



Psychology Fuels Innovation

By Dr. Stacy Feiner
Cleveland Crain's Business, March 2020

Leaders of businesses of all sizes are looking for a competitive advantage wherever they can find it, and innovation is where it's at.

In addition to assigning innovation goals to design engineers and creative marketers, leaders are giving the assignment to their workforce as well. They are trying to inspire innovation using trends such as relaxed dress codes, high-tech gyms and replacing restrictive PTO days with permanent flexibility.

While furnishing an innovative environment and fostering an innovative culture are definitely best practices for creating a workplace that is receptive to new ideas, a crucial component of the formula is missing — and it reveals a glaring blind spot that frustrates leaders and holds many companies back.

Innovation requires more than comfortable surroundings and a relaxation from routine. You actually need new ideas — original thoughts — in order to have innovation.

This is where the conversation takes us into the realm of creativity, and creativity resides in human psychology. Many leaders employ a top-down approach to gain organizational buy-in and encourage everyone to jump on board. But creativity does not emerge with this strategy. Rather than starting top-down, creativity starts at the beginning of the innovation equation, which is in fact human psychology: where creativity resides and where original ideas are generated.

Psychology is a human resource, and leaders need to learn to value it in this way. We are now realizing that "soft skills" and emotional intelligence are the most



STACY FEINER, PsyD
Business Psychologist
216-315-3155
stacy@stacyfeiner.com
www.stacyfeiner.com
www.psynamics.com

valuable natural resource for companies. Many leaders are focused on the results of innovation, such as increasing profit, beating the competition and disrupting industries. That can lead them to neglect to focus on the source of innovation. When they do focus on it, however, it changes everything.

Creativity is spawned within a person's psychology through a synthesis of complex processes where novel ideas are conjured. When the conditions are right, we suspend our mind from habits of convention, enabling us to escape the present, reconstruct the past and imagine the future — to envision something that does not exist and change the world with it.

The problem is, the inner realm where people can unleash their creativity has been compromised by pressures in business to be right, to follow the rules and to compete. So how do we create the right conditions for spawning original thought — and can we get there fast?

Psychologists are the professionals who set the stage and facilitate the process that allows people to readily move from conventional to unconventional, from original thought to true innovation.

A fundamental aspect of our profession is to apply a refined set of relational tools — evolved from theory, research, experience, training and practice — that stimulates the conditions for creativity and growth. It takes experience to consistently unleash human potential:

1. **Safety** in the space to be authentic, where no confidence will be breached, nor ulterior motives lurk.
2. **Emotional Connection** with someone listening to our deep thoughts, feelings, aspirations.
3. **Intelligent Exchange** with someone pushing us to evolve our ideas, expand the realm of possibility.
4. **Experimentation** to tinker with ideas as they take shape.

When you provide the conditions for creative thinking, your people experience the psychological processes to generate new ideas for innovation. So, what goes on when the conditions are put in place? Here are four psychological processes that ignite and interact to fuel original thought that leads to creativity:

- **Positive emotion:** This feeling expands our radius of awareness and opens our minds to possibility. When we experience positive emotions like joy, our emotions spiral upward, readying us to create.
- **Associative thinking:** This state allows ideas to flow freely and opens the mind to easily link ideas, images, observations, sensory input, existing knowledge and the subconscious.
- **Divergent thinking:** This process allows outside-the-box thinking where your mind generates creative ideas about how unrelated ideas connect and you can imagine unusual uses for an object with an otherwise prescribed purpose.
- **Reflective thinking:** Reflection allows the mind to observe the larger context, the meaning and implications of an experience with an awareness of one's own agency and influence.

Psychology is a catalyst for creativity. Businesses with a persistent blind spot to the source of original thinking necessary for innovation will fall behind those that bring aboard professionals who can create the conditions for creativity to flourish.

How is your business accomplishing this? A flex policy won't do it, but introducing a psychologist to your team will help foster creative thinking that promotes valuable innovation. Understanding the source of innovation is necessary in order to encourage it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

"When you start a conversation with Stacy, prepare to be engaged."

Dr. Stacy Feiner is the CEO of Psynamics and business psychologist. Stacy's distinctive coaching method brings psychology to the forefront of business, so leaders get the results they want faster. Her approach solves complex dynamics within corporations, private enterprise, management teams, and boards that hold them back. Stacy is an author, speaker, and entrepreneur.