

# **Creativity 201 for Futurists: How to Further Integrate Creative Practices to Sustain the Human Spirit in Your Work and Why It's a Good Thing to Do**

*by Marci Segal and Megan Mitchell*

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Each person has the capacity to generate new ideas, use imagination, and make new decisions to change and/or improve his/her status quo and/or that of the external world. This is creativity; it is the engine that drives innovation. Futures planning requires people to use creative problem solving, defined as thinking beyond the scope of ordinary, logical, rational thinking, which includes emotions. Positive emotions have a relationship to enhanced creativity. This paper demonstrates why and how futurists may sustain the human spirit for enhanced creativity in their practice by attending to the emotional needs of those with whom they interact and lead.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

**Marci Segal, MS**, is Canada's first accredited creativity specialist and is internationally recognized as a creativity authority and pioneer. She is co-founder of World Creativity & Innovation Week (April 15–21) and president of creativityland inc., Toronto, Canada. She delivers innovation-leadership enhancement keynotes, conducts training, and consults with corporations, associations, nonprofit organizations, in higher education and within all levels of government, empowering leaders and teams with practical innovation and creativity tips, tools, structures, and methods. Her clients appreciate the integration of innovation mind-sets, futures thinking, languaging for engagement and personality styles intelligence into their organizations that deliver synergistic impactful shifts in attitude and behavior.

Her books include *Creativity and Personality Type: Tools for Under-*

*standing and Inspiring the Many Voices of Creativity* (2001), *A Quick Guide to the Four Temperaments and Creativity: A Psychological Understanding of Innovation* (2006), and *A Quick Guide to the 16 Types in Organizations* (2003), all Telos Publications, Huntington Beach, California. She earned her Master's of Science in Creative Studies from the International Center for Studies in Creativity, Buffalo, New York. She has been in the creativity and innovation business for more than 25 years. For further information visit <http://www.creativityland.net>.

**Megan Mitchell** is chair of the Centre of Excellence in Innovation at the Schulich Executive Education Centre, York University, Toronto, Canada. She develops and delivers inspiring and practical customized executive education, coaching, and consulting programs to help progressive organizations advance their thinking and achieve business success. Her focus is on leadership effectiveness to build innovation capacity. As a former director of leadership development and innovation at one of Canada's largest consumer packaged goods companies, she helped build a climate for innovation, including training and leading teams. She is the recipient of the W.E. Upjohn Award for Innovation and helped her organization celebrate World Creativity & Innovation Week (April 15-21) in 25 countries. She has her Master's Certification in Innovation Management from Schulich and her HBA from Richard Ivey School Business, University of Western Ontario.

# Creativity 201 for Futurists

## How to Further Integrate Creative Practices to Sustain the Human Spirit in Your Work and Why It's a Good Thing to Do

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### INTRODUCTION

Each person has the capacity to generate new ideas, use imagination, and make new decisions to change and/or improve his/her status quo and/or that of the external world. This is creativity; it is the engine of innovation. Approaches to actualize creative thinking include processes, tools, techniques, and behaviors that stretch the boundaries of normal thinking or, in other words, challenge conventional rational wisdom to arrive at new understandings for moving forward.

Futurists lift people beyond their day-to-day thinking and spark insights regarding how to think and invest differently in their business and lives. They leverage creativity using processes that deliberately stretch normal thinking to anticipate a future that may unfold.

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Futurists, for example, scan the environment for social, technological, environmental, demographic, economic, and political clues; analyze historical data related to trends of interest; extract statistical data related to those trends; project them decades forward; and then extrapolate from them to build concrete future scenarios—probable, possible, and wild-card prospects—for strategic planning consideration.

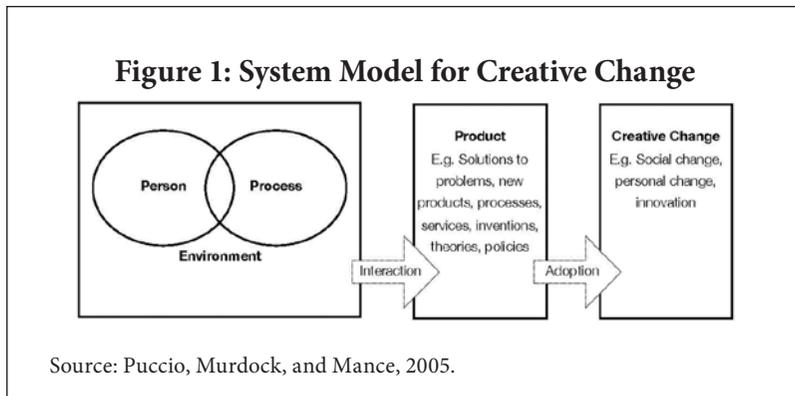
Futures planning requires people to use creative problem solving, defined as “think[ing] beyond the scope of ordinary, logical, rational problem solving; it requires using suprarational thinking” (Torrance and Safter 1990). Logical thinking alone may not enough to achieve breakthroughs in achieving futures solutions, though the results must stand the test of logic for implementation to occur.

Suprarational thinking is understood as individual consciousness transcending the boundaries of rational processes. It is experienced as an altered, holistic state of awareness. This nature of thinking can be accessed through temporary suspension of judgment and the rational process, through deliberate use of intuition, and by paying attention to messages available from emotional awareness (Torrance and Safter 1990).

### **HUMAN SPIRIT, HUMAN NATURE IN FORESIGHT**

A common foresight practice is to gather stakeholders together in a workshop setting to explore and develop new futures, using a variety of techniques to actively analyze trends, generate ideas, create scenarios, and set success criteria, for example. Without paying attention to the human nature in the suprarational realm during these occurrences, futurists may run the risk of underutilizing the potential in the room and missing important elements that could positively influence their practice and outcomes.

The people part of the creative process has been strongly supported by Puccio, Murdock, and Mance (2005) in their description of components inherent in creative change: People using processes within



an environment, interacting to create a product that, when adopted by others, results in a novel and relevant outcome.

People's perceptions of the environment within which they work have been found to have a significant impact on creativity and innovation (Byrne, Barrett, Mumford, and Vessey 2008). As such, futurists can encourage new thinking by strengthening each of the primary components within the System Model for Creative Change.

**1. Process:** Demonstrate appreciation of suspended judgment and of the rational and nonrational processes. That is, they can allow and ask for many alternative solutions before a final selection is made (Torrance and Safter 1990; Osborn 1951) and support decisions made from a feeling base as well as from a logical one.

**2. People:** Provide ample opportunity for each person to participate fully through using a variety of activities—e.g., small group discussion, individual reflection, paired conversation, drawing, etc. (Puccio, Murdock, and Mance 2006; Segal 2001, 2006).

**3. Environment:** Pay attention to the affective climate in the room (Segal 2006, 8). Affects provide visceral signals by which people become of aware of their needs' fulfillment (Rosenberg 2003). Affective skills that support creative problem solving include curiosity, dreaming/imagining, sensing gaps, playfulness, resisting the urge to push for a decision, and tolerance for risk (Puccio et al. 2005).

This third point warrants further explanation. The connection

of emotions to positive creativity is well documented. Both positive and negative attitudes can provide impetus for generating new ideas to creating a new future. However, research shows that, “the more positive a person’s affect [emotions], the higher their creativity in a work setting” (Amabile, Barsade, Mueller, and Staw 2006).

How do you create more positive affect? This is accomplished through providing satisfiers for people’s needs (Rosenberg 2003).

**Human Needs**

Human behavior, as outlined by Chilean economist Manfred Max-Neef (1991), among many others, is driven by meeting needs.

**Table 1: Sampling of Emotions**

Positive Emotions as signals of needs being met	Negative Emotions as signals of needs not being met
Amazed, joyous, confident, optimistic, stimulated, intrigued, satisfied, happy, fulfilled	Angry, hopeless, annoyed, impatient, reluctant, nervous, dissatisfied, pressured, frustrated

His Human Scale Dimensions model is both similar to and different from Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (Maslow 1943).

Maslow’s original fivefold hierarchy of human needs, updated in the 1970s and again in 1990, includes all aspects appearing below. His model implies that first-level needs (biological and physiological) must be met and are the focus of attention until satisfaction is derived. After that, second-level needs (safety) become behavioral drivers, and so on.

Max-Neef, on the other hand, asserts that human needs are fundamental to each culture and occur simultaneously, save one: subsistence. That is, subsistence needs must be met before any other, and once satisfied, the others become behavioral drivers as determined by situation. Secondary needs are not hierarchical. Human Scale needs are

subsistence, leisure, creation, understanding, participation, affection, protection, freedom, and identity (Max-Neef 1991).

### **Affect**

Positive feelings such as love and joy broaden a person's available thought-action repertoire. University of Michigan's Barbara Fredrickson states, "When positive emotions are in ample supply, people take off.

They become generative, creative, resilient, ripe with possibility and beautifully complex. The broaden-and-build theory conveys how positive emotions move people forward..." (Fredrickson 2004).

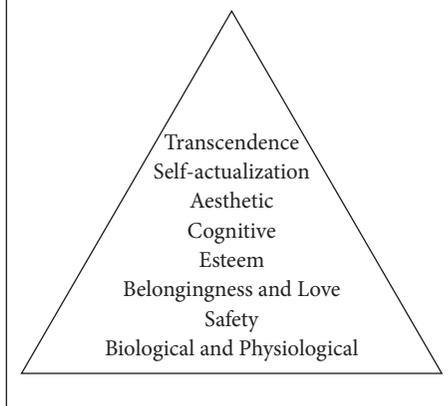
Additional support for attending to participant affect in futures planning workshops comes from research conducted by Harvard's Teresa Amabile: People are happiest when they come up with a creative idea, and they are more likely to have a breakthrough if they were happy the day before. "One day's happiness often predicts the next day's creativity" (Amabile et al. 2005).

By creating and maintaining an environment where participants experience positive affect, futurists may provide potential for greater divergence from conventional thinking to include nonrational considerations, resulting in richer scenario-building experiences and outcomes.

## **INTEGRATING HUMAN NEEDS AND POSITIVE AFFECT INTO FUTURES WORK**

As we look to strategies to sustain the creative human spirit in futures planning, attention must be given to the environment and ac-

**Figure 2:  
Maslow's Hierarchy of  
Needs, 1990**



**Table 2: Max-Neef's Human Scale Dimensions**

Need	Implications for	Examples
Subsistence	Safe environment, physical needs attended to	Clean uncluttered workshop space, windows, drinking water, proper seating
Leisure	Taking time out, playing games, relaxing, time for incubation	Warm-up exercises, brain teasers, going for walks, playing music, frequent breaks, items to encourage play and brain activity
Creation	Building new scenarios, putting new thoughts together, deliberately using nonrational thinking	Hands-on tools for constructing possible futures—e.g., straws, string, drawing, visual imagery
Understanding	Being understood by others, asking clarifying questions	Engaging in dialogues and other activities to evoke questions and insight
Participation	Varying activities to assure quiet time, interaction, movement, and contribution	Ensuring all have the opportunity to actively and reflectively play a part in each stage of the foresight activities, designing teams for maximum contribution
Affection	Laughter, networking, play	Creation of workshop buddies, storytelling, positive reinforcement of contributions, providing stimulus to evoke positive associations
Protection	Safety in the room from fears of worthlessness, loss of security, abandonment	Affirmation and behavioral reminders that all ideas and insights are welcome, in the single session and beyond on an ongoing basis
Freedom	Having choice, autonomy	Varying activities to appeal to different approaches to tools being used, using an opt-out strategy as needed; ability to move to other locations or environments for different stages of problem solving
Identity	Recognition, originality, character, distinctiveness	Seeking inputs from different view points

tivities used to provide needs satisfiers. This can be accomplished by applying Max-Neef's Human Scale Dimensions to the workshop preparation and delivery as shown in Table 2.

Additionally, futurists may want to consider the longer-term relationship with whom they engage in futures work outside of workshops; greater success may result from cultivating the right environment over the longer term to maximize creative potential and output.

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