

THE CREATIVE GORILLA #113

It is important to build the appropriate climate for your innovation needs...

Build a Creative Climate...

"Companies must have capacity for radical change to survive long term, whilst having the ability to innovate in day to day operations." Summarised from Goran Ekvall, in Creativity and Innovation Management



A brisk walk...

How good is the climate in your organisation?

Imagine you are driving a right hand drive car along a busy German autobahn. There are roadworks and the road has only two narrow lanes.

To your left is a low concrete barrier to protect the road workers. You cannot see it well and if you drive in the left lane you worry you will hit it.

In the right lane are many huge lorries (trucks) that drive close together. Driving between two of them feels very uncomfortable.

I experienced this recently, en route to Wolfsburg, Germany, for a football match with my family. It was stressful and I think it fair to say if you had asked me for a creative idea at that time, you were unlikely to get more than a grunt.

We returned on the Friday and the next day I was reminded of this experience whilst facilitating a study day for MBA students, with my friend, Elvin Box. We touched on the theme of creative climate in organisations and I thought what a

great metaphor the autobahn situation was for a poor creative climate. Compare that to a brisk walk along a sunny beach, having a lively discussion with a friend whilst a cool breeze fans your face; or choose your own metaphor for a creative climate.

SO

Many managers struggle with the issue of innovation and the personnel issues that surround it. So let's consider what makes a creative climate, whether "one climate fits all" and how people with different innovation styles cope with different creative climates.

Probably the most well known study on organisational climate for creativity was carried out by Goran Ekvall. He identified ten dimensions on which to measure creative or non creative climates in organisations.

Some researchers have extended and amended his original dimensions and I have adapted wording here, but in summary they are:

1. **Challenge** ~ How challenged by and committed to work am I?
2. **Freedom** ~ How free am I to make decisions, find information and show initiative?
3. **Idea Time** ~ Do I have time to explore challenges and generate ideas?

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4. **Idea Support** ~ Am I encouraged to put forward ideas and suggestions?
5. **Trust & Openness** ~ Am I happy to say what I think and offer contrasting points of view?
6. **Playfulness and Humor** ~ Is our workplace a relaxed and fun place to be?
7. **Debates** ~ How much do I engage in lively debates about issues?
8. **Risk-Taking** ~ Do people accept failure when I try new things?
9. **Dynamism** ~ Is this an exciting and dynamic place to work?
10. **Conflict** ~ How much do I engage in interpersonal conflict? (Ekvall makes a strong differentiation between the positive conflict of ideas and negative interpersonal conflict.)

Two additional dimensions I noted on the internet which interested me are:

Open Communication ~ Do I communicate with different levels of people in the organisation?

Stress ~ How much negative stress do I suffer?

Some people make the mistake of assuming that innovative organisations should score highly on dimensions 1 – 9. This is true if the organisation seeks radical innovation, however, in an organisation that seeks only adaptive innovation, it is likely to be inappropriate.

In addition, people with an adaptive style of creativity can find it uncomfortable in an organisation with a climate suited to radical innovation (and vice versa).

Ekvall therefore suggests that one way for creative leaders to deal with these issues is to have different climates in the organisation, with one department geared for adaptive innovation

and one geared for radical, both with the appropriate climate and style of people.

ACTION

Think about problems your organisation faces with innovation. Consider whether it may be related to some of the factors laid out in this article.

Score your department on a scale of 1 – 5 on the dimensions and if possible have some other people do the same. How does it rate, is it appropriate for the type of innovation you need and how might you move one step up the scale?

TO CLOSE

Reflecting on Ekvall's dimensions whilst writing, I realise how well the climate in the Wolfsburg stadium could be rated on most of them. However, my team, Fulham, scored within 30 seconds of kick off. There was stunned silence amongst the Fulham fans (trust me, we are not used to success) and then we leaped up cheering excitedly.

Two minutes later I felt a tap on the back and the man behind me asked if I could sit down. I looked around and realised I was the last person standing. I was so stunned by the goal, my mind was blank.

It was a moment to challenge Ekvall's theory of climate. As good as the climate was, I couldn't have thought of a creative idea for the life of me.

Enjoy the climate this week.

John Brooker | Facilitate, Innovate, Transform.

PS. We got through to the semi final. Driving back through the roadworks felt so much easier in a state of shock!