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# How to Organize Creativity at Work

**6 Strategies to:  
Organize, Favor, Encourage, Develop,  
Creativity in the Workplace**

- **1) Creative tanks and commandos**
- **2) Creative contracts**
- **3) Creative forums**
- **4) Innovation units**
- **5) The intranet ideas box**
- **6) Permanent units**

# 1) Creative tanks and Commandos

## ○ Objectives:

- Create a creative climate throughout the company, facilitate spontaneous gathering of ideas, ensure that ideas do not get lost,
- Be able to rapidly solve punctual and occasional problems that require creative input,
- Have an ideas production source available that can be quickly put to use,
- Have available a tool that is supple, flexible, malleable, inexpensive and participative

## ○ Tools

- Train a great number of people in creativity (ex. All of the research department; all the sales force, and even everyone in the company) that becomes the “creative tank”.
- One can then “dip into” this tank and make up temporary “commando” teams to work on punctual areas of research.
- Such widespread training and the participative process it implies creates a climate within the company that is extremely favorable to innovation.

# 1) Example of Creative tanks and Commandos

**A company doing electrical appliance (Merlin Gérin) which needs a lot of new technical ideas wants to have an ideas production source available that can be quickly put to use**

- Chosen Solution:

**Creativity training for almost all management personnel and training of one employee to become Creativity Facilitator. Frequent “commando” unit meetings were organized.**

## 2) Creative Contracts (or temporary creativity units)

- **Objectives**
- **Solving a particular and exceptional problem that requires creative input over a limited period: for example, the launch of a new product; designing a new head office; introducing a new work schedule, etc.**
- **You wish to mobilize a creative reflection unit without necessarily wanting to confer it permanent status, without general training objectives**

- **Tools**
- **It is decided to set up a temporary creativity unit of between 8 to 10 people, specially recruited and trained for this purpose, (generally in the form of one or two 2-day residential courses).**
- **Either people of the enterprise or people not belonging to the company, with different training and style backgrounds according to the issue to be explored**
- **The unit meets regularly (one day every fortnight, for example).**
- **It disbands at the end of the project, like a film crew once the film is finished.**

## 2) Creative Contracts examples...

- **A large editing and mail order company (Reader's digest, La Redoute) wishes to organize from time to time a creative reflection with people able to spontaneously work together creatively.**  
Chosen Solution:
  - **The company set up several temporary creativity unit, specially recruited and trained for this purpose, who works generally during three months on a project.**
  - **Banking conglomerate wishing frequently to urgently solve a punctual problem (development of a new kind of shopping mall, new services)**  
Chosen Solution :
    - **The company sets up an external creativity unit made up (for instance) of architects, decorators, advertising consultants, sociologists and business partners**

### 3) Creative Forums

#### Objectives

- Have a large number of people participate in a creative or prospective reflection process
- Associate different populations divided into groups according to various criterion (ex. Employees, distribution network, clients; or technicians, sales force, concessionaries; or government representatives users, civil servants; consumers, etc.)
- Have differences expressed then try to find a consensus
- Have criticisms expressed, then enable emergence of positive proposals

#### Tools

- The same day, in the same place, 5 to 7 groups of 10 to 12 people
- Gathered together in separate rooms, each with a specialized facilitator (invite creativity techniques: ideas quest, sketches, drawings, etc.)
- The rooms are linked by circuit video
- Each group works separately for about an hour, its work and proposals are then shown in all rooms during synthesis link-ups (central facilitation)

### 3) Creative Forums example...

- **A company in the Do It Yourself sector wishes to have its employees, clients, salespeople and management team participate in a creative reflection process regarding its new products.**
- **The Ministry of civil engineering wish to have all the citizens concerned by the future highway participate to a creative reflection.**
- Chosen Solution:  
**They organize a creative forum: 5 groups are brought together, representing each typology, for a day of creativity. They work in separate rooms, united by circuit video**



## 4) Innovation Units

- **Objectives**
  - **Ensure the development of an innovating project from its beginning to its instigation**
  - **Methodically respect all phases of the process: clarification of objectives, gathering of essential information, consulting relevant specialists, using creativity in the various process steps, testing hypotheses along the way, defining launch stages**
  - **Very clearly distinguish rational phases from creative phases**
- **Tools**
  - **Create an innovation unit (pilot, evaluation and judgment tool) composed of management and experts, with the eventual participation of external specialists (agencies, developmental research practices)**
  - **The unit meets regularly throughout the process (ex. One morning per week) for the rational phases**
  - **When necessary it calls on creativity groups, using one of the tools described here, to bring original ideas to the innovation process**

## 4) Innovation Units example...

- **A company (dairy products : Candia Yoplait) must permanently innovate to encourage consumption of milk. The innovation required is halfway between technical and marketing.**

### Chosen Solution:

**It creates an innovation unit that regularly meets (laboratory, marketing, packaging, advertising). It regularly calls on creativity groups to solve punctual problems.**

## 5) The Intranet Ideas Box

- **Objectives**
- **Incite the internal participants of a structure, (company, professional bodies), to propose new solutions, make suggestions, bring ideas.**
- **Circulate innovating practices**
- **In a structure that has many relays in one or several countries (chain of hotels, network of concessionaries, etc.) it enables the ideas of each unit to be stocked in a database that everyone can consult to as not to "reinvent hot water".**

- **Tools**
- **An intranet or extranet tool in which everyone can put their idea or have their innovation known, if they follow a certain process**
- **The system is stimulated by bonuses**
- **Organize a system that enables ideas or innovative processes to be stored and consulted by key words, so enabling the system to be checked for a problem to see if a solution has not already been found or proposed (see following examples).**

## 5) The Intranet Ideas Box (Examples)

### ○ **France Telecom**

- “Bonidoo” : Currently, there are 800 registered ideas per year. A search engine allows inputted ideas to be found using key words (there are 10 000 ideas in the database)

### ○ **The Accor Ideas Box: Innovaccor**

- Since the start of the system: 4800 ideas generated; 1421 ideas instigated

### ○ **The Hutchinson Ideas Box**

- An Intranet system in 7 languages
- The concept: “ALL INNOVATORS, ALL DUPLICATORS” employees are encouraged to “copy” innovations instigated at another site of the conglomerate; or to be inspired by ideas from somewhere else in the world.

## 6) Permanent Creativity Units

### ○ Objectives:

- Organize creative research on a permanent basis, to meet frequent needs,
- Or to pursue long term research, requiring input over a long period of time
- Or to bring fresh creative ideas to stimulate the research department on a regular basis
- To have an effective creativity tool available at all times, made up of highly experienced team members

### ○ Tools:

- A permanent 8-member unit
- Having undergone in-depth training in creativity techniques
- Meeting on a regular basis (ex. One day per fortnight, or one week bimonthly out of the workplace)
- In an appropriate place, (in or outside of the workplace)
- Please refer to the detailed description of Permanent Creativity Units on the following pages

## 6) Creative Forums example...

- **A company (Poclair) that makes tools for civil engineering (hydraulic diggers, etc.) has to permanently solve new problems to adapt its machines to different geographical contexts.**
- **It wishes to evaluate the results of a creativity process.**
- Chosen Solution:
- **All those working in the research department are trained in creativity (two three-day courses with a variety of participants). They then work together in several permanent creativity unit. The company decides to compare the number of patents registered before and after the creativity process. The results are conclusive: there has been a significant increase in the number of patents registered.**



# Description of a Permanent Creativity Unit

Extract from “La créativité dans l’entreprise”. Guy Aznar.  
Editions d’Organisation

# 14 Criterion for a Group

**Nothing is more difficult to describe than a group.**

- **In order to describe this ten-headed beast, we will use the check-list developed by the American psychologist Hemphil (1). He tried to invent an instrument that would enable “differentiating a group from one that is not”**
- **He defined 14 criterion, a little like one would define a car by talking about its road hugging quality, how you feel inside it, how quickly it accelerates...**

(1) “The Measurement of Group Dimensions”. Hemphil. Journal of Psychology.1959. Vol 29. P.325-342



# 14 Criterion for a Group

- **Criterion n° 1: POLARIZATION**

*"The way that a group is oriented towards a unique, perfectly defined goal that is specific to each member of the group."*

- **Criterion n° 2 SIZE**

*"Number of people participating in the life of the group"*

- **Criterion n° 3: HOMOGENEITY**

*"Degree of resemblance between members of the group, in terms of social characteristics."*

- **Criterion n° 4: STRATIFICATION**

*"Hierarchy between the roles and status of the various members."*

- **Criterion N° 5: PARTICIPATION**

*"Ease or difficulty with which a group accepts a new member."*

# 14 Criterion for a Group

- **Criterion n° 6: PERMEABILITY**

*"Ease or difficulty with which a group accepts a new member."*

- **Criterion n° 7: AUTONOMY**

*"Degree to which a group functions independently of other groups and occupies an independent position in the workplace"*

- **Criterion n° 8: CONTROL**

*"Degree to which the group determines the behavior of individual members"*

- **Criterion n° 9: FLEXIBILITY**

*"Way in which activities are regulated by informal or formal procedures."*

- **Criterion n° 10: STABILITY**

*"Way in which the group continues to have the same characteristics."*

# 14 Criterion for a Group

- **Criteria N° 11,**

- **"Potentiality"** : "Psychological significance that the group has for its members."

- **Criteria N° 12,**

- **"Privacy"** : Level of more or less intimate knowledge of other members of the group."

- **Criteria N° 13,**

- **"Hedonistic Tone"**, "Feeling of pleasure or displeasure linked to belonging to the group."

- **Criteria N° 14.**

- **"Viscosity"** : "Way in which the group functions as a unit."

For the creativity group regroup these four criteria under the terms of:  
**Communication, Trust, Climate, Cohesion**

## Criterion n° 1: POLARIZATION

*"The way that a group is oriented towards a unique, perfectly defined goal that is specific to each member of the group."*

### Recommendations for the permanent creativity unit:

**"Start by clearly defining with the group what you expect of it and root out false motivations."**

- Tell them clearly **why they are gathered together.**
- **Creativity interests everyone, and everyone likes to express themselves.** Some wish to participate out of sheer curiosity, "to see", hoping to simply observe. Others think it will be an enriching experience. Others want to have a little fun. Finally, some others are, consciously or not, seeking some kind of personal therapy.
- Nothing is more contrary to the functioning of groups.
- **It is essentially gathered to find ideas.**
- To find concepts, solutions within the framework that has been defined.
- **This desire to find, this objective to succeed, this striving towards a solution creates a dynamic that shifts information towards new uses.**

***Criterion n° 3: HOMOGENEITY***  
***"Degree of resemblance between members  
of the group, in terms of social characteristics."***

**Recommendations for the permanent creative unit:**  
**"Constitute a heterogeneous group"**

- **Creativity groups must comprise people that are different in several ways.** Different in terms of both professional activity and training.
- **In a company, for example, it is preferable that the group contains people from production, from sales, from the research department, from HR etc.**
- **In groups external to companies, a doctor, artist, chemist, musician and engineer etc. could be brought together.**

## **Criterion n° 4: STRATIFICATION**

***Hierarchy between the roles and status of the various members."***

**Recommendation for the permanent creativity unit:**

**"Compose groups outside of hierarchical concerns, but do not make the permanent unit a therapy center for hierarchical conflicts"**

- Should people from different hierarchy levels participate in the same permanent unit?
- Our position on the issue is simple. There can of course be hierarchical *differences*, and it is better if there is as this enriches the group. "White collar" and "blue collar" workers will have very different approaches to any problem. This can only improve vertical communication.
- There should not, however, be any hierarchical "problems" if time is not to be wasted: a superior who is afraid of losing status in front of a subordinate, for example, or a young manager careful about his image or rival colleagues whose emulation of each other blocks them, etc.

## **Criterion n° 7: AUTONOMY**

***Degree to which a group functions independently of other groups and occupies an independent position in the workplace"***

### **Recommendations for the permanent creativity unit:**

**"Do not confer it too great an autonomy of judgment, but do give it autonomy of life (designated space, privacy, confidentiality, etc.)."**

- It is not autonomous, primarily because of its objectives, since it has not itself chosen the subjects it investigates – it is not a decision group – but has simply been invited to produce ideas within a given proposed context,
- It is not judge of its birth – it is not a spontaneous group, but a provoked group
- It is not free to choose which solution it likes the best. It proposes a quantity of ideas. Another group chooses.

## **Criterion n° 7: AUTONOMY ( 2 )**

***"Degree to which a group functions independently of other groups and occupies an independent position in the workplace"***

- If the group is not autonomous in regards to its context, it is, however, independent in some aspects.
- Where it meets. It is preferable for the unit to meet at a place where it will be de-connected from usual life and free from the kinds of interruptions that prevent the mind from wandering.
- The group is independent as regards its "privacy". Of course it has to present a list of ideas, the result of its work, but the "history" of each session is its own affair. Nobody has a right to know how it came up with its results. Any recordings may be destroyed at the end of a session if the group so wishes. The content of any session is confidential.



## **Criteria N° 11, 12, 13, 14.**

***"Potentiality", "Privacy", "Hedonistic Tone", "Viscosity",***

**We have reserved special treatment for these last four variables, as they regroup for us essential information that is the key to successful creativity groups:**

- We regroup these four criteria under the terms of:
  - **Communication**
  - **Trust**
  - **Climate**
  - **Cohesion**

## ***Criterion n° 11: COMMUNICATION***

**Recommendations for creativity groups, and notably permanent units:**

**“Teach them to communicate”**

- **The group must be a whole and function as one person.**
- **This is myth, of course, but you must get as close to it as you can**
- **How can you improve communication within a creativity group?**
- **First of all by making participants sensitive to the difficulties of communicating.**
- **By having them identify the difficulty of being oneself in the presence of others, being attentive to others, “listening” to others.**

## ***Criterion n° 11: COMMUNICATION (2)***

- By teaching them to talk, by which we mean forbidding expert languages, and a certain number of taboo phrases that cause communication breakdowns.
- This is why is it a good idea to plan, as well as verbal training exercises, for group training in non verbal communication: the corporal expression, and graphic and sound exercise techniques that we habitually use, and which we gather together under the term “non-verbal techniques”.
- One has to be sufficiently linked to them to be able to “feel” their idea, even if one expresses it badly or incompletely. A little like having that impression of “thought transmission” that you often find with a person with whom you are in harmony.

***Criterion n° 12: CONFIDENCE***  
***Recommendations for creativity groups***  
***"Help them to have confidence in their creativity."***

- **A. Confidence in the group.**

- **B. Confidence in the others.**

- There are never any personal ideas in a group, even if it was distinctly enounced by one person during a long moment of silence; it is always a group idea, as it was the silence that allowed it to become, the silence

## ***Criterion n° 12: CONFIDENCE***

### ***Recommendations for creativity groups***

***"Help them to have confidence in their creativity."***

- **C. Confidence when in front of the others.**
- Meaning not to worry about one's image, status or function when in front of the others.
- Not being afraid of ridicule when the most incongruous ideas come out of your mouth, which may transform themselves into the simplest of ideas. Not being afraid of being wrong, having the right to be silent, not having the impression of being judged.
- **D. Self-confidence.**
- Finally, the proven certitude that one is creative and which effectively enables one to become creative. The certitude of finding, of finding something other than that which one is communicating, for example, when participating in intense research exercises.

**Criterion n° 14: COHESION**  
**Recommendations for creativity groups:**  
**"Consider it as an indication of good functioning."**

- Cohesion: "Term borrowed from physics and which designates the force that binds elements together."
- As it is a result, it is the fruit of all the elements previously mentioned and which, one day, make a group of this number of chosen individuals.
- Cohesion is the result of a history. It is also the pooling of motivation, desires and the certitude of fulfilling them.
- An essential condition in the success of a creativity group, cohesion is the sum of all previously mentioned factors.




## ***Others key factors***

***The facilitator***

***The composition of the group***

***The Training***



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