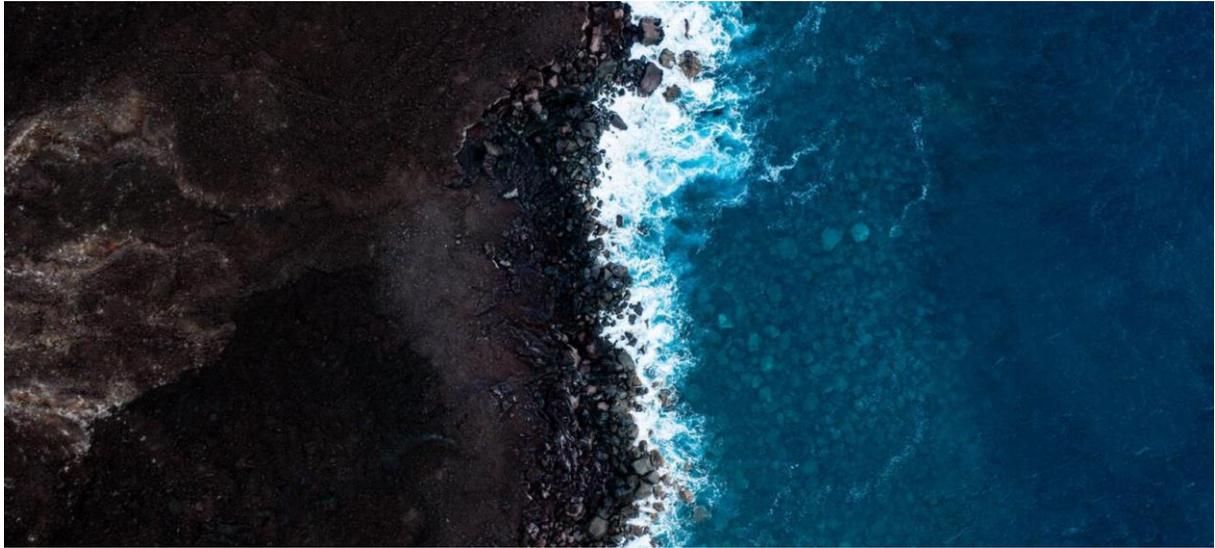


Discovering the truth about team creativity

By Paul J Barbour and Lucy Widdowson



Before discussing team creativity, it is essential to address the elephant in the room. What do you believe about your ability to be creative? While writing our book *Building Top Performing Teams*, we stated our belief that ‘the world is full of potential artists that have never painted, musicians who have not discovered their instrument and poets who have yet to find their pen.’ Both research and our own experience confirm this. However, if you are still not convinced we would encourage you to invest fifteen minutes of your life, along with plenty of pens and paper, watching Graham Shaw’s (2015) TEDx talk - ‘Why people believe they can’t draw - and how to prove they can.’

Even if you are still not convinced about yourself, there is hope. We instinctively know as humans, that we can achieve so much more by working together, than apart. The research on collective intelligence in teams, also confirms this.

So how can you become more creative as a team? When researching creativity Amabile and Pillemer (2012) in their Componential Theory of Creativity, have outlined four areas of importance, including: (1) the importance of skill in the area in which you wish to be creative; (2) the need for creativity-relevant processes; (3) intrinsic motivation towards the area you are focusing on; and (4) a social environment that is conducive to being creative.

Now think about the teams you lead or are part of. How much time are you spending on being creative? Do you have team processes that help the team maximise their creativity? Are the team creating together on areas that matter, e.g. areas linked to their purpose as a team? Does an environment exist (virtually or in-person) that supports creativity e.g. time allowed for creativity, psychological safety?

So, what can this look like when working with teams? As team coaches, a creativity process that we have successfully introduced to teams, includes the following seven steps: (1) decide on the team challenge; (2) give everyone time, in total silence, to consider potential solutions; (3) give everyone equal opportunity to share their ideas without interruption from

others; (4) after everyone in the team has shared their ideas, ask each person to comment on each idea by saying, “what I like about idea xx is xx and what I would add to this is xx”; (5) then as a team look for common themes; (6) collectively decide either through discussion or a secret ballot, which themes merit deeper exploration; and (7) agree on next steps.

This exercise requires an investment in time. It allows team members to think on their own, be heard, listen deeply to others, give generative feedback, and eventually collectively discuss and agree on the next steps. In our experience, those who are more introverted appreciate the silence and time to think, whereas those who are more extroverted, appreciate a process that allows their mind to slow down. Importantly, the process allows for ideas to be created and worked upon, that otherwise would have remained unspoken. This type of thinking and approach, helped us create and co-author a book that we know could not have happened by working on our own.

While team creativity is vital, for a team to be truly transformational, other areas need to be considered. From our review of the research and experience, we have proposed that a team transformational mindset, needs to be underpinned by a focus on team learning, team creativity and innovation, team inclusion and diversity, and team well-being. We have also proposed that team transformation, is only one of the seven characteristics that help build top-performing teams.

In summary, the truth about creativity has a similarity to the truth about teams. It takes time and hard work, however, the benefits are endless.

Lucy and Paul, tutors on team coaching at Henley will be leading our upcoming webinar - What does it mean for a team to be truly transformational? - on 23 March 2021. For details and to register, visit <https://live.henley.ac.uk/events/51916>. You are welcome to bring a colleague or friend if you think they could benefit from this session.