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How Facilitators use Affect to Help Workplace Employees Learn Creativity

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Abstract: *One way to foster workplace creativity is to position it as a learning process. How emotion influences this learning process, and how facilitators may or may not use it, is not fully understood.*

There currently exists a gap in knowledge about how facilitators make decisions in supporting the learning of creativity (McNess, Broadfoot, & Osborn, 2003) and how emotion can influence creative productivity (Kurtzberg, 2005). In response, this roundtable provides a platform to better inform an interactive discussion regarding how facilitators might best use affect in order to help adult workers learn creativity, including theoretical implications and methodological approaches best suited to inform a study of this phenomenon.

Creativity is important for enhancing innovation in the marketplace, and key to achieving innovation is the development of the creativity among individuals who work in that organization (Fenwick, 2003). Learning creativity requires direct interaction with new frames of thinking, and the transfer of knowledge across different domains (Barak, 2006). Learning in the workplace involves individuals using prior knowledge and experience to continuously interpret new experiences in order to construct new knowledge. As a result, individuals tend to encode and retrieve memories based on patterns developed over time, and these patterns get in the way of creativity (Lucas, 2001).

Creativity consists of affectively charged experiences that shape, and are shaped by, emotion (Amabile et al., 2005), such as the excitement of discovery, anxiety with challenging the status quo, frustration with obstacles, and anguish of failure. Yet, reason and rationality have traditionally dominated the study and practice of learning in the workplace; and emotions have typically been positioned as disruptive and something to be isolated and controlled (Bierma, 2008; Dirks, 2001). Relying solely on rational reasoning without acknowledging affective influence can dilute the inherent meaning that the emotion is communicating (Dirks, 2001). Affect can influence both what people think (the intake of information) and how people think (the process of making constructs). Providing equal emphasis in reflecting on the affective domain of learning improves areas critical to creativity, such as increased self-reliance and self-confidence (Shepherd, 2007). Learners who do not consciously engage the affective dimension of their memories and meaning undermine the value of the reflection process and limit the choice of how to interpret meaning it provides (Boud, Keogh & Walker, 1985).

Accepting that emotion and creativity are inherently linked, it is imperative that adult educators become more familiar with how to foster affective learning within the creative process. While studies have focused on the affective aspects of the learning process from the learner perspective, little has been done to study how facilitators intentionally support the learning process through affect. Facilitators shape the learning milieu in order to help students consciously acknowledge and associate feelings with ideas gained both during the event and during the reflection process (Boud, Keogh & Walker, 1985) in order to accept alternative ways of understanding. They observe and interpret learner's emotion, and use that knowledge to select, order, and dynamically maneuver learning interactions and activities (McCaughy, 2004). Facilitators must help individuals actively recognize and engage with emotions involved with

learning experiences (Dirkx, 2001), yet how facilitators understand the emotional aspects of teaching and learning has received relatively limited attention (Zembylas, 2007).

The art of facilitation itself is filled with affective interactions, such as those that establish rapport, create trust, focus reflection, and elicit meaning. Yet many facilitators who are perceived as highly competent in fostering these interactions may or may not be conscious of the differential nuances that exist. Working with a context inherently filled with affect, such as creativity, provides a unique opportunity to study how facilitators view the influence of affect on facilitating a learning process. The key is to identify those facilitators who are conscious of why they are making decisions from an affective perspective, and the influence of affect on themselves, the content and the learning process they are fostering.

Questions to address with these facilitators can include concepts such as: *what principles do they use in designing and preparing for a learning activity?*; and *what triggers do they monitor in establishing and maintaining the learning milieu?* Such questions can be addressed using a variety of methodologies, including quantitative techniques designed to capture affective principles for decision-making, key interactions that occur, and specific activities that make a difference. Qualitative techniques could also be designed to capture common and unique themes of experiential influences and practices. Combined, the results of such types of studies can shed new light on the influences of affect in learning processes, including the suggestion of new theoretical models and prioritized principles to guide effective decisions and actions in practice.

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