



Creativity and imagination are key catalysts to unlocking potential in the 21st century. While those in business and civil society are generally aware of the challenges of the modern age, few seem able to understand or apply the creativity necessary to meet them. *Creativity Explained* suggests that the most direct route to imaginative insight lies in understanding how genuinely creative people develop their big ideas. Focusing on the lives of contemporary writers, musicians and artists, David Priilaid examines the elements of the creative process to provide readers with a better appreciation of creativity in practice. Through exploring the creative lives of figures such as Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen, David Bowie, Bill Evans, Jackson Pollock, J.K. Rowling and the iconic Steve Jobs, Priilaid shows how artists are typically outsiders, marked variously by the extent of their suffering, resilience and love for the work they do. *Creativity Explained* offers an insightful overview of the imaginative mindset and disciplines crucial to the formulation of great ideas.

First Edition 2018
Revised edition 2023

Copyright © in published edition: Peter Flack 2018
Copyright © in text: David Priilaid 2018
Copyright © in illustration: Aleksandra Sumner-Priilaid 2018
Publisher of Revised edition: UCT Libraries

Peter Flack Productions
29 Sunset Avenue, Llandudno, 7806, South Africa
Tel: +27 (0)21 790 6374
email: peterflack@mweb.co.za
www.peterflack.co.za

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including photocopying and recording, or by any other information storage or retrieval system, without written permission from the publisher.

Editor: Gillian Warren-Brown
Designer: Peter Bosman
Proofreader: Lesley Hay-Whitton
Indexer: Katya Sumner-Priilaid

Printed and bound by  **novus print**, a Novus Holding company

ISBN 978-0-620-78538-9
e-ISBN 978-0-620-78539-6

CREATIVITY EXPLAINED

From Music and Art to
Innovation in Business

David Priilaid



**PETER
FLACK
PRODUCTIONS**



To Anne

Who first showed me the magic, and still does.

What is this face, less clear and clearer
The pulse in the arm, less strong and stronger –
Given or lent? more distant than stars and nearer than the eye
Whispers and small laughter between leaves and hurrying feet
Under sleep, where all the waters meet.

"MARINA", T.S. ELIOT

CONTENTS

Preface ... i

Introduction ... 1

Section One

AN ARTISTIC OVERVIEW...9

1. The Artistic Sensibility ... 10

Section Two

THE ARTISTIC MINDSET ...27

2. Artistic Grit ... 28

3. Passion ... 45

4. The Exiled Child ... 58

5. Depression, Madness & Addiction ... 82

Section Three

THE ARTISTIC DISCIPLINES ... 105

6. Proactivity ... 106

7. Practice ... 117

8. Perspective ... 131

9. Instinct, Intuition, the Unconscious & Still Water ... 146

Section Four

FATE ... 173

10. Success = Talent + Luck ... 174

CONCLUSION: Whereto with Creativity? ... 190

Acknowledgements ... 199

Endnotes ... 200

Index ... 227

Preface

Context: the need for creativity

Within the span of a generation, the world has changed irrevocably and it is changing still. The change is relentless, dangerous even, seeking to overthrow all before it. Never before has business and civil society been so challenged to deal with the problems of change. For so many reasons, however, we are failing in this task. Though we see and sometimes comprehend the threats of change, corporately and individually, many seem unable to adapt to the times, incapable of reinvigoration.

Stagnation in the status quo

Take business, for example. In the last decade, concepts such as imagination, creativity, innovation and inspiration have become commercial buzz words. Ironically, while advertisements employ these hot-button terms to the point of hyperbole, most so-called cutting-edge products and services are merely incremental repeats riding out the S curve. This is not creativity. Confounded by the problems of our age, in many cases, corporate innovation appears incapable of producing anything more than bigger screens and larger hard drives. This problem has nothing to do with money. The great corporations are sitting on piles of investment cash. New ideas are simply not happening fast enough and in the right areas. Innovation in the US is “somewhere between dire straits and dead”,¹ said Peter Thiel, cofounder of PayPal and the first external investor in Facebook. Citing transport as an example, Thiel pointed out that travel speeds peaked with the Concorde in the '70s but since then have declined to norms reminiscent of the '60s. “If you look outside the computer and the internet, there has been 40 years of stagnation,” he concluded.² While anticipating some Elon Musk-driven advances in solar energy and space travel, and acknowledging progress in health and biomedicine (such as the Human Genome Project completed in 2003), in this our “second Renaissance”³ of intellectual endeavour, we remain beset by problems imposed by the overshoot of the earth's carrying capacity. These include population expansion, food and water security, global warming, animal extinctions, pollution, health care and poverty. Racial prejudice and religious intolerance - spurred by waves of refugee migration - are on the rise. Conflict and war are rife, replete with an expanding arsenal of sophisticated weaponry. Computer technology has increased exponentially, advancing to the second half of the metaphorical chessboard and driving concerns around data security, cyber warfare and artificial intelligence. The list goes on. With so many problems, it seems there are no meaningful means of

solving them; this despite all the cash, R&D departments and corporate goodwill capitalism can muster. What is going on?

Four main factors explain this dynamic: (1) outmoded organisational practices, (2) relentless technological change, (3) compliance-driven work competencies, and (4) a debasement of art and creativity disciplines in schools and universities. Let's briefly examine each.

1. Outmoded Business Practices

For more than a hundred years the structures and practices of business have been designed to protect and entrench existing business models. Unchecked, business will therefore naturally gravitate towards areas of monopoly and do whatever it can to drive out competition. Rightly or wrongly, capital's instinct is to seek out exclusive zones of profit and to extract margin as efficiently as possible. With proficiency of mass production, management techniques developed around the time of Henry Ford excelled at maintaining optimum rates of output. As part of a mechanistic mindset, a culture of compliance prevails, along with a zero tolerance of failure. All this has worked incredibly well for a long time. But no longer.

2. Seditious change

Since World War II, the changes wrought through technology have rocked the status quo. This is clearly witnessed in the ever-decreasing shelf life of companies listed on the S&P 500. According to a 2012 study, in 1958, firms listed on this index could expect to remain there for 61 years. Shooting forward 22 years, by 1980 this figure had declined to approximately 25 years and, by 2012, to just 18. At this rate, the study concluded, 75 per cent of those companies on the 2012 list could expect to be replaced by 2027.⁴ The lesson offered by these statistics is clear: business models are increasingly under threat from gales of “creative destruction” that wipe out the old to make room for the new. Predictive techniques aimed at mitigating the storms of change have proven impotent. The incidence and impact of random “black swan” events is increasing, with scholars such as Nassim Taleb⁵ suggesting that history will increasingly pivot on moments of random havoc. This is no longer business as usual.⁶

3. Work competencies

To survive in a changing world, existing businesses must therefore reinvigorate their ways of being, seeking to supplement and replace outmoded revenue streams before it is too late. “Imagination!” is now the clarion call, “creativity!” the

catchword. With the hunt for new ideas now truly on, increasingly, innovation consultants are summoned, creativity workshops convened, and new brainstorming techniques developed. Despite the incessant busyness, studies indicate that the majority of the workforce remains bored, unfulfilled and indifferent. In a 2017 study of 1300 white-collar professionals, 74 per cent of those canvassed declared their work boring.⁷ Those in desk jobs seem to find imagination and creativity elusive and, arguably, the cause is the very organisational practices prescribed by business in the first place. For, as much as top-down authoritarian structures have bred compliance, competence and a modicum of intelligence, they have also stultified more desirable qualities such as passion, initiative, creativity and vocation - the very skills required right now. In short, the traditional practice of business has effectively suffocated any possibility of free thought and imagination.

4. Debasement of art in education

Business is not solely responsible for this destruction of creative instinct. Education systems must share the blame. Collectively, junior, secondary and tertiary institutions of education have connived to systematically devalue the creative arts in favour of the sciences. While not denying the power of the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) disciplines, this debasement has dispossessed young people of their creative faculties.⁸ SpaceX and Tesla CEO Elon Musk agrees, saying: "I think there are probably too many smart people pursuing Internet stuff, finance, and law ... That is part of the reason why we haven't seen as much innovation."⁹

In light of the four factors above - and taking into account that to be more innovative we need to be more creative - it is imperative for those in enterprise and business to ask how they can properly pursue the development of creative ideas.