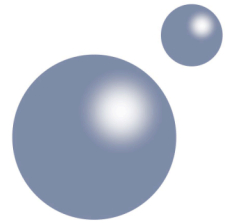


## CREATIVE STYLE – “HOW” ARE YOU CREATIVE?

In conversations with organizational leaders intent on improving innovation in their organizations, inevitably the subject of “Level” arises.

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This is often articulated in questions such as “How do I make my organization more innovative?” or “Help me find the most creative people?”.

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While Creative Level (How Creative Am I?) is a legitimate area of investigation, we have found that more powerful insights and actions emerge from exploring *styles* of Creativity; focusing on “how” rather than “how much”.

## BACKGROUND

The myths and misconceptions that surround concepts like “creativity” and “innovation” impede an organizations ability to innovate effectively. Examining the notion of creative style cuts through the fallacies. At the heart of this concept is the understanding that all people are creative – but *how* they are creative differs, sometimes extremely so. Differences in how people prefer to solve problems, make decisions and bring about change if managed well can be very powerful; managed poorly, performance suffers.

In academia, several researchers have explored aspects of people’s cognitive style. Cognitive – or thinking style - theory makes an important distinction between a person’s capacity for creative thinking (level) and his or her style (how they prefer to do it). Among other findings, the research demonstrates that style and level are not correlated; one does not reveal or predict the other. The heart of the research examined differences in problem-solving, idea-generating, decision-making and effecting change – all key elements of creativity and innovation

The Creative Styles Indicator (CSI) developed by Zeisler Associates, Inc. is based upon that solid research in cognitive style and rigorous application over several years. The CSI measures a person’s creative style and locates it along a continuum ranging from being creative with more and more structure, rules and consensus to being creative with less and less structure, rules and consensus. Each point along the creative styles continuum has advantages and disadvantages.

Those who prefer to work with more structure (relative to others) apply their creativity within existing patterns and procedures, frequently making incremental improvements with a preference for making things “better”. They prefer to solve problems, generate ideas, make decisions and create change *within* prevailing paradigms, orthodoxies, systems and structures.

In contrast, those persons on the “Less Structure” side of the continuum (relative to others) prefer to be creative *outside* of prevailing paradigms, structures and systems as they solve problems, generate ideas and create change. They prefer to work more outside existing patterns and procedures, seeking alternative ways and frequently making more radical changes, as they prefer to make things “different.”

What is clear is that organizations need the benefit of the entire range of creative styles.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR LEADERS

Leading successful innovation requires that leaders understand these differences in creative styles, make use of the differing strengths, and facilitate positive relationships in organizations to produce profitable growth through innovation. Being skilled at innovation requires leaders to identify the kinds of innovation their organizations need if they are to succeed – and therefore the kinds of creative approaches and solutions they need to target.

In addition it requires leaders to be flexible in creating conditions and value for those whose creative styles are different from each other and from what the organization may have valued in the past.