusion of quantity)? Several. First and foremost, quality requirements lead to self-censoring. Self-censoring occurs when people do not suggest ideas because they believe the ideas don't meet the imposed quality criterion. They fear others will ridicule their ideas. So, they play it safe and don't say anything. When other people ridicule their teammates, this is known as jeering. We've all seen how this creates an uncomfortable silence and can also be demoralizing. Instead of ridiculing or badgering others, team members must find ways to stimulate and encourage others. Team members don't need to be criticized, rather they need ideas to stimulate the next idea and so on. This is called "priming": the act of stimulating new ideas and thoughts with a phrase, suggestion, picture or idea. For example, the other day, I was facilitating a brainstorming session and the group came to a grinding halt after about 5 minutes. With 5 more minutes left to work, they were at a loss for how to reinvigorate themselves. So, we decided to look for inspiration in the environment. We raided briefcases and found various items, magazines, iPhones, personal photos that the team spread out on the work table in front of them. Suddenly, new ideas started sprouting! Priming is like social popcorn – it stimulates others to suggest ideas.

A strict, or even loose, quality focus narrows the options. Quality requirements create small set of ideas from which to choose. The smaller the set of ideas from which to develop and choose, the less likely it is that a truly great idea will emerge.

We often try to get companies to avoid choosing the very first idea that is brainstormed. A related problem is the primacy effect: the strong

tendency to be attracted to the first option that is suggested. There is a pervasive belief that the first idea is mission critical for the creative enterprise. But Ed Catmull, president of Pixar and Disney Animation Studios could not disagree more. A misguided view of creativity is to exaggerate the importance of the initial idea in developing a product.

### **Myth #4: We need to be actively brainstorming to generate ideas.**

Idea exchange is a crucial part of creativity, and we sometimes lose sight of the fact that there are two key elements. First, people need to carefully process and understand the ideas in the group – this is known as *attention*. Second, they need to reflect on the ideas – this is known as incubation. *Incubation* is the term used to refer to how our unconscious mind often works on a problem when we just can't think about it anymore. This is why sometimes people think of a solution to a problem when they are in the shower or taking a walk – they are not thinking consciously about a problem, but unconsciously, they are solving the problem. This is important, because incubation gets shut out by another dynamic that affects brainstorming. Fixation is the tendency to focus on a limited number of domains or kinds of ideas. Fixation is thinking inside the box!

Unfortunately, the very act of brainstorming with other people tends to lead to fixation, as compared to brainstorming independently. Indeed, over time, the quality, variety, novelty and quantity of ideas starts to decline in a group. Most important, taking a break can break this cycle.

Engineers Paul Horowitz and Alan Huang were both facing extremely vexing problems concerning designs for laser-telescope controls and laser

computing. After struggling with the problem for months they both depicted a solution in their sleep. Similarly, in the 1950's, Don Newman, a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology was trying to solve a vexing math problem. "I was... trying to get somewhere with it, and I couldn't and I couldn't and I couldn't." One night, he dreamed of the solution in his sleep and turned his dreams into a published paper.

Indeed, studies of problem-solving and incubation reveal that temporarily putting a problem aside, and returning to it later can lead to more breakthroughs and superior performance than continuing to actively focus on the problem. Why? Steven Smith and Steven Blankenship of Texas A&M University argue in their forgetting-fixation hypothesis that correct solutions are made inaccessible during initial problem solving because we keep retrieving incorrect solutions. Thus, forgetting about a problem and focusing on something else can make correct (but dormant) solutions more accessible.

### **Myth #5: Brainstorming teams should work closely together and tear down boundaries.**

Private space and solitude is out of fashion. In some companies, requesting private space might even raise concerns about your teamwork ability or whether you are a "team player." Nearly all US workers spend significant time in "teams" and 70% of us inhabit open plan offices in which no one has an office to themselves. In fact, in recent decades, the average amount of space allocated to each employee shriveled by 300 square feet, from 500 square feet in the 1970s to 200 square feet in 2010. When I went to primary school, our desks were in neat rows and all my gear was loaded into my

own space and sacks that hung on my desk; today, primary school classrooms are arranged in pods and rotated regularly. Yet, working closely together and removing all boundaries is in no way conducive to creativity.

Susan Cain notes in her 2012 *New York Times* expose, that Backbone Entertainment, a video game company in California initially used an open-plan office, but soon realized that its game developers—the creative think tank of the organization—were not happy. So, they converted to cubicles and soon the creative game developers had those nooks and crannies that allowed them to think creatively.

Consultants Tom DeMarco and Timothy Lister studied the Coding War Games, a series of competitions that test software engineer's abilities, and compared the output of more than 600 computer programmers at 92 companies. DeMarco and Lister discovered that the enormous performance gap between highly-productive companies and less productive companies was how much privacy, personal workspace, and freedom from interruption that programmers had. Statistically, 62% of the best performers described their workspace as private compared with only 19% of the worst performers. And, 76% of the worst programmers said they were often "needlessly" interrupted, compared to only 38% of the best performers.

For all these reasons, the cave-and-commons workplace design may be ideal for team-based companies. A cave-and-commons design is an office in which teams have shared space—known as a commons, but each team member also has private space—known as a cave. In the cave-and-commons design, people have common space to meet—when needed and necessary—but they have their own private caves that they can retreat to for creative idea

generation—which usually happens in solitude. This hybrid structure perfectly reflects the fact that the creative process is a fine orchestration of individual and group work. Let individuals think in their caves. Then let the team debate which of the ideas is the most valuable (this is when to bring the teams into the commons).

Relatedly, there is a common notion that the more time groups spend together, the more they will bond and perform well together. Think again. Karen Girotra, Professor of Technology and Operations Management at INSEAD, examined hybrid teams, in which individuals first worked independently, and then together, and versus teams that worked only together and found that hybrid structures led to more ideas, better ideas, and increased ability to discern the best quality ideas.

### **Myth 6: You should brainstorm together first to get the creative juices flowing, then work alone.**

People are under the mistaken impression that being in a group will supercharge their idea generation and prep them to think creatively. This is patently false. In fact, the opposite is true! It is nearly always better for people to work independently before moving into a group. Paulus and his research team put this idea to the test by training people in several different modalities. Some people worked alone on a brainstorming problem and then moved into groups. Other people worked with groups and then moved to independent brainstorming. Specifically, they instructed some people to first brainstorm in a team and then brainstorm alone and then had another group do the opposite (i.e., first brainstorm alone and then brainstorm in a team). The results were quite clear: those who worked independently before moving into groups



had much better group brainstorming sessions! Why? The people who were alone initially in their own thoughts before moving into a team led to much greater group creativity. When we are brainstorming alone, we are in a state of thought; we are not in a state of action. Conversely, when we work in teams, we start getting busy, making plans, setting an agenda and this does not serve us well.

It is far more effective to have people brainstorm alone and then move to groups than to do the reverse. By brainstorming alone first, the individual is not under the peer pressure of others. Moreover the individual does not have to pay attention to social cues or for that matter even listen to others. Rather, that person can think in a completely unfettered fashion.

**Myth #7: People who are pro-social (team-oriented) are more creative than those who are pro-self.**

We warned you this would not be politically nor organizationally correct. For years, we've been told to act more like team players and put self-interest aside. In fact, that advice does not make sense for creative teamwork. People who are pro-self and have a high concern for their own self are actually more creative than people who are pro-social.

How do you know if you are pro-self or pro-social? Well, as a start, do you resonate more with the statements like, "I enjoy being unique and different from others in many respects" or statements like, "Even when I strongly disagree with group members, I avoid an argument"? Similarly, are you more likely to state that "I do my own thing, regardless of what others think" or that "It is important to maintain harmony within my own group". And what about, "I prefer to be direct and forthright when dealing with people I've just met" ver-

sus "I usually go along with what others want to do, even when I would rather do something different". If you tended to agree with the first statement in each pair, chances are you are primarily pro-self. If you tended to agree with the second statement in each pair, chances are you are primarily pro-social. Don't misunderstand me, being pro-social is very advantageous in many, if not most of life's situations. It is just not conducive to thinking creatively.

However, we don't advocate creating a culture of self-centeredness. Rather, we point to ways of temporarily putting pro-social, communal concerns aside during a focused brainstorming session in order to turn on or ignite a pro-self orientation for increased creativity. In my research with social psychologists Wendi Gardner at Northwestern and Elizabeth Seeley at NYU, we've used a technique to temporarily engage pro-self views. It involves pronouns. If you want people to be self-absorbed, then have them write or read statements that contain a lot of personal pronouns, such as "I", "me" and "mine". Conversely, if you want people to focus on others, then have them read or write statements that contain other pronouns, such as "we", "us" and "ours". We find that this simple mind exercise can temporarily activate either pro-self or pro-social concerns.

**Myth #8: Calming, relaxing, peaceful de-activating moods (e.g., sadness, relaxation, serenity) lead to more creativity than activating moods (e.g., anger, fear, happiness).**

There is a widespread belief that creativity is best served through inner peace, serenity, and calmness. I know one colleague who was convinced that her own creative writing was best when she had no distractions, quietly sipping tea in a peaceful setting.



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Leading High Impact Teams, and the Kellogg Team and Group Research Center. She also codirects the Negotiation Strategies for Managers course. Thompson has published more than 100 research articles and has authored nine books, including *The Truth About Negotiations*, *Making the Team*, and *The Mind and Heart of the Negotiator*.

However, after three months of such languid writing days, she produced nothing that she was proud of. Shortly thereafter, her first baby was born and her schedule went from long, open, peaceful, unstructured days to tightly orchestrated minute-by-minute slots, punctuated by extreme activity. The result? She became prolifically productive. In her words, she was "wired". The way she put it to me was, "I have 90 minutes when Sam is napping and I run to the computer and write like crazy. I'm totally focused." Turns out our colleague is onto something. In fact, it is better to be aroused when attempting to think creatively. In my own research with Brian Lucas, we find that people feel that they will be more creative when listening to peaceful, calming music than to a boring speech, but in fact the opposite is true. When people were listening to the boring speech, they were becoming annoyed, frustrated and agitated. Conversely, those listening to their favorite songs were growing more relaxed and serene. We then examined their behavior in a creativity challenge and found that those who had listened to music dramatically under-performed compared to those who had been frustrated by the annoying political speeches. We don't want to suggest that it is always nec-

essary to frustrate and annoy people in order to spark creativity. What we do suggest is that arousing, energetic moods and environments bring out more creativity than relaxing peaceful environments.

### **Assess your team's creative know-how**

Now that we've poked some of the big myths surrounding creative collaboration, what can we *do* make sure our own teams don't get caught up in them, and hold themselves back from being effective? First, we need to set the stage by seeing where you are in terms of

creative collaboration competence.

Think about the last meeting you had in which the task called for creativity. What did you do to set the stage? If you are like most people, you did not do anything different – or maybe you brought in the donuts! Most teams run every meeting the same way no matter what the business at hand is. High performance teams, however, constantly change gears so as to optimally meet the challenge of the day. If the challenge of the day involves brain surgery, or a SWAT mission, then clearly defined roles, top-down leadership, and a strong prevention-focus is necessary.

However, if the challenge of the day calls for brainstorming a new product idea or new ways of engaging customers, then the team must organize itself to be at its creative best, which will call for a different set of norms and behaviors. Establishing the ground rules for these norms and behaviors to occur is the part and parcel of the creative conspiracy.

Most people float into meetings and conference rooms that look strangely similar to one another, no matter what the true business at hand it. Why? In the Creative Collaboration Assessment that follows, we ask

## **Creative Collaboration Assessment**

### **1. With regard to ground rules and norms in our creativity sessions, my team...**

- ☐ operates with dysfunctional rules and norms (0)
- ☐ really does not have any clear rules or norms (1)
- ☐ has knowledge of effective ground rules, but does not regularly use nor enforce them (2)
- ☐ regularly operates with at least 4 cardinal rules of brainstorming (e.g., expressiveness, no evaluation, quantity focus, and building on ideas of others) (3)
- ☐ regularly operates with the 4 cardinal rules of brainstorming as well as additional rules that we have found to be particularly impactful (e.g., no story-telling, no explanations, encouraging those who are not making a contribution to contribute, etc.) (4)

### **2. With regard to conflict, my team...**

- ☐ is not very nice; we engage in openly rude behavior; open venting, jeering, personal attacks and harsh criticism (0)
- ☐ is too nice; we actively avoid conflict (1)
- ☐ sometimes expresses conflict, but people try to separate the people from the problem (2)
- ☐ routinely engages in open, spirited debate, much as scientists do, who hold different theories; we passionately attack the problem, but we respect our people (3)

### **3. With regards to a group facilitator, my team...**

- ☐ has never used nor is open to using a facilitator (1)
- ☐ has attempted to sabotage an outside (or inside) facilitator (0)

- ☐ has used an untrained facilitator (2)
- ☐ has used a trained facilitator, practiced in the art of creative teamwork (3)

### **4. In terms of external aids (e.g., whiteboards, flipcharts) props, stop-watches, toys, films, and materials, my team...**

- ☐ meets in a room that is largely impoverished (no whiteboards, no flipcharts, no wheels on the chairs, no art, etc.) (0)
- ☐ meets in a room that has blackboards, flipcharts, writing surfaces, moveable chairs, and we might occasionally use them but not regularly (1)
- ☐ actively uses the blackboards, flip charts, writing surfaces, moveable chairs and more (2)
- ☐ in addition to actively using our space, we bring in additional materials, such as stickers, index cards, post-its, or other supplies and materials (3)

### **5. With regard to mental stimulation and things to keep us thinking, engaged and invigorated, such as props, videos, games, primes, objects, pictures, etc., my team...**

- ☐ does not provide nor encourage any kind of “external stimuli” such as pictures, toys, objects, etc. (0)
- ☐ has on occasion, attempted to “liven up” our creative meetings through the use of props, humor, etc. (1)
- ☐ actively imports props, such as toys, devices, gadgets as a trigger for discussion (2)

you to think about how your team conducts itself. Where do you meet? What are the spoken and unspoken rules of engagement? Does anyone facilitate the meeting? Are any special props or materials brought in for the meeting? Are ground rules discussed? Sadly, most of the time, the answer is no, no, and not really. This suggests then, that leaders are not making most efficient use of their scarcest resource: people's time.

We've developed a Creative Collaboration Assessment that invites you to examine your team's creative meetings – which absorb at least 25-

50% of your time or more. Once you have taken stock of just how you are using your own and other people's meeting time, we introduce a set of scientifically-tested best practices for optimizing the creative meeting. We suggest that you begin by completing the assessment yourself and then conduct an open-ended conversation among the team's members. Does everyone see the group's process in the same way? Where are the points of agreement? Disagreement? What works well in terms of your group's process? What does not work? What practices should be added? What pro-

cesses should be dropped altogether or abandoned?

The Creative Collaboration Assessment contains 20 items. As you answer the assessment, imagine that a team psychologist is observing your team through a one-way mirror. Your team does not know they are being observed, but an organizational psychologist is watching your every move. The psychologist is well-trained and has studied thousands of teams. How would that psychologist describe your team? In short, we are asking that you take an objective look at your team.

#### 6. With regard to mood, my team...

- ☐ looks like a bunch of grumpy men and women (0)
- ☐ is largely neutral (not happy, not sad, just there, taking up space) (1)
- ☐ is often positive, and upbeat (2)
- ☐ is consistently positive and upbeat (3)

#### 7. With regard to goal-setting, my team...

- ☐ has not set a goal as long as I can remember (0)
- ☐ sets safe/weak goals (1)
- ☐ sets definite goals (2)
- ☐ sets goals based upon meaningful criteria and scientifically-based benchmarks, and revisits those goals on a regular basis (3)

#### 8. With regard to diversity, my team...

- ☐ is largely homogeneous, with people having similar points of view, personality, and background training (1)
- ☐ has demographic and or gender diversity (2)
- ☐ has demographic or gender diversity that falls along faultlines (e.g., all women are in HR; men in engineering, etc.) (0)
- ☐ has deep-level diversity (based on skills, training, background, education) (3)

#### 9. The size of my team is...

- ☐ unclear since we have never specified who's on the team (0)
- ☐ consistently over 10 people (1)
- ☐ 8-10 people (2)
- ☐ 5-7 people (3)
- ☐ less than 5 (4)

#### 10. In terms of incentives, rewards, and consequences, the following best describes my team:

- ☐ many more sticks than carrots; under-performance more scrutinized than exceptional performance (punishment focused) (0)
- ☐ no meaningful rewards or punishments (no consequences) (1)
- ☐ more carrots than sticks (reward-focused); exceptional performance noted more often than under-performance (2)
- ☐ meaningful process and outcome rewards (3)

#### 11. The leader of my team is best described as...

- ☐ milquetoast: uninvolved and passive (0)
- ☐ transactional: gets the job done; acts like a manager (1)
- ☐ relational: nice, likeable, but not particularly strategic on the tasks (1)
- ☐ transformational: consistently articulates goals and vision for the team (2)

#### 12. If my team were having a brainstorming or creativity session, my team would most likely...

- ☐ not do anything different than in any other meeting (0)
- ☐ hope that people share ideas (1)
- ☐ go around the table one-by-one and invite people share ideas aloud (2)
- ☐ engage in brainwriting (the simultaneous writing of ideas) (3)
- ☐ engage in brainwriting for part of the time; and perhaps electronic brainstorming (4)

### 13. With regard to membership change on my team...

- ☐ there has been no membership change for 5 or more years (0)
- ☐ there has been no membership change for at least a year (1)
- ☐ new members have been added and some members have left in the past 12 months (2)
- ☐ we have planned membership change and rotation; and often invite people on a temporary basis (3)

### 14. With regard to office space, my team or company...

- ☐ is marked by closed doors and very few meeting spaces (0)
- ☐ has a largely, completely open floor plan (1)
- ☐ is a careful balance of cave-and-commons, with private spaces and common meeting spaces (2)

### 15. With regard to time pressure in our brainstorming-creativity sessions...

- ☐ we meet for the same amount of time every week (0)
- ☐ we meet until we are finished (1)
- ☐ we strategically plan the length of the meeting and set goals (2)

### 16. The future oriented mindset of my team is largely...

- ☐ prevention-focused; the team worries about what can go wrong; attempts to avoid disaster or bad outcomes (0)
- ☐ promotion-focused; we focus on goals; think about success (1)

### 17. With regard to people skills, also known as emotional intelligence skills...

- ☐ plain and simple: my team does not have them (0)
- ☐ some members have people skills, but not everyone (1)
- ☐ several members have people skills and they coach others (2)
- ☐ the team has people skills, we actively coach each other, and the organization appreciates the value they bring (3)

### 18. With regard to free-riders on our team, such as people not doing their share of the work, yet expecting credit...

- ☐ free-riders exist on our team and they get away with it (0)
- ☐ free riders exist on our team and we make weak attempts to confront them (1)
- ☐ we take proactive steps to discourage free-riding (2)

### 19. In terms of outsiders, my team...

- ☐ does not trust them and does not involve them (0)
- ☐ may consult with them occasionally (1)
- ☐ regularly involves the input of outsiders (2)
- ☐ regularly involves the input of outsiders who are devil's advocates (3)

### 20. With regard to social networks, my creative team...

- ☐ is disconnected from the rest of the organization (0)
- ☐ is very closely connected to one another (1)
- ☐ are closely connected to one another, yet have good working relationships (2)

## Scoring

After taking the Creative Collaboration Assessment, add up your answers across the 20 items. The points for each answer are in parentheses. Note that the minimum score is 0 and the maximum score is 56. We rarely see such extremes. An average score is around 28. The higher your overall score, the more creatively healthy your team is.

**Scores 0-10: (Low).** Scores this low should be an immediate call to action. Low scores in this range are usually due to one of three things: (1) the team has not been taught the best practices of creative teamwork; (2) the team does not take the time or does not feel accountable for modifying the structure of the group; or (3) someone is actively sabotaging the team. The first two are easy to fix. Reading this book will undoubtedly improve your team score. Making even one change to your weekly team creativity meetings will have a marked effect on your creative output.

**Scores 11-21: (Medium-Low).** You have much room to improve. We suggest focusing on 2-3 best practices to implement in your team. Be sure to introduce each practice by itself and build in new best practices incrementally. Ask for feedback and keep modifying.

**Scores 22-32: (Average).** This range is actually the danger zone because it is the zone of complacency. "We are ok. There is nothing to worry about. We are about average for our industry. Others are worse than us." If you find yourself in this range, make it a point to locate a team in your organization with a significantly higher score and invite them in for an informational session. Barrage them with questions. Ask whether it was worth it. (no doubt it is!). Find others in your team who are not satisfied with mediocrity and introduce one new best practice every month.

**Scores 33-44: (Above Average).** Congratulations! Scores in this range are rare and it means that someone on the team really is committed to the success of the team. Make sure you affirm this person's efforts. Ask how you can be an active contributor to the team's continual evolution. Celebrate your best practices. Offer to coach other teams.

**Scores 45 & higher: (Extremely Advanced).** You are a black belt creative conspirator. Because of you, your team is already functioning at an elite level. Find areas to continue to improve. Offer to coach other teams. Conduct smart experiments within the team to discover which practices had the biggest effect. Publish your findings and share with other teams in the organization. ■