

SIGMALeader

360 Leadership Assessment



Leadership Series

Great Leaders
Are Creative



GREAT LEADERS ARE CREATIVE

“ Without change there is no innovation, creativity, or incentive for improvement. Those who initiate change will have a better opportunity to manage the change that is inevitable.

– William Pollard

Creativity is often desired in organizations, but can be difficult to foster. Some organizations depend on creativity to thrive, while others benefit from novel solutions or approaches to problem solving. Individuals are most creative when they are interested in their work, and when there is a new problem to be solved or an interesting task to tackle¹. Given that creativity can depend on the workplace environment or the job itself, leaders have the unique ability to make their workplace one in which employees strive, and are rewarded, for their creative input.

In a leader, creativity means demonstrating the ability to initiate original and innovative ideas, products, and approaches. It is not enough to be creative yourself, today's leaders are tasked with inspiring their direct reports to be creative as well. Innovation can make work easier, faster, or more efficient, so the potential benefits to organizations are limitless. Given the growing interest of creativity in the workplace, leaders need to be skilled in both innovating and inspiring.

In assessing your current creativity, ask yourself the following questions:

- Does my organization foster creativity?
- Is there room for employees to make, and learn from, mistakes?
- Does my organization reward creative behavior?
- Do I model creative behavior in my own work?
- How can I apply solutions from one area to my own work?
- What are the holes in our current processes that need innovating?

Improve Creativity at Your Organization

The work environment matters: It is possible for organizations to be more, or less, supportive of creativity. To foster innovation in yourself and your followers, the ideal organizational culture

is one where creativity is valued. Leaders may want to open opportunities for employees to work collaboratively where possible², and reward employees for designing successful ideas or products. In addition, a creativity-supportive environment should acknowledge that not all ideas are successful ideas, and that failure is an acceptable, and even necessary, part of the creative process. This gives employees the freedom, means, and encouragement to try new ideas, to approach problems in a new way without fearing punishment or retribution.

Leader creativity is related to follower creativity: In line with having support for creativity, when leaders model creative behavior to their employees, they are more likely to receive creativity in return. This may be due to a combination of other factors, such as trust, encouragement, and engagement. Where possible, try to apply novel techniques or ideas when completing your work. This helps foster the supportive environment and shows direct reports that leaders value creativity. Once employee creativity begins, remember to applaud and reward new ideas to continue to encourage a more open environment.

Knowledge is key: One major component of creativity that is often overlooked is knowledge². It follows that to create new ideas, products, or approaches, you need a thorough understanding. First, you must know the items that already exist. Further, you must understand how these items are flawed, and where to focus your attention. Finally, you must understand how ideas from one area can apply to another, making it easy to innovate by pulling together many existing ideas into one new solution. Innovators don't pull ideas from thin air: they must understand the situation and the problem at hand. For organizations, this means ensuring your employees are well trained in their job, and that they have access to ideas or procedures from other departments or companies that they can then apply to their own work.

Start Doing These 3 Things Now to be More Creative

The following steps can help you be more creative at work:

1. **Support creativity on a day-to-day basis.** There are a few things that can be done daily to help foster creativity in your department. First, develop your relationships with employees. A friendly, supportive relationship between leaders and followers has been associated with greater creativity³. In addition, leaders can support innovation on a small scale. For example, leaders can hold problem solving meetings, where employees are free to share their ideas, showing that critical thinking is valued and desired in your organization. Remember, most employees need to feel comfortable in the organization and with their leader before offering their own suggestions.
2. **Motivate to innovate.** Research has suggested that individuals who are more motivated in their job are more likely to be creative². More specifically, those who feel autonomous on their job – that is, that they have control over how their work is done – are more likely to engage in creative thinking. Being successful at motivating oneself, as well as others, are key traits in a leader's toolkit, as motivated employees are generally more productive. Borrow lessons from your competency in [Motivating Others](#) and [Achievement and Motivation](#) to better place your employees to be creative.

3. **Engage with the task at hand.** For both leaders and followers, engaging in work is related to higher creativity³. It may be that engaged employees have many of the other hallmarks that support creativity, such as a supportive environment, autonomy on their job, knowledge of their job, and the freedom to make mistakes. It may be that engaged workers are more creative, or that more creative employees are more engaged with their work. Either way, an increase in one is associated with an increase in the other, so engaging in your work, or helping employees to engage in theirs can positively impact innovation.

Resources



[Teaching Creativity to Leaders](#)



[Creativity and the Role of the Leader](#)



Develop your creativity by taking advantage of SIGMA's coaching services.

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SIGMA Assessment Systems, Inc.

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References

¹ Conti, R., Coon, H., & Amabile, T. M. (1996). Evidence to support the componential model of creativity: Secondary analyses of three studies. *Creativity Research Journal*, 9(4), 385-389.

² Amabile, T. M. (1983). The social psychology of creativity: A componential conceptualization. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 45(2), 357-376.

³ Bae, S. H., Song, J. H., Park, S., & Kim, H. K. (2013). Influential factors for teachers' creativity: Mutual impacts of leadership, work engagement, and knowledge creation practices. *Performance Improvement Quarterly*, 26(3), 33-58.