

The Creative Personality — A Conceptual Discussion

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Abstract

The creative personality is a distinctively unique person. There are four broad aspects of human personality, viz., public personality, private personality, blind spots and unknown personality. In order to be more creative, an individual should delve into his blind spots and unknown self and strip away the nameless unconscious fears and inhibitions that hold him back from being creative. There are many psychological traits that characterise a creative individual. A creative personality has certain special abilities. Again, there are many human motives, which influence creative behaviour.

Key-Words : Personality; Creativity; Creative ability; Motivation; Ideal creative personality.

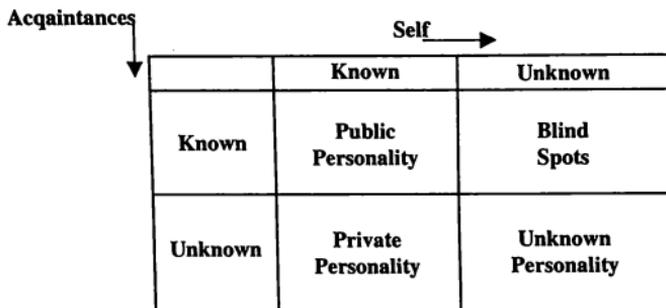
Introduction

Although individuals are different from one another, the creative person is distinctively unique, both because of what he does and what he is. The case studies of creative persons are absolutely fascinating. Abhorred, as often as admired, they are vibrant, moody, complex and seemingly a bundle of contradictions. This complexity of personality sometimes is a liability to the creative person, or to those associated with him. But it may contribute to his creativity. If one can think of different facets of personality as apertures through which the person admits perceptions, ideas and feelings, then it is obvious that a multifaceted personality, especially one with seemingly contradictory traits, may ingest into his consciousness a far richer range of stimuli than a simpler, more uniform personality. In the tumult of clashing stimuli may well be born those unique syntheses known as creative insights. One of the first steps to becoming more creative may be the acceptance - rather suppression - of contrary impulses, feelings and ideas welling in the underworld of the mind. A peep into oneself to identify blind spots as well as hidden strengths and motives may be a necessary first step towards the development of a more creative personality. Therefore, it is necessary to enquire into the kinds of personality traits, motives, etc., that facilitate creative activity, i.e., activity whose outcome is novel, useful, imaginative, perceptive, and, in its final form, conceptually distinct from the triggering stimulus.

Personality is the set of distinctive characteristics of the individual that he manifests in a variety of situations. Personality is a complex phenomenon. There are four broad aspects of human personality (Luft, 1961), viz.

- i. both known to self and known to acquaintances (i.e., public personality)
- ii. known to self but not known to acquaintances (i.e., private personality)
- iii. not known to self but known to acquaintances (i.e., blind spots)
- iv. both not known to self and not known to acquaintances (i.e., unknown personality).

These four aspects of personality have been shown in the Johari Window below :



Johari Window (Luft, 1961)

The smaller the area of blind spots and unknown personality, the more aware the individual is of his deeper impulses and potential, and the more effectively the person can marshal his inner resources to achieve his goals. If becoming more creative is the desire of the individual, it would be useful for him to delve into his blind spots and his unknown self to make contact with the deeper forces that are shaping his life. He should try to strip away the nameless unconscious fears and inhibitions that hold him back from the adventures of creative life and tap the spring of his deepest yearnings. These, apart from providing a focus to the arena of his creativity, would provide him with a nearly limitless source of energy to pursue the often hard and lonely struggles to create effectively. Also, the greater is the consistency between the known and the under-known selves of the individual, the better it is for the individual in terms of succeeding at difficult creative tasks, i.e., the two selves should reinforce each other rather than block each other.

Traits Congenial to Creativity

A good number of behavioural scientists have tried in different ways to identify those psychological traits that distinguish creative individuals from relatively less creative individuals, the purpose precisely being to identify those traits that contribute to creativity. Normally, this is done by selecting two groups of individuals, one known to be creative and the other known to be non-creative or less creative based on some test or criterion. Thereafter, personality tests are administered to the two groups. If there is a statistically significant difference on any of the measured personality traits, such trait(s) is (are) assumed to be related to creativity. But there are many abilities (viz., fluency, flexibility, originality, sensitivity, guessing and elaborative) related to creativity and the findings may be affected by which of these is/ are considered to separate the two samples. Again, from this type of research it is never clear whether the trait causes creativity or vice versa or whether the association between creativity and the trait is an artificial one or one arising from mere chance. However, on the whole, the findings of the studies conducted by such behavioural scientists certainly provide some useful hints as to the traits that are worth inculcating for enhancing one's creativity.

Creative Abilities

Creative ability consists of several distinct abilities as to divergent thinking. In fact, human creativity is not just one ability but a whole cluster of abilities (Guilford and Merrifield, 1960; Torrance, 1965a). The major creative abilities so far identified have been briefly discussed below.

Fluency ability — This is the ability to come up with a large number of words or ideas or concepts or solutions in response to a given stimulus. It is very useful for finding solutions to that class of problems which are not likely to have a single best solution or can be solved by strictly logical steps (Osborn, 1953, 1956; Roweton, 1973).

Flexibility ability — This is the ability to come up with a wide variety of ideas, approaches and solutions. In a wide range of problems, it is necessary for the problem-solver to look at the problem from different angles.

Originality ability - This is the ability to come up with useful ideas or solutions that others have not thought about. It is, perhaps, the most important element of creativity. Originality is concerned with coming up with unusual ideas or solutions that are not only new and surprising but at the same time relevant, useful and elegant. Originality is a very rare quality (Koestler, 1970; Roweton, 1973).

Sensibility ability — This is the ability to spot the uncommon or unusual. It is really the ability to feel, see, smell or hear, i.e., in brief to notice what may others fail to notice. To notice might give rise to an enquiry resulting in a creative insight.

Guessing ability — This is the ability to grasp the causes and visualise the consequences of a situation. It is important to make good guesses about the possible causes and consequences of a difficult problem. This ability distinguishes a first rate mind from any other.

Elaborative ability — This is the ability to work out the implications of a brilliant idea by a combination of analytical, evaluative and associative thinking. Creativity marks the distance and difference between the original idea or stimulus and its ultimate elaborated outcome.

Torrance (1959, 1965a,b) reviewed over fifty studies of the type mentioned above, and eventually came up with a list of 62 traits that seemed, on the basis of those studies, to characterise creative individuals. A list like this is expected to contain some contradictory traits and the list prepared by Torrance was no exception. Torrance got a panel of ten judges (all of whom had done advanced post-graduate courses in personality theory and all of whom were students of creativity) to rate each of these 62 traits. The judges have rated 19 traits as closest to and 17 traits as farthest from the ideal creative personality.

Traits judged by experts as closest to ideal creative personality

Courage and Independence

1. Courageous in convictions
2. Independent in thinking
3. Independent in judgement
4. Unwilling to accept say-so

Risk-taking

5. Willing to take risk
6. Adventurous
7. A self-starter

Persistence

8. Persistent
9. Determined

Self-sufficiency

10. Becomes preoccupied with tasks
11. Self-confident
12. Self-assertive

Inquisitiveness

13. Curious
14. Always asking questions

Complexity

15. Intuitive
16. Visionary
17. Emotionally sensitive
18. Strives for distant goals
19. Attempts difficult tasks

*Traits judged by experts to be farthest from ideal creative personality**Passivity*

1. Timid
2. Reserved
3. Bashful
4. Quiet
5. Obedient
6. Willing to accept judgement of others

Abrasiveness

7. Haughty and self-satisfied
8. Domineering
9. Stubborn
10. Negativistic

Attractiveness to Others

11. Courteous

12. Popular, well-liked by peers

13. Altruistic

Others

14. Physically strong

15. Talkative

16. Sophisticated

17. Does work on time

Steiner (1965) also came up with a list of characteristics of a creative individual which are given below.

1. Conceptual fluency is able to produce a large number of ideas quickly.
2. Originality generates unusual ideas.
3. Separates source from content in evaluating information is motivated by interest in problem follows wherever it leads.
4. Suspends judgement avoids early commitment spends more time in analysis, exploration.
5. Less authoritarian ... has realistic view of life.
6. Impulsive playful, undisciplined exploration.
7. Independent judgement, less conformity; Deviant sees self as different.
8. Rich, 'bizarre' fantasy life and superior reality orientation.

Davis and Scott (1971) and Stein (1975) have nicely summarised the characteristics of creatively behaving individuals, based on the findings of many studies on creativity. According to them, the creative individual:

- a) is an achieving person;
- b) is motivated by a need for order and a need for curiosity;
- c) is discerning and observant in a differentiated way; is alert and can concentrate and shift attention appropriately;
- d) is sensitive to his own psychological intricacies and is, therefore, less inhibited, less formal, less conventional and is low on measures of authoritarian values;
- e) has persistence of motive, liking and capacity for work, self-discipline, perseverance, and thoroughness;
- f) is not particularly conscious of what others think about him and is, thus, freer from conventional restraints and inhibitions;
- g) is less interested in facts as such, and is instead more concerned with the meaning and implications of facts;
- h) is independent and is constructively critical, less contented and dissatisfied.
- i) is well informed, has wide ranging interests, is versatile and is open to feelings and emotions;
- j) is aesthetic in his judgement and value orientation and generally scores low on economic value;

- k) has freer expression of what has been described as feminine interests and lacks masculine aggressiveness;
- l) has little interest in interpersonal relationships, does not want much social interaction, is an introvert and scores lower on social values;
- m) is emotionally unstable, but capable of using his instability effectively; not well adjusted by psychological definition, but adjusted in the broader sense of being socially useful and happy in his work (This is, however, a controversial finding and is not accepted at face value);
- n) sees himself as creative, is intuitive and emphatic, is less critical of himself and is less inclined to use negative and unfavourable adjectives.

It is important to note that these findings do not characterise any single individual and are the outcome of a great deal of independent research. In other words, no creative individual possesses all these characteristics but is likely to possess more of them than a less creative person.

Acquiring desirable traits or shedding undesirable ones is, no doubt, difficult but not impossible. Self-awareness, exposure to individuals who have the desired traits, acting as if one already has the desired traits, etc., are some of the major steps in this direction. Strengthening one's motivation to grow, create and pioneer and weakening one's need for safety and status provide the needed motivation to change one's traits. Apart from lack of motivation, there are various fears and disabilities that inhibit creativity. Shedding fear of failure, fear of humiliation, fear of criticism, aversion to ambiguity, etc., may significantly help an individual to work effectively towards acquiring creativity traits.

Motivation and Creativity

Necessity is the mother of invention, goes the famous adage. All kinds of human needs have led to acts of creation. Penicillin drugs were discovered in response to some serious diseases. The drive for money and power has led to the emergence of vast enterprises and power structures. And, of course, the need to be creative and to make distinctive contribution is the spring board of much scientific and artistic creativity. Any human need, when it is felt strongly enough, can, if the circumstances are favourable, result in an act of creation. Yet, there is a difference. There are certain needs that, once satisfied, no longer help generate creative behaviour. These are needs for money, security, power, etc. Again, there are some other needs that provide more durable fuel for creativity, e.g., need for development and realisation of one's potential (Maslow, 1954), i.e., self-actualisation need, and need for helping others grow and develop (Pareek, 1968), i.e., altruism or extension motivation. There is also a special need that is, perhaps, the most important motivator of creativity. This is the need to create, to discover, to pioneer and to do something original and distinctive (Houston and Mednick, 1963; Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi, 1972).

Extensive research work on motivation all over the world has identified a number of human motives some of which have been mentioned below in the context of creativity -

- a) the desire to be original and to do something distinctive (pioneering motivation);
- b) the desire to develop and realise one's potential (self-actualisation motivation);

- c) the desire to serve others, help others grow and develop (altruism/ extension motivation);
- d) the desire for security (security motivation);
- e) the desire for the pleasant things in life, money etc. (hedonism);
- f) the desire to be successful in one's career (career success);
- g) the desire for power and authority (power and authority motivation);
- h) the desire for friendship, companionship and cordial relations (affiliation motivation).

These needs if reasonably powerful can motivate a person to invent. However, all these are not equally important for the motivation necessary for creation. Experts in this field have observed that if a person intends to lead a creative life it is highly desirable that he should have a high degree of pioneering motivation, self-actualisation motivation and also extension motivation. In order to lead a creative life it is not enough to have a high degree of the aforesaid three types of motivation. At the same time it is also necessary to have a relatively weak need for security and only moderately strong need for the pleasant things, career success, affiliation and power and authority. This is because too much of the aforementioned five types of needs may impede one's creativity. Since being creative implies taking risks and being rather unconventional in approach, a relatively high security-need comes in the way to an individual's becoming really creative. More than moderate affiliation need deters a person from becoming creative because a creative person must be ready to face criticisms from others and be socially unacceptable if necessary. More than moderate need for power and authority certainly prevents a person from becoming creative because much energy and time is consumed in the battle for power and authority and very little is left for realising one's creative potential. Some need for the pleasant things of life complements the realisation of one's creative potential because the cultivation of one's ability to enjoy the good and pleasant things of life is useful for becoming creative. However, beyond a certain point this type of need interferes with one's pursuit for creative efforts.

Similarly, some need for career success is necessary for creativity because it provides a desirable focus to one's creative activities. But too high a need of this type can result in the neglect of one's potential other than that which is directly useful in one's job, and consequently can be damaging to one's creativity.

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