



The Deliberate Creative Podcast with Amy Climer

Transcript for Episode #050: Creative Synergy Scale

May 19, 2016

Amy Climer: Welcome to The Deliberate Creative podcast. This is [Episode 50](#). Wow! You all, I cannot believe it is [Episode 50](#)! That means this podcast has been on air for almost a full year. A couple more weeks to go! That is super exciting to me. I am so glad you all are listening. Thank you so much to everyone for all the support and feedback and for listening to The Deliberate Creative podcast. My mission is to help you and your team be more creative and more innovative.

Today's episode is about the Creative Synergy Scale. This is a scale I designed as part of my doctoral dissertation research to help teams be more creative. I am going to tell you all about it. If you happen to have listened to last week's episode, you know that I just defended my dissertation last week which means I am now officially a doctor. Super cool! I am really excited about it. Today I want to tell you about the research that I did because I think it can have a significant impact on teams who are trying to be creative. Besides the dissertation defense last week, this is the first time this information is really going out into the public. So I welcome your feedback, I welcome your comments. Let me know what you think.

Let me tell you about the research. I am not going to get into a lot of like researcher-ese and I am not going to go into depth about the statistics that I use and all that stuff. Eventually, probably in another couple of weeks, sometime in June I think, the entire dissertation will be available to the public and I will put a link in the shownotes once it is available. In the meantime, if you would like to, I am offering a free deck of slides that will go along with this podcast episode. So if you are at your desk or at home or someplace where you can download the slides, I highly recommend you doing that. The slides can be found at www.climerconsulting.com/050. If you are out driving or running or something while you are listening, no worries, you can download the slides later and they will still be helpful, really be more of notes for you to reference and for you to remember the things that we talked about.

Let me tell you about the Creative Synergy Scale and the research that I did. I stated the PhD program that I was in with this big question of why are some teams creative and some not? For



the last five years I have been researching that question and every single project I did, almost, I was focusing in on team creativity. What I found was this concept called Creative Synergy. This is where the interactions amongst team members where the collective creative results are greater than the sum of their individual efforts. Essentially, one plus one is greater than two. There is something about teams getting together. I am sure most of you had this experience where you have been a part of a team that was amazing and you all really gelled and you had this synergy together, and then other teams where maybe you were even questioning why are we even on a team? Why don't we just do this work individually and compile it?

I believe that when a team can reach that higher level of collaboration and creative synergy, it can be so powerful. And really it is. There is something that happens when you get people together and they can play off of each and build on each other and just really collaborate and work together, it is amazing. Time and time again there has been research that shows teams have the potential and they can be more creative than individuals. But there are some factors that either make that work or make the team a small disaster, and many of you have probably had those experiences.

What is a Team? [04:47]

Because I am talking about teams today, I want to explain what do I mean by a team? In this case I am using a definition from Katzenbach and Smith, who I have referenced at other times on this podcast. I will put a link in the shownotes for you. This is from the book [The Wisdom of Teams](#). They define a team as a small number of people committed to a common purpose, performance goals and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable. There is a previous episode I did with [the difference between a team and a working group](#) and I will put a link to that in the shownotes, but really what I am talking about here are teams. This is a group of people that are actually trying to collaborate together.

Sometimes we are in groups and they are referred to as teams, but we are not actually truly trying to collaborate. It is really people just sharing information and helping each other but they are not collectively working together. That is okay too, but I just want to differentiate because this research was specifically about teams and so I do not know if it would apply in those other contexts. I think it might, but I did not do any research on that so I cannot speak to it. So I just want to clarify that is what I am talking about when I talk about a team.



What Has the Greatest Impact on Team Creativity [06:01]

Anytime you are doing research, you have to start out and look at all the past research and what has already been done because, of course, you do not want to repeat what has been done. Really, you want to build on the past research and I think of it as like standing on the shoulders of giants and how can I contribute? How can I kind of stand on top of what they have done and look out and see what is next?

As I was reading all the research, what I found was kind of this interesting concept. As you can imagine, there are many things that influence team creativity. But what I found were there were certain things that had a greater influence and greater impact on team creativity than others. Okay, that is no surprise, right? But what I was able to do was put all the variables that impact team creativity into a four quadrant model. And this is in the slides, but let me see if I can explain it to you.

On the horizontal axis, there is input and process. If you imagine a team together, there is input that goes into the team, there is the process of the team working together and then there is the output, like whatever it is that they are doing. In this case, the output is creativity, innovation. They are producing some sort of creative innovative product. So there is input and process on the horizontal axis.

On the vertical axis, on the top is internal and the bottom is external. What happens is that all the variables that impact team creativity fall into one of four quadrants. In the upper left there is internal-input. These are things that if I am a team member, they are internal to me and I am bringing them into the team. It has nothing to do with our interactions together but I show up with these things. For instance, my education level, the prior experience that I have had, my personality and culture. Those things are internal inputs. So that is the top left.

Bottom left is input-external. These are things that are going into the team but they are external to the team members. So these may be things like the reward structure that the organization has for the team performance, it could be organizational climate for creativity, it could be the physical environment that the team members are working in. That is external-input.

Then moving across to the bottom right of the quadrant, there is external-process variables. These are things that are outside of the team, but they impact the process of the team working together. So these are things like leadership styles of leaders who are influencing the team,



external accountability that the team has to others outside of the team. Those are examples of external-process variables.

Then finally, in the upper right quadrant, there are internal-process variables. These are things that the team members themselves influence and it happens once the team starts to work together. Some examples are the team dynamics between the team members, the team's shared sense of purpose. What kind of collaborative process are the team members using together? What do their meetings look like?

What I found in reading the literature was that, the internal-process variables had the greatest impact on creativity and innovation. And to me, that was really exciting because it is also the quadrant that team members themselves can have the greatest impact on changing. Knowing that if a team is going to be creative and they are going to experience creative synergy and that is going to lead to a creative or innovative output, they need to have strong internal processes.

Then I am thinking okay, well what if a team could measure those internal processes of where they are at regarding creative synergy? That led me to design the Creative Synergy Scale. This study, for those who want to know about study design, it was a mixed method, sequential study, which means I did a quantitative portion first and then I moved into a qualitative study. So there were two phases to it. The first phase was just developing this new scale that was going to measure components of creative synergy. Then the second portion was taking that designed scale and testing it with some teams.

Three Factors of Creative Synergy [10:49]

What I found, and I am going to kind of fast forward through all that methodology, is what I found is that there were three factors that have the greatest impact on creative synergy in teams and those are 1) team purpose, 2) team dynamics and 3) team creative process. If you are a regular listener, an example of team creative process is something like [The Creative Problem Solving Process](#) that I have talked about, particularly in some of the earlier episodes. That is an example of a creative process. So what is the process the teams use together?

Team dynamics include things like the communication between team members. How much do team members trust each other or how emotionally safe do they feel around each other? Are team members comfortable having creative abrasion together? And creative abrasion is basically where we can disagree and have conflict around ideas and concepts, but we do not have conflict around personality or identity. We do not have that kind of petty conflict. Instead,



we have conflict around concepts and ideas. And we are not moving into group think. Group think is where people just agree for the sake of agreeing because they do not have conflict and that can have a really negative impact on a team's creativity. Creative abrasion, trust and communication are the three components of team dynamics.

The third component for creative synergy is team purpose. That is the sense that a team is very clear about what they are doing and why they are doing it and they are all committed to that purpose. The scale measures those three components. The scale was tested in December and some of you who are listening probably got an email or saw on Facebook, Twitter, or LinkedIn a note from me inviting you to take the scale. I had an amazing response. 1,226 of you took the survey. From there, 830 people I actually had useable results because some people did not finish the survey, which is fine. It happens. It is normal. So 830 people took the survey and from there I was able to narrow it down to a scale.

The word survey and scale here are significant because I cannot call it a scale until I have done the statistical analysis. For those of you that are interested, I used exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis to develop the scale. That is all I am going to say. Again, you can go read the full dissertation if that kind of thing interests you or just call me, I will be happy to talk to you about it. Anyway, so of those 830 adults that took that survey, I was able to narrow that survey into a scale with 29 questions. In the slides, I will have detailed demographic data about who took the survey. So if you are interested in that, you can check out the slides, which are part of the [free download](#) I mentioned earlier.

The cool thing about this scale was that I was able to, through statistics, identify those three components of creative synergy; team purpose, team dynamics and team creative process. So I got this scale and I am thinking yeah, this is pretty awesome, but the question is how do I know? I am just one person. Of course I am going to think it is cool. It is my research. So then I test the scale with three different teams. These teams are from three different industries, one was from higher education, one was from a very large non-profit financial organization, and one was from a small for-profit creative services agency, like a graphic design firm.

I tested the scale with this group and basically what I did is I gave each of the three teams, I gave them the scale, got the results back, analyzed the results and then I met with them, essentially in a workshop format. Two of the teams were in person. One of the teams was in a webinar format because they were too far away to meet with in person. I shared with them their scores and how their team ranked on the three components of creative synergy. Then I was asking



them what do you think? Does this feel like an accurate representation of their team? The responses that I got were, “Yeah, this feels really pretty accurate,” which is the big question you want to figure out when you are taking a scale or when you are designing a scale. The scale is not going to be that helpful or that usable if it feels completely out of whack, like it is just completely off the wall and does not make any sense. Like, “Wait, I don’t get these results. This doesn’t make any sense for us.” Then there is not going to be any trust in the scale. That was exciting to get the feedback that, “Yeah, this feels accurate.”

I got this feedback from them on a paper-pencil questionnaire as well as in conversations that we had during the workshop and I want to share with you a few of the responses from the participants in those three teams. One participant said, “Overall just looking at it for what it is, it feels pretty accurate, at least from my standpoint anyway.” Another person said, “I don’t think that any of the responses surprise me. So to me that kind of signals that... we all are on the same page. Even with the responses that have a wide spread, none of them really surprise me, I guess.”

What they were talking about there is that the items in the scale you had the option between one to six, like a classic Likert scale, so one was strongly disagree, six was strongly agree. When the participants in the team got their results, they were able to see for each item, how many people answered strongly agree, agree, disagree, and so forth. Sometimes there would be an item where there would be a wide variation of responses and what that person was saying is that even in those cases, it did not surprise them. So that was kind of interesting.

Another response about the scale’s accuracy was, “No, I don’t think it aligns with what I thought, but if people were honest then I guess it is.” That particular person was quite surprised to see the team results. So what she was saying is, “This isn’t what I expected to see, but now that we are talking about it and I hear people’s responses, then yeah, I guess it is accurate. It wasn’t my experience.” In some ways to me, that is the most powerful. That is the biggest value, I think, in taking a scale like this. Because it helps you see what other people’s perspectives are on the team and maybe not all team members are having the same experience about the team within the team.

Using the Creative Synergy Scale to Increase Creativity in a Team [18:07]

One of my motivations for developing the Creative Synergy Scale was to help teams understand their strengths and their gaps. One of the areas that they are strong in is the team purpose, team dynamics or team creative process, and then where are the areas that they could improve



upon? And focusing in on those areas that they can improve upon while at the same time keeping the strengths that they already have can help a team be more creative together, which ultimately is the purpose. The way a team interacts together makes a difference in their creativity, in their innovation. To me, that was one of the insights from this research, was really that I feel like I was really able to understand the depth that the team interactions and their internal processes, the depth that mattered for their creative output.

Again, just to summarize, the Creative Synergy Model you can envision a Venn diagram with three circles intersecting; team purpose, team dynamics and team creative process. Teams need all three of those in order to be creative together. The purpose of the Creative Synergy Scale is to get a starting point and then you know “all right, what do we need to focus on?” If you are interested in taking the Creative Synergy Scale, send me an email or give me a call. At this point, it is only available through me and so you have to reach out to me if you want to take it with your team. However, eventually, I am hoping by the end of 2016 that it will be available online for anybody to access and you can log in, you can get your team access to it as well and you can analyze your results. It is not there yet, but it will be, eventually. But in the meantime, feel free to reach out to me and I can facilitate that with your team and help your team see where they are at so they will know where are we going?

The Weekly Challenge [20:15]

Your weekly challenge this week is, first of all, download the slides, which you can find on the shownotes www.climerconsulting.com/050. Go there, download the slides, take a look at them and take a look at the Creative Synergy Model and think about where do you think your team has the most gaps? Do you think it is in team purpose or team dynamics or team creative process? Where do you think you have the greatest potential to grow that would help you achieve creative synergy? Think about that with your team and like I said, reach out to me if you are interested in taking the scale, I would be happy to help you with that.

One more thing I want to share with you, and this was a comment from somebody in phase two, one of the teams that I worked with. They said, “I think that the results will serve as a platform to discuss possible/potential areas for improvement. It gives us a reason to have the difficult, painful conversations.” That was really impactful and meaningful. If this scale can help a team have conversations that they need to have, then to me it is a huge success. Again, if you feel like your team is in that place where you are ready to dig in and have some of those conversations, let me know and I would be happy to help with that.



If you want to find out more about when the Creative Synergy Scale is available online, download the slides on the shownotes and you will be added to a mailing list and you will get a notification of when that is. You can also visit www.creativesynergyscale.com. Right now there is not a whole lot on that website but eventually there will be more. In the shownotes, I will also upload, in a couple of months, it is probably going to be sometime in July, I will upload my full dissertation. I think it will be published sometime in June or early July. I am not exactly sure of that. It is a little bit out of my hands at this point. But as soon as it is, I will put it up there as well as email you if you are on the mailing list. Of course, I will post that on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) because I will be so excited when it is ready.

You all, thank you for listening. I hope that understanding creating synergy and the Creative Synergy Scale was helpful and will help you think about your team in a bit different way. Have a wonderful week and I will see you next week. Bye.