Abstract: The great bulk a creative work in business occurs in teams. But courses on creativity in business focus primarily on creativity as an individual phenomenon. Being creative in a team requires additional skills. Developing skill in recognizing and accommodating differences in “mind patterns” and “thinking skills” can account for many of the incompatibilities that business people encounter in project teams. The proposed workshop would focus on ways to introduce these two constructs two students and to allow them to understand and plan for the different ways that team members process and act upon information. The workshop would give participants experience in diagnosing and then making use of their own individual mind patterns and thinking skills. The workshop draws on the author’s experience in teaching an undergraduate class focused on creativity and collaboration.

**Introduction**

For more than 30 years, business schools have been offering courses on creativity in business (Ray and Myers, 1985, Adam's, 1974) Those courses have largely focused on reconnecting students with their individual creativity.

But the great bulk of creative work in business occurs in teams. Those teams are typically chosen for the mix of disciplinary skills and organizational representation necessary to complete a particular project, rather than for their collaborative skills or creativity. Conflict in creative project teams is commonplace in both business settings and classroom projects. One cause of this conflict is differences in the skills and thinking processes of team participants.

Research and consulting practice have demonstrated that differences in “mind patterns” and “thinking skills” (Markova and McArthur, 2015, 2017) can account for many of the incompatibilities that business people encounter in project teams.

The proposed workshop focuses on ways to introduce these two constructs to students and to allow them to understand and plan for the different ways that team members process and act upon information. The workshop would give participants experience in diagnosing and then making use of their individual mind patterns and thinking skills.

The workshop draws on my experience in teaching an undergraduate class focused on creativity and collaboration. (The course introduces these concepts over two - three weeks and then requires students to use the language of these constructs in planning for and then writing analytically about a creative team project.) The workshop also draws on my long experience designing workshops for graduate students and executives in classroom and industry settings. Initial experiences with the frameworks have found students incorporating language for these two frameworks in their conversations about their own creative process in team projects, and to at least a limited extent, addressing differences within their teams constructively.

**Theoretical Foundations**

This workshop draws primarily from two books by Dr. Dawna Markova and Angie MacArthur (2015, 2017), two professionals who teach collaborative thinking to senior management teams. Their two books focus on presenting and applying two concepts.

“Mind patterns” classify the ways we differ in processing information. In very clear language the books describe difference between Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic ways of processing information. (Similar frameworks are common in other books on learning design.) The books argue that any individual is likely to prefer 1 mode for focused thinking, a different mode for “sorting thinking”, in which the participant is trying to make sense of information, and third mode for “open thinking”, in which the person is trying to generate new ideas. The resulting pattern classifies a person on the which modes they use for each type of thinking. (Based on the book, I am classified as VAK.)

The key insights concerning mind patterns is that teams need to be mindful of and respectful toward differences in the ways team members process information. Differences in habitual behaviors such as movement, eye contact, or note taking may signal differences in modes of information processing. But in groups not attentive to these differences, lack of eye contact, for example, might indicate lack of interest or attention to one team member, while actually signifying deep focus and concentration to another. Building collaborative processes that respect and take advantage of team members’ differing mind patterns can improve collaboration and reduce misunderstandings that lead to conflict.

“Thinking talents” refers to 35 distinct skills that participants may use habitually. The range from interpersonal skills such as “creating intimacy” or “feeling for other” to “goal setting” or “story telling”. The framework asks participants to evaluate each skill and identify whether it is one that they usually, sometimes, or seldom use. Based on the skills that a person usually applies, the person can be classified in to one or more of four quadrants.

The key insight concerning “thinking talents” is that a team typically will need a mix of different thinking talents in order to be both creative and productive. At the same time, team members focussed on process and team members focused on innovation and idea generation may have conflicting priorities over the course of a project. Identifying and planning for differences in thinking talents can reduce the potential for conflict, and at best can lead for thoughtful planning for how to use each team member’s distinctive strengths at appropriate stages of a project.

Many frameworks exist for classifying employees skills and thought processes. The two books by Markova and MacArthur provide concepts that have resonated for my students, and have led to some uncommonly reflective insights in final papers on their creative processes in my course.

**Learning Objectives**

After participating in this workshop, participants will:

1. Be able to identify and explore their own “mind patterns” and “thinking talents”

2. Evaluate those characteristics in order to be able to contribute more effectively to creative teams, and

3. Identify ways that these concepts can be applied in their own courses.

**Workshop Overview**

I have requested a 60 minute format, but would be open to either a longer or shorter time frame. If conducted in a 60 minute format, this exercise would occur in five phases:

1. Identifying mind patterns
2. Comparing experiences with others that share the same mnd pattern
3. Identifying thinking talents and the resulting quadrants
4. Brief planning for a simulated project
5. Reflection/discussion of insights gained from the simulation

If a 30 minutes format is necessary, I would choose to do either steps 1,2 and 5 or steps 3,4 and 5, depending on which seemed more insightful to MOBTS reviewers.

[If a 90 minute format were available, I would expand the simulated project to include 2-3 tasks that would illustrate key pitfalls when people with different mind patterns and thinking talents try to accomplish a time senstive task.]

**Session Description (60 minute design)**

The session schedule is tight, but based on my experience can be completed with a group of 10-20 people in the allotted time.

Introduction (5 minutes). Introduce the concepts and the format of the workshop.

Identification of mind patterns (10 minutes). Participants review 6 pattern descriptions and decide which one(s) best fit themselves.

Pattern matching (10 minutes). Participants talk with others about the ways in which their identified pattern describes their lived experience.

Identification of thinking talents (10 minutes). Participants do a quick identification of thinking talents they use habitually and classify themselves into one of 4 quadrants.

Simulated project (15 minutes). Participants are placed in small teams and receive a simulated creative project assignment. They identify the skills they have and the skills they need in the group. The task ends with an identification of the key challenges the simulated team would face. (For example if a team has all process oriented people, or all idea generators, they will face predictable and opposite problems completing the project.)

Conclusion (10 minutes) Participants identify key insights and identify how they might use these concepts in their own teaching.

**References**

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