

The Unexpected Venn: Creative Action in Leadership

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OUTLINE:

1. Imagitivation: ACTION as Key
2. FEAR: Failure as Prohibitive Action
3. Power of Play
4. Unusual Inputs vs. Institutional Hierarchy

A 2024 study published by the expeditionary warfare school poses that “military education, as it’s delivered today, is not suited for fostering creative and innovative leaders, instead it may actually drum the creativity out of service members. At the same time, military success depends on creative problem solvers.” (Holm)

Leadership is a blend of the leader, the led and the situation. Not one ‘right’ way to lead- not one singular, perfect approach that fits every scenario. You can never predict the who, why, or where your leadership will need to reach, so your mind must be ready, agile, and equipped for anything. How do we prepare to have the solutions and ideas we need when those needs arise?

If you want the right idea at the right moment, you've got to begin the process far upstream from when you need that idea. Tomorrow's ideas are the results of today's intentions. (Accidental Creative)

Lesson 1: Imagitivation

What is imagination? (TO IMAGINE)

- **Imagination** is the ability to bring to mind things not present to our other senses. Fashionista penguin.

What is creativity? (TO CREATE)

- **Creativity** is applied imagination, involving **action**. Development, synthesis, building. Draw the penguin.

What is innovation? (TO INNOVATE)

- **Innovation** is **applied** creativity, based on existing concepts/scaffolding. Improve the penguin.

These are all ACTION centric. To imagine, to create, to innovate- action is the key.

Importance of creativity included in military doctrine:

- **ADP 6-22:** LRM states that creativity is necessary for both leader attributes and competencies. It's required to produce "original and worthwhile ideas," "prevent complacency," and "adapt to new environments."
- **ADP 6-0:** The mission command philosophy exists to empower agile and adaptive leaders. NCOs equipped to **take action in the absence of orders**. NCO CREED.
- **ADP 7-0:** Outlines seven principles for developing future leaders, including training leaders to think critically and creatively.
- **Key concept of Army Definition Leadership = ACTION.** *Process of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish the mission and improve the organization.*

Creative solutions come with an inherent amount of risk. Mission command philosophy specifies that risk acceptance is an official part of effective leadership structures. **Creative Action in Leadership=Risk.**

Chapter 2: Fear/Failure

6 primary fears that inhibit action: Loss of life, loss of livelihood, loss of reputation, unusual states of mind (being a fool), fear of speaking before an assembly, fear of ghosts (heroes). **FEAR OF FAILURE.**

What are some ways to overcome fear of action?

- Challenge you to make a mistake today. What did you fail at today?
- Festival of Errors/FailCon/Queasy Eagle Award
- 1,000 ideas. Turn the smaller idea battles into a bigger war.
- You WILL fail as a leader.

Chapter 3: Play

Why do animals play? *Bob Fagen (behavioralist): In a world continuously presenting unique challenges and ambiguity, play prepares them for evolving planet. Play activity sculpts brain through simulation and testing. (Play)*

6 main properties of Play: Apparently purposeless, Voluntary, Inherent attraction (fun), Freedom from time/diminished consciousness of self (flow), Improvisational potential, Continuation desire.

Play personality: Joker, Kinesthete, Explorer, Competitor, Director, Collector, Artist/Creator, Storyteller.

How does Play apply to creative leadership?

- DEVELOPS: Requires permission to be a beginner- Amateur/Beginner is not an insult.
- RESILIENCE: Recognize how you naturally cope with stress/challenges.
- ESPRIT DE CORPS: Play creates bonding chemicals and encourages human connections.
- See the variety and unique strengths in your teams. Recognize what motivates one person might not resonate with another.

Chapter 4: Unusual Inputs

We are not creative in isolation, even if we create alone- we are always building on what we've seen, heard, thought or experienced- so the deeper and broader your pool of experiences the deeper your creative leadership potential extends.

The information we absorb "stimuli"- raw materials that stimulate thought. Higher the quality of your creative stimuli, the better you are at setting yourself up for the high-level breakthroughs. We should be seeking challenging, relevant, unusual, & fresh inputs.

JABERWALKING POEM ACTIVITY: WRITE A POEM, FIND THE WORDS, CHAOS ON SCREEN.

Chapter 4.2: Institutional Functioning

The Einstellung effect: Cognitive bias that occurs when a person's existing knowledge causes them to default to a familiar solution to a problem, even when a better method is available.

THE OMEGA COA ACTIVITY: 26 IMPOSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Chapter 5: Closing

Cultivating creativity is a continuous process. (Just like leadership). We cannot get people to be creative once and then claim to have established a creative culture. Creativity needs to be integrated into the organization and continually cultivated. (Holm)

Column A: CHOOSE ACTION

- Make a conscious choice that this is important to you and commit to devoting a daily or weekly goal time to the pursuit.
- Write the original amount of time you'd be willing to devote here; change if you'd like.
- Write your "The Big 3. Not to do list, not project list, it's 3 concepts where you could benefit from a creative breakthrough. This will keep them on the burners of your brain, so any new inputs will more likely be aimed towards these 3 projects.

Column B: PRACTICE ACTION through CONSCIOUS SCHEDULING

- **Start taking notes.** Consciously observe every mission you work, watch how your different leaders handle situation- take notes. Consider every mission a mini-masterclass in leadership philosophy. Imagine how you would handle the scenarios you watch them unfold.
- **Ask to shadow** or have a coffee with a leader you respect. Ask real questions.
- **Morning Pages** (Artists Way). "Why write them? Get to the other side."
- **Make a mistake this week and say "HOW FASCINATING.** (Fighting fear of failure)
- **Something from ACCIDENTAL CREATIVE**
 - Idea Time: 1 hour a week, warming up the brain regularly.
 - Unnecessary creating: Physical creation, simple is great.
 - Build a network, start a circle. (Need accountability? I'm game!)

Column C: IMPROVE INPUTS

- **Let your brain be bored.** We all feel the urge to look at our phone- standing in line, killing time scenarios- how many times can you forgo looking at your phone when you feel the draw? Feel what happens when you deny yourself that dopamine.
- **REDUCE JUNK FOOD INTERNET INPUTS.** Put timer locks on social media apps.
- **What are you curious about right now and how can you explore it?**
- **What scares you right now and how can you embrace it?**
- **Once a day, or week, or month-** Put yourself into a new situation, engage with a new person in conversation, find a workshop, go to an exhibit, listen to a new genre of music, try a new hobby, take an unusual route to work... seek a challenging experience. This doesn't have to be a huge time commitment- finding small ways to fight your own patterns helps to generate momentum that encourages larger leaps later.

All stories of creators tell the same truths: that creating is extraordinary, but creators are human; that everything right with us can fix anything wrong with us; and that progress is not an inevitable consequence but an individual choice. Necessity is not the mother of invention- you are. (How to Fly a Horse)

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