

Bring on the Brilliance: The Making of Great Ideas

Brilliant ideas can only be cultivated within an environment that creates the conditions for creativity.

By Tracy Brower, Ph.D., MM, MCR

A professor in my undergraduate program used to say that a sound idea had its own form of energy. It would attract attention, capture resources and create momentum. In addition, having plenty of ideas was the basis of brilliance - quantity of ideas for the workplace was as important as quality and the engine of success.

However, the half-life of brilliance is becoming shorter and shorter, and yesterday's great idea is less relevant today. The demand for creativity and innovation is increasing exponentially. This gap matters to business and to us individually if we want our careers to develop...well, brilliantly.

A recent study by Steelcase and Microsoft reports 77 percent of people believe creativity is a 21st century job skill, but according to the Adobe State of Create Study, fully 69 percent of people don't believe they're living up to their creative potential, and 61 percent of leaders say they don't believe their company is creative, according to Forrester, The Creative Dividend. Roger Martin argues that in order to thrive in the future, we must make more creatively-oriented jobs.

We need to be more creative, more brilliant, and have better ideas. But how do we accomplish this?

In order to create the conditions for creativity, it is first about shifting our perspectives:

- From hierarchical approaches in which decisions are made by the highest-paid person (HiPPO decision making) to a networked model where the network is tapped for the best solution.
- From limiting creative expectations to certain roles, to empowering everyone to think and act creatively no matter their role.
- From granting the best technology on the basis of status, to making technology available equally.
- From managing with lots of rules to empowering people to make things happen within a set of key principles.

Next, creating the conditions for creativity requires us to signal and reinforce the empowerment we want to create. In addition to critical levers like leadership, reward systems, job design, and lots of other important organizational systems, there is another influence not-to-be-forgotten: place.

Place matters for creative expression, creative confidence and creative productivity. Why? Because it is one of the most explicit artifacts of culture. It signals to employees what is valued, what is expected and how work gets done.

- Place must support both the group collaboration that is important to creativity and the individual focus that is also necessary. It must provide for connections and for privacy.

- Place must provide opportunities for people to be immersed in a problem and also to get away from it for distance, incubation and reflection.
- Place must engage us emotionally and welcome us.
- Place must provide equal access to tools, technology and the space to get work done in multiple ways.
- Place must give each of us what we need – a fluid ecosystem in which we can choose the environment that will work best for each element of our own unique creative process.

A sound idea is its own form of energy, but brilliant ideas can only be cultivated within an environment that creates the conditions for creativity at work. Place can help creativity thrive. Bring on the brilliance.

Dr. Tracy Brower is a sociologist focused on work, workers, and workplace. She is a Principal with the Applied Research + Consulting group at Steelcase and the author of *Bring Work to Life by Bringing Life to Work: A Guide for Leaders and Organizations* (2014). Tracy contributes as a board member with the IFMA Research & Benchmarking Institute as well as an executive advisor for Coda Societies and for Michigan State University's Graduate Mathematics Program.

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