REVIEW ESSAY

Creativity Enhancement Books: How To, Not What To

Eleanor D. Glor

Books Discussed:

Ed Bernacki, Wow! that's a great idea! How to find million-dollar ideas ... and keep finding them! Create your own idea factory (Melbourne, Australia: Perspectives, 2001)

Elaine Dundon, The Seeds of Innovation. Cultivating the Synergy that Fosters New Ideas (New York: Amacon, American Management Association, 2002)

Dennis Sherwood. Smart Things to Know About Innovation and Creativity (Oxford, UK: Capstone Press, 2001)

George M. Prince, The Practice of Creativity through Synectics–the proven method of group problem-solving (New York: Collier Books [Macmillan], 1970)

Rolf Smith, The 7 Levels of Change. Create, Innovate and Motivate with the Secrets of the World's Largest Corporations. (Arlington, Texas: The Summit Publishing Group, 1997)

Edward de Bono, The Use of Lateral Thinking (Aylesbury, Bucks, UK: Pelican Books, 1971. Originally published by Jonathan Cape, 1967).

Introduction

People give me, I buy and I borrow books about innovation and creativity. This essay examines six such books. Books about creativity and innovation exhort readers to be creative and innovative, and offer the tools and strategies for doing so. None of these volumes looks at any scholarly thinking about the subject. As a result, they are without context or theory, and fall into my category of how to books.

A tremendous number of how to books are available–how to garden, cook, fix cars, be happy. They cheerfully position themselves on the practical, technical, concrete side of things. Many people are concrete rather than conceptual thinkers, so this might help to explain the how to phenomenon. While it is understandable, how to has its troubling side. None of it examines what kind of thinking or politics it grows out of, none of explores the implications of the activity. Mainly positive, sometimes only positive, effects are identified or implied. In other words, no critical faculty is applied to it. Any criticisms are assumed to be made by fuddy-duddies who want to maintain the status quo. This anti-intellectual, positivistic, technical approach to innovation worries me.

For my part, while I think innovation is mainly about how to get from here to there, it is important to know how and why we got here, how and why we want to go there, and (most

important) where "there" is." often how we get from here to where we want to be, we can't get there unless we understand how we got here and why, where we want to go, and how. Although not in the same way or as directly, these books often address the same factors as I do in my concept of innovation patterns–individual motivation to innovate, organizational culture and external environment (culture), and challenges to successful implementation and success (Glor, 2001a, b). Let us see what approach they take.

The Books

Ed Bernacki's short (164 pp) book was prepared as a supplement to his workshop on creating ideas. It is specifically targeted to the private sector, as are the other books reviewed, but some of the techniques could also be applied in the public sector.

Bernacki's emphasis is on tools, resources and the right environment. While much of what he offers is not new–such as the need to search broadly for ideas from staff, suppliers, and customers–he has some interesting ideas. He suggests, for example, applying five themes to a company's situation: (1) Solve problems but remember opportunities, (2) Recognize the difference between customer needs and wants, (3) Change the rules of the game, which are typically the components of the culture of an organization and, in my opinion, among the hardest things to change. (4) Pursue the opportunities. (5) Address innovation in your annual report. In other words, be accountable for how much you do or do not support innovation in your company.

Like Bernacki, Elaine Dundon looks overall at innovation management, and has developed a number of principles to guide it. She focuses on three themes: creative thinking, strategic thinking, and transformational thinking.

Dundon sees creative thinking as supported by believing in it, by curiosity, and by discovering new connections. For her, strategic thinking involves seeing the big picture, looking to the future, and doing the extraordinary. Transformational thinking is about seeking greater awareness, igniting passion, and taking action. She concludes by looking at advice for stimulating organizational innovation, using a systems approach.

These "pillars" are the elements that need to be created for sustained innovation, including an innovation vision and strategy, environmental supports, resources, networks, and rewards. They are not unlike the elements I have identified in my work on an innovative government (Glor, 1997, 2000). As I did, she has also identified an innovation process. Hers has nine stages and includes such steps as gathering information, identifying the real problem, identifying ideas, and gaining commitment. Dundon has also created a list of probing questions to ask about any innovation, and that will help anyone become more curious.

Dennis Sherwood's is a more serious *how to* book. Sherwood is British, and has worked for many years as a management consultant. In recent years he has been a creativity and innovation consultant. Sherwood uses some new tools and many techniques developed by others. His approach is both thoughtful and based on experience.

Sherwood's book is longer (307 pp), and more thorough than those of Bernacki and Dundon, the other two books discussed so far. One element I particularly like is his short

explanations of others' techniques, of who their developers were, and of where they did their work. In this way, he quickly runs through business process engineering, scenario building, de Bono's thinking hats, total quality management, and more. In total his book takes the reader through many of the most popular concepts and techniques of creativity and innovation; however, he offers little that is new.

George Prince's book was written in the early days of the Synectics movement, which continues today. Prince suggests that all humans are highly creative, but that we all also develop a fear of change. In this book, he addresses how leaders and participants in meetings can develop more effective strategies for encouraging creativity. Like many other authors–de Bono, Rolf Smith, Elaine Dundon, Ed Bernacki, Min Basadur (1994)–he suggests the strategic planning process needs to be broken into parts and that different thinking and participative methods need to be applied to the different segments. Early in the process, the most inclusive thinking possible must be applied, and only at the end of the process can critical thinking be allowed to enter.

Prince's focus is on the meeting process. In a traditional meeting, a strong chairman "points directions, makes instant judgments of relevance and usefulness, hews to the agenda, and parcels out assignments." (p. 7) He is self-serving and manipulative. His ideas get special treatment and he gravitates to responses that support his preconceived notions. Immediate negativity to other ideas and the need to defend alternate points of view are accepted as useful and realistic. Only one idea is seriously considered at any one time.

The alternative is for a meeting leader (not always the same person) to use his power to serve the group members–to assure that no (self) images are damaged, that no one loses; to direct aggression against the problem, not people; and to demonstrate that in this meeting everyone wins. In meetings run by leaders every contribution is honoured and used, people win with contributions, there is intense cooperation and teamwork, all directed to accomplishing the tasks at hand. Good leaders cultivate the attitude that anything is possible. This book offers a number of techniques for leaders to use to encourage these approaches and outcomes.

Rolf Smith's is another book that focuses on techniques. Smith set up the US Air Force's first Office of Innovation, then became a consultant. He is an effective presenter (I have seen him), who connects with people.

The seven levels of change of which he speaks are doing the right things (effectiveness), doing things right (efficiency), doing the right things better (improving), doing away with things (cutting), doing things other people are doing (copying), doing things no one else is doing (differences), doing things that can't be done (impossible) [and of course, beyond impossible....].

Rolf Smith broke his understanding of creative thinking into separate strategies. One of the most appealing aspects of Edward de Bono's early work is that he examined the thinking process behind creativity. De Bono delved into his concepts by writing separate books about two of them–lateral thinking and simplification. Moving outside the normal ways of thinking about issues is fundamental to creative thinking, and it is also very hard for most people to do–we have become hard wired to vertical, analytic thinking. De Bono spends some time in this book talking about the limitations of the scientific method which, in effect, limits its considerations to one idea–the most likely idea–at a time.

The term "lateral thinking" was de Bono's contribution. Based on the concepts of lateral thinking and simplification which, I believe are first outlined in this book, de Bono went on to develop the idea of thinking hats as a way to avoid premature critical thinking. He always promoted the need for vertical thinking as well, but at a later stage in the development and evaluation of a new idea. He eventually broke evaluation of an idea into six stages, and attached his famous coloured hats to them (1986). Dennis Sherwood has suggested the addition of a seventh, purple hat, whose role is to ask: "What do we do next? Do we have sufficient information to take a decision, or is it worth continuing this analysis to a deeper level?" (p. 227).

De Bono has described four principles of lateral thinking: recognition of dominant polarizing ideas (p. 68), the search for different ways of looking at things, a relaxation of the rigid control of vertical thinking, and the use of chance. De Bono makes clear that once an approach is chosen, it should then be "pursued with the full vigour of vertical thinking" (p. 97).

De Bono has offered here a truly original approach to enhancing the creativity of ideas. Lateral thinking is not natural for most people, but it can be learned, and it is fun.

Conclusion

Six books about thinking creatively. Two were written early in the current phase of the study of creativity and innovation, a phase that has emphasized the practice rather than the understanding of creativity. Four were penned recently, and add minimally to the understanding of creativity, emphasizing technique instead. All of the books argue or assume that creativity can be enhanced. As I have argued elsewhere (Glor, 1998), the scientific basis for this argument is thin.

These authors do not argue that creativity can be enhanced on the basis of research but on the basis of practice. Each has worked hard to help corporations become more creative in an increasingly competitive environment. The more recent books in particular emphasize that creativity is no longer an option, it is a necessity.

None of the books focuses on the public sector. Since it is unlikely a solid case can be made that the public sector does not need to be creative, and only "dinosaurs" timidly make this case anyway, there must be another explanation. I would suggest that it is a question of market. Most of these people have worked extensively with large corporations, ones that can afford the help, and appreciate the need. Large corporations bear the greatest resemblance to the public sector, in their size and use, for example, of corporate-wide strategies and administrative rules. Although Rolf Smith started his career in creativity in the US Air Force, private sector organizations continue to be the ones most interested in creativity and innovation. If government offered consultants enough work, the consultants would write books about creativity in the public sector–I understand, for example, that Ed Bernacki has now prepared materials to go with the workshops he is offering in the public sector. Nonetheless, the public sector still has some catching up to do.

While writers like de Bono brought truly new techniques to the table, and the other authors continue to argue that creativity and innovation are necessary in the private sector, I believe there is an equal or greater need for them in the public service. Although these authors offer the same techniques to the public sector, and thus imply that their techniques are universal and value-free,

this is never true. Because the concepts of learning and imagination, the assumed roles of private and public sector are not discussed, their books do not move learning forward.They remain what they are, cook books for an unplanned meal.

So, let's see if we can't get off this spinning wheel. Can we all agree, for example: (1) On a definition. Innovations are creative ideas for new or improved products, services, processes, relationships, and organizational improvements that make things better (Hitler was not an innovator when he created efficient extermination camps). Ethics cannot be removed from the innovation equation. (2) There is an identifiable innovation process. (3) Specific skills are required at each step of the process, and they can be enhanced. (4) Will and risk-taking are required to innovate. We share some insights. Can we either come to a common set of conclusions or start debating the issues that divide us? These books do none of this: For the most part these are mechanistic, technical, supposedly ethically neutral, self-help approaches to innovation.

Let's stop repeating ourselves. Some people are beginning to talk, for example, about webs and patterns of life in organizations. I find this interesting. W. Warner Burke talks about Fritjof Capra's work (e.g. Capra, 1996) as useful in organizational development and Charles Sirois uses the concept of *organic management*. At least some relatively new metaphors are being applied to innovation in organizations in their books. I say "relatively" because the work that led to the organic metaphor was done during the 1970s. Are there no new ideas since then?

While Prince and de Bono's ideas were original in their time, the other authors are largely repeating what others have said. How odd: a lack of creativity in books about creativity and innovation!

Sources:

Basadur, Min. 1994. Simplex: *A Flight to Creativity*. USA: Creative Education Association

Burke, W. Warner. 2002. *Organization Change*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications

de Bono, Edward. 1986. *Six Thinking Hats*. Viking

Capra, Fritjof. 1996. *The Web of Life: A New Synthesis of Mind and Matter*. Hammersmith, London: HarperCollins, 1996

Glor, Eleanor. 1998. "What Do We Know About Enhancing Creativity and Innovation? A Review of Literature." *The Innovation Journal*. Vol. 3(1). Internet at: http://www.innovation.cc under Peer- reviewed section.

Glor, Eleanor. 1997. *Policy Innovation in the Saskatchewan Public Sector*, 1971-82, E. D. Glor, ed. 1997. Toronto: Captus Press

Glor, Eleanor. 2000. *Is Innovation a Question of Will or Circumstance? An Exploration of the Innovation Process Through the Lens of the Blakeney Government in Saskatchewan, 1971-82*. E. D. Glor, ed. *The Innovation Journal* at http://www.innovation.cc under Books.

Glor, Eleanor. 2001a. "Innovation Patterns." *The Innovation Journal: The Public Sector Innovation Journal*. Vol. 6(3) (July) http://www.innovation.cc under Peer-Reviewed Papers.

Glor, Eleanor. 2001b. "Key Factors Influencing Innovation in Government." 2001. *The Innovation Journal: The Public Sector Innovation Journal*. Vol. 6(2) March. http://www.innovation.cc/rev_arts/factors_of_innovation.htm

Sirois, Charles. 2000. *Organic Management. Creating a Culture of Innovation*. Toronto: Telesystem, Harper Collins

Eleanor Glor has published "What Do We Know About Enhancing Creativity and Innovation? A Review of Literature," published by *The Innovation Journal* at:
http://www.innovation.cc/peer_reviewed/creativ7.htm