

Creativity Through Intrapersonal Communication Dialog

**CREATIVITY AND
COMMUNICATION:
DYNAMIC PROCESSES**

Explanations about creativity and creative methods are numerous, but often they are vague and difficult to apply. One experience, however, that of internal, or intrapersonal communication, provides an accessible approach to creative thinking and behavior.

Creativity is a dynamic process that defies complete description because of its own qualities. Creativity exceeds its own limitations, continually going beyond codification. It encompasses personality traits, deliberation, novelty, insight, spontaneity, originality, method, the actualizing of potential, as well as creative responses (Young, 1985). If this definition is difficult to operationally observe, it does indicate the complexity of creative phenomena. Thus, our respect for creative people may be enhanced, but the complexity may also engender frustration among those who attempt to understand and foster creativity. Fortunately, the process of communication, accessible to all of us, offers a familiar analogy and explanation for creative processes.

The implicit relationship between creativity and communication is well recognized. Isaksen and Treffinger (1985, p. 13) define creativity: "Creativity is making and communicating meaningful new connections," to which they add the qualifications of variety, quantity, novelty, and application. Goldberg's (1986) discussion of creativity identifies creativity as primarily a type of interpersonal and intrapersonal communication. Also recognizing both of those contexts, Thompson (1987) describes creativity as a "muddeling dialectic." These definitions identify a tacit relationship between creativity and communication. The purpose of this paper is to expand the possibilities of the communication process as a way of providing accessibility to creativity.

Communication, like creativity, is a dynamic, adaptive, process, providing for synthesis, interaction, and understanding, as well as being fundamentally interdisciplinary. Like creativity, communication may be explained as an intrapersonal phenomena, but communication also occurs externally, as an interpersonal process, so it can be observed and described. I am suggesting that the development of an analogous relationship between communication and creativity can allow intervention into creativity.

Both external and internal communications offer an analogy to understanding creativity. In both communication contexts, the quality of the relationship between parties is the central characteristic that determines the difference between a dynamic dialog, or a series of monologues between parties. While interpersonal dialog describes the relationship an individual has with another person, intrapersonal dialog describes the relationship one has within one's self, with the subject matter, and with the medium that links one to thought itself.

Descriptions of creative work often include the qualities of spontaneity, intuition, and inexplicability, which tend to limit creativity to a class of individuals of special artistic or genius status. But creativity may also be understood as a more mundane, adaptive process. In this perspective, Weisberg (1986) identifies the familiar, general communication concepts of perception and response also as the generative contexts of creativity. In a similar manner, the Aha!, the insight that follows a period of conceptual incubation, can be explained as a function of linguistic classification, a function of abstraction that operates below the threshold of awareness. Perry (1988) would prefer to downplay the spontaneous, more chaotic aspects of creativity often implied as more important in divergent thinking techniques. He discusses creativity in terms of learning the structures and routines of society, language, and problem solving, all of which extend the familiar communication dynamics even further into the realm of creativity.

Weisberg discusses examples of Mozart and Einstein, used to the point of cliché, as examples of considerable problem development (albeit anecdotal) that finally resulted in highly creative ideas and products, but rejects the "magic" of the Aha! He suggests the work of these and other creative people to be the result of previous interaction with concept and medium. From a communication perspective, creativity is not limited to a special few, and that familiarity, involvement, and the manipulation of structure and medium, qualities and processes available to all, are the critical elements of creativity.

**DIALOG: STRUCTURE
AND QUALITIES**

The communication dialog used here, as an analogy to creativity, is phenomenological in orientation. This I believe is appropriate because of the fundamentally individual, internal nature of creativity.

Creativity may be likened to an internal type of interaction where method and validity are of secondary interest, and the nature of the development of content, is of primary concern.

The major criterion for a description of creativity is not contained in specific definition, development, or the identification of components. Just as communication is not limited to "information flow," or even symbolic sharing. Instead, communication might be likened to a smooth or jerky dance, where what is needed is not control, but elegance. Here coordination and co-orientation between two individuals or between an individual and a problem and/or medium, are the objectives. The elements of dialog, the self, the other, and the relationship (Poulakos, 1974), together begin to account for an interaction that can produce creative results.

The Self A description of the self in intrapersonal terms is a description of self reflexive, symbolic awareness. It is a description of thinking that is intuitively sound, but logically problematic. In the interpersonal dialog, the self and another can be described as both simultaneous sender and receiver. The relationship between the two is a reciprocal role sharing process. A slight shift in the usual description of these roles is necessary with the intrapersonal dialog where both functions occur in

the self. "Receiver as source" is developed by Burtis (1987) where, in the context of creative fantasy, one is the implicit audience, or receiver or the fantasy. Johnson (1984) explains the function of intrapersonal communication roles by describing inner speech as a function of egocentric language, characterized by qualities of very low semantic and syntactic thresholds, needing little inner articulation to evoke great quantities of meaningful thought. Inner "language" may be verbal or visual, is highly symbolic, ambiguous, and for the individual, rich in meaning and association. Symbolic inner language allows for simultaneous communication roles of originator/sender and interpreter/receiver to be present in the individual.

One's culture, language, and previous personal history form various contexts for the self. These factors combine to form an extension of understanding that precedes the self. Culture and language already make sense. The understanding of complex contexts is provided for by the structural forms of culture and language that exist long before the self begins its inner dialog.

Those explanations and understandings in turn, form the limits of a "horizon understanding" which is highly influential, powerful, and inescapable (Deetz, 1973). Understanding in the dialog is incompatible with a common, linear communication model of perception, interpretation, understanding, and response. In the internal dialog model, awareness of understanding occurs simultaneously with perception.

The importance of identifying the limitations imposed on the self is readily recognized by popular writers on creativity. Creativity is commonly approached from limiting influences, routine, fear, lack of flexibility, and lack of insight (Von Oech, 1986, 1983; Koberg and Bagnall, 1976; McKim, 1980). Often not recognized is that all these limiting qualities as well as their opposites, which do lead to creativity, are part of the horizon of understanding, and are bound to the self. Restricting or liberating, they are part of the internal communication dialog. They direct understanding, whether it is creative or not. Most importantly, one may not simply step out of that horizon at will, no matter how strong or novel a stimulus, or "kick" that might be received.

Identifying the self within a horizon of understanding presents a problem for offering an explanation for the process of creativity. If the self is always found within a predefined reality, how is it possible to redefine problem boundaries to discover solutions that may reside in a new paradigm? How are novelty and originality accounted for? The second concept to be discussed in the dialog is the Other, which offers the potential to answer the above questions.

The Other Understanding between individuals is more than an addition of respective understandings. Gaddamer indicates that understanding in interpersonal dialog is fundamentally creative, always resulting in a synthesis of new insight (Bleicher, 1989, p. 114). In the interpersonal dialog the process does not differ greatly, but the understandings that result from the creative process have different origins. The internal, creative dialog identifies the self as one origin and the other as another. In the interpersonal dialog the other person is regarded as a responding entity with degrees of respect and interaction. Buber's (1965) I-It, and I-Thou terminology describes two fundamental types of relationships. When the Other is objectified as an it,

the monologue is the communication mechanism that links the two entities. If an interpersonal I-it is formed, the ensuing communication is a series of monologues where each individual as self, objectifies the other. In contrast, the I-Thou is a communication relationship where the self and the Other enter into a reciprocally confirming relationship. It is a communication relationship marked by profound respect for the Other, hence the use of "Thou" and "Other". The I-Thou transcends the limitations of language and context. It allows the Other to respond to the self, and with the self. One may even regard an inanimate object, like a tree, in such a relationship (Buber, 1965, p. 56-59).

In the creative dialog, the self may regard the content, or the subject, as the Other. Allowing the Other to respond to the self in the creative dialog, requires a discovery of the context within which that Other resides. Familiarity with its history, language, and traditional codes, rituals, and associated values are required of the self. The process of becoming familiar is often referred to as "research," and often receives immediate attention in problem solving activities where a direct (often efficient) problem-solution response is sought. Regarding the content as Other, recognizes that the Other may "speak". The possibilities for insight and creative response are the results of such interaction. In the dialog, the Other may even begin to "question" the self, asking questions of self identity, expectations, assumptions, patterns of problem solving, all apart of one's own horizon limitations.

Dialog with the other is not necessarily predicable, or even reasonable, if anything, the mind seems to be an analogic process where the dynamic association allows for the spontaneous, the intuitive, where solutions are said to present themselves. This is partly because what is represented by one's horizon of understanding is for the most part implicit. The dialogic process partially brings previously unrecognized associations to the light of the explicit.

Another, second, potential Other exists in the creative dialog; it is the medium with which the self operates. The development of the dialog between self and medium as creative communication is evident in some of the arts, but is not restricted to the arts. As an example, an artist is spoken of as struggling with a medium as if it had its own volition, at times resisting, at times responding. A painter's pallet may begin to "sing" as involvement with the medium increases. However, "singing" usually refers to more than just involvement, but includes a quality of harmony that develops between painter and medium, and within the medium, between the relationships (color, graphic, and textual) that are created as a result of the interaction.

The medium may include language, procedure, organization, expectations, and professional codes. The Other, as medium, has content qualities of its own. Working with stone is quite different than clay. Working with verbal language in a standardized, problem solving agenda is different than working with language in the medium of poetry. The qualities of the medium have limitations which dictate to some degree the nature of the eventual creative response. It is not unusual for artists to execute works simply to expand their own familiarity with a medium. Familiarity, and novelty, in and of

themselves are often sufficient criteria to justify the creative effort. One objective of the creative relationship may be to discover the voice of the medium, whether it is plastic, visual, electronic, or logical. Creative problem solving itself has become somewhat standardized, and is described by a jargon. "Incubation," "divergent thinking," as well as acronyms like "IWWM" (In what ways might..."), (Isaksen and Treffinger, 1985), are examples of terms that function as any medium, facilitating and structuring creativity. They may also begin to act as restrictive languages, including the initiated and excluding those unfamiliar with them.

The medium also exists within a horizon of understanding which will contain procedural and structural considerations, and assumptions concerning its nature and use. Creative response may then be a synthesis of understandings between self and problem and self and medium, or a combination of all three.

The creative dialog may be arbitrarily defined to include or exclude understandings of self, content, and medium. The exclusion of one will limit the potential of the dialog, but it may emphasize other areas. The current model of creative dialog recognizes multiple levels of creativity, that may be operating simultaneously. From this perspective, creativity is a necessary result of dialog. Traditional arguments about creativity often concern themselves with decisions to determine if a given result is creative. In the creative dialog what is considered is not *if* a thing is creative, but in what manner it is creative.

The Relationship The relationship between Self and Other is intangible, dynamic, changing, allowing simultaneous and reciprocal linking. Primarily important, it determines the qualities of resulting creativity. Buber (1965) calls the relationship "the between". Stewart (1978, p. 184) describes it as an, "... interhuman force that sustains dialogue". The relationship accounts for the emergence of insight, understanding, novelty, and synthesis.

Rather than limiting relationships to verbal language, the creative dialog looks to language as a dynamic binding between self and other that offers the potential of confirmation and revelation (Stewart, 1978). While the medium reveals the final solution, it is the relationship that is responsible for the creative process. The relationship determines the identification of an object, reflecting psychological distance or intimacy in the relationship.

Three elements that are central to the creative relationship are responsiveness, risk, and spontaneity. The creative dialog is developmental. The self understands in part, and in advance, but the relationship requires a give and take, like question and response. In the midst of this involvement, the voice of the other is discovered. The self must respond to it. Responsiveness resides at the center of the involvement in the creative relationships and requires energy. Regardless of any qualities of programmed involvement, passivity is the antithesis of dialog and creativity. If the communication relationship is one characterized by control or withdrawal, a monologue results. Results may be desirable, valid, and reliable, but they will not be creative.

Risk of change is associated with responsiveness. The self must be willing to be influenced by whatever is presented by the Other. One must recognize assumptions and habits, and make an attempt to suspend their operation. Palmer (1969) points out that analysis usually avoids calling into question the assumptions that govern understanding, but not to do so may result in a validation what is expected, not what is creative.

Finally, when the self allows spontaneity to occur, its discovery is often marked with an affective quality, it is often called the "Aha!" The allowance of this development of the dialog assumes that information exists within the horizons of both self and other that may be revealed as a function of the relationship that arises between them. The concepts of subconscious, and the collective unconscious are useful examples in describing such potential information sources within the self. Synthesis is a natural development of involvement in a medium and with a content. The "Aha!" shouldn't surprise us, but it usually does. Dialog can describe the creative process, and allow for novelty, as unexpected insight.

CONCLUSION Creative communication dialog offers an approach to creativity that those who consider themselves "uncreative" may find useful. Perhaps from this perspective, some of the limitations of predispositions, that "I'm not the creative type" can be avoided through the use of a familiar process. Intense communication within ones self can be an analogy to the more unfamiliar creative process. If we find that we are already doing something (communicating), and simply need to improve our skills, that belief may take up residence in the mind, and we may discover ourselves in a highly creative inner dialog.

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