

Running Header: Creative Person, Process and Press

My Individual Creative Person, Process and Press Analysis

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I am starting this new chapter and it is about time I confess that my creative process is driving me crazy. Don't get me wrong, I would rather be creative and wrestle with my process than to not be creative. Despite some of my natural inclinations, which are rather dysfunctional, I have been successful academically, as a corporate executive, an entrepreneur, community leader, parent, wife, sister, daughter and the list goes on. Success has been a constant companion because my drive has led me to pursue loftier goals that stretch my capabilities. My biggest stretch is underway as I endeavor to reinvent myself as a transformational leader in education. This stretch, however, is exposing all of my weaknesses. It is clear that my process needs an overhaul. For this reason I have chosen to use this paper to investigate and explore the factors that will influence my application of the Creative Problem Solving (CPS) process. I will consider my individual characteristics as a creative person, my problem-solving style and the creative press (work environment) where I will be most successful.

**Nicole: The Creative Person**

One of the first things I learned as a graduate student at ICSC is that my FourSight Thinking Profile preference combination is High Ideator-High Clarifier which is referred to as the Early Bird (FourSight, 2014). This means that I tend to spin fast and furious on the front-end of a project and my energy quickly dissipates when it's time to develop and implement. I am a prolific divergent thinker. The divergent thinking rules are woven into every fiber of my being: Defer Judgment, Strive for Quantity, Seek Wild and Unusual Ideas, Build on Other's Ideas. My divergent thinking is like a bonfire that can rage for hours with sparks flying everywhere igniting everyone around me, but it doesn't respond well to attempts to subdue it (aka convergent thinking).

In *Creative Leadership: Skills that Drive Change*, Puccio, Mance & Murdock (2011) summarize the Characteristics of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Leaders and Traits of Creative People. I already possess many of these characteristics. Below are items from their list that I believe clearly describe me. (p. 9)

Seeks options not plans	Flexible	Pursues vision with intent
Looks for what is possible	Experimenting	Encourages initiative
Empowers the talent, intelligence, and creativity of others	Independent	Intuitive
Learns from, and is not traumatized by failure	Industrious	Passionate
Tireless, inventive, observant risk-taker who is an ever-hopeful builder	Intellectually curious	Values diverse perspectives

Resists rules and regulations	Open-minded	Expresses self in own way
Challenges assumptions and paradigms	Original	Questions everything
Comfortable spanning boundaries and cross-fertilizing	Perceptive	Self-aware
Improvises, not wedded to routine	Persevering	Sensitive

### Nicole's Creative Process

Despite all those creative characteristics, my natural tendency to diverge, diverge, diverge has probably taken me about as far as it possibly can. That's because "person" is only one of the 4 P's of Creativity as defined by Mel Rhodes. Process is another P, and that is the weak link for me.

Creative Problem Solving (CPS) is a process which when applied deliberately can successfully ignite creative thinking. Puccio, Mance, Barbero-Switalski & Reali (2012) say it is "a conceptual framework that helps organize and improve your thinking, *for any context in which you apply your thinking.*" (p. 72) To become more creatively productive, I will need to master the CPS process, including the CPS tools that will bring me the most individual success; I will need that to stay sane while pursuing this degree on top of my other responsibilities. I will not be satisfied simply becoming a more creatively productive individual; I want to lead others!

As an aspiring transformational leader I must strive to develop "others to their fullest potential." Transformational leadership is about precipitating change and guiding a team or organization toward the new and desired future state. (Puccio, Mance, Murdock, 2011, p.13) Besides mastering my own creative thinking, I will need to create the climate for, and facilitate,

the creative thinking of others (p. 15). To be effective I will need to ensure that I capitalize on my strengths and learn to adjust for my weaknesses. Puccio, Mance & Murdock connect this to Sternberg's description of successful intelligence which is that "People achieve success by recognizing and either correcting or compensating for their weaknesses." (p. 17) As a transformational leader I will need to be able recognize the strengths and weaknesses of those I lead and help them to do the same for themselves and others.

Treffinger, Selby and Isaksen (2008) realized there were "consistent individual differences in the ways people prefer to plan and carry out generating and focusing activities, in order to gain clarity, produce ideas, and prepare for action" (p. 393). They called these differences, problem-solving styles. Their theory is influenced by mindset, attitude and personality and built upon psychological type theory, learning style theory and cognitive style theory combined with the research and field experience in creativity and creative problem solving instruction and training of the developers.

There are three dimensions to problem-solving style, each consisting of two general styles.

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>General Styles</b>
Orientation to Change (OC)	Explorer or Developer
Manner of Processing (MP)	External or Internal
Ways of Deciding (WD)	Person-focused or Task-focused

There is an assessment instrument *called VIEW: An Assessment of Problem Solving Style*. It is my belief that upon reading the descriptions of each style, an adult can likely figure out which

way they lean. When working with children or teenagers, I believe the assessment would be very valuable.

My Orientation to Change (OC) style is Explorer. I thrive when pioneering and breaking new ground. I initiate a wide range of tasks and I'm at my best when tackling situations and challenges that are new, ill-defined, and ambiguous. Risk and uncertainty are my friendly sidekicks; I improvise as a challenge evolves and I can generate lots of data, and propose unusual and original options because I make unusual connections. Any colleague or friend of mine who reads the following part of their description of explorers would think that it was written specifically to describe me!

[Explorers] have a tendency to focus too much on the desired future instead of the current realities. Explorers may need help in moving from generating to focusing activities, and may continue to generate and consider new ideas about a project, even after closure has been reached, or they may abandon a project before reaching any closure, so they can pursue new challenges. (p. 394)

Manner of Processing (MP) is similar to the extraversion-introversion concept of personality but this dimension focuses on how a person acts when problem solving or managing change. It is my hunch that this style would follow the personality construct in almost every case. With that said, it is no surprise that I identify as an Internal. I want to first think deeply about the challenge and come up with my own independent ideas. I prefer to have time to process and will be more energized for the task at hand when given the time to reflect before sharing.

Ways of Deciding (WD) is related to the Thinking-Feeling measure of the MBTI® but again WD is specifically about the individual's behavior in problem solving or managing change. When questions of priority and trade-offs are on the table, as a Person-focused individual I will consider how the decisions will impact other people. I want to make sure we are meeting their needs, creating positive and harmonious relationships and environments. I will want to make sure everyone is heard and respected and will consider whether our choices may offend others, and if so, will want to address how to minimize that impact.

Understanding my own style of problem solving and applying process tools effectively will enhance my problem solving efforts. As I start to lead teams, appreciating their different problem-solving styles will boost the overall results of our problem solving endeavors. Knowing in advance and remaining conscious of the different problem-solving styles of team members can allow each person to work to their strengths and ensure the team as a whole maintains a good balance. By doing this a team can compensate for individual weaknesses with the strengths of other team members.

There are educational implications of this information as well. Selby & Treffinger developed differentiated instructional needs of students based on these problem-solving preferences. As a transformational leader in education this is the kind of personalization I think needs to be brought to the forefront of how we educate in K-12 schools. Treffinger, Selby, Isaksen (2008) suggest that we could teach for "gifted" performance instead of simply identifying "gifted people". Wouldn't that be amazing?

### **Nicole's Ideal Creative Press**

Press is another P of creativity. It refers to the environment encircling the other three - person, process and product. Press can either be conducive to creative work or it can hinder it. Being self-employed for the last 12 years, working mostly from home, I can also say that sometimes press can be both conducive to, and hinder, creative work.

Over the last 3 years I became extremely restless working from home. I began to wonder what other options I could pursue. I tried working from Starbucks and more interesting cafes and while the change of scenery was nice and it worked well sometimes, other times I realized it would be easier to access physical things back at my home office.

I noticed the growing coworking movement and started to research it. These "third places" are becoming a commodity and supply can not keep up with demand. That's because it works, especially for creative people. It's a place where creative freelancers and solo entrepreneurs can come together and "amplify each other's inventiveness." (Sloat, 2014) My challenge was that I lived in a rather rural area which would mean a significant travel to get to a coworking center. Sharing my challenge with another self-employed friend led us to decide to co-work at her house a few times a week. We would sit at her dining room table focused on our own work for periods of time and would take breaks together. It worked beautifully. We got a lot of individual work done, didn't feel as lonely and we could collaborate and bounce ideas off each other throughout the day.

Then my husband & I decided to move our newest business venture into a small professional office building in September 2013. It was a converted barn and the space was



gorgeous and I knew and loved the other 4 business owners in the building. After signing the lease and moving in I really didn't like going to work there everyday. I was even more restless. This made me realize just how much my physical environment affected my focus and feelings and therefore, my work.

I think what I came to realize is that at heart, I am a digital nomad; I like being mobile and working 'anytime, anywhere'. Some digital nomads hop across the globe finding tribes to collaborate with or surroundings to inspire them, while others simply cross town to do that. (Liegel, 2014)

In the future I don't think I will always be working alone and yet organizations can be very stifling. That's why I am intrigued by the results-only work environment (ROWE) explained in Daniel Pink's new book. ROWEs were pioneered by Cali Ressler and Jody Thompson, two former human resource professionals at Best Buy who convinced their employer to switch the corporate headquarters to a ROWE. In a ROWE employees have autonomy over: when, or if, they show up at work or meetings, how they do their work and where they do their work. The bottom line is that they get the work done. Pink suggests that the command and control environments of the 20th century will not work in the 21st century because humans have an innate drive to learn, create, and better the world. (Pink, 2012) I couldn't agree more!

The ROWE, coworking and digital nomad trends are all part of the "Rise of Creative Class" that Richard Florida discusses in his book by that name. He also talks about "Quality of Place" which has to do with where you choose to live. I believe this still falls under the press domain. He believes creative people flock to cosmopolitan areas. These places are not all big cities but they do offer a wide range and interesting mix of culture, ideas, diverse people,

engaging activities - something for everyone. Ultimately, I too will likely need to change where I live to fully feed my creative spirit.

In considering creativity and how it affects my everyday life and future goals, I am glad to realize how applicable my studies are to my own life right now. I get excited about how different my life will be when I master CPS and understand more about creative press and figure out what will truly work best for me. The good news is that I know that creativity is going to be a part of my future and being able to personally testify as to the impact it made on my own life will be very valuable. There is so much more I have to learn and I am ready!!

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