

Fostering Creativity in Leader Teams

Having been involved as a management consultant in strategy assignments over the past thirty years, I have led scores of management teams to galvanize themselves around a shared strategic direction. For the most part, the objective has been to “get everyone on the same page,” and while this *is* a powerful step, there is more. For the most part, that “more” has remained beyond the reach of those teams. That “more” is real “creativity.”

Those that *do* experience the flow of creative juice, also sense a dazzling **flow of energy** among the group, a **heightened awareness** of the possibilities facing them in the particular situation, and a **passionate shared commitment** to the strategic choices they make. The challenge is in how to set the conditions that will foster this enhanced creativity.

The not-so-secret secret rests in arousing the skills, innate to humans, that enable us to *connect* and *collaborate* with one another in the pursuit of *invention*.

The first requirement to allow these natural abilities to emerge is a “safe” – or trusting – environment. The key to producing this atmosphere is in persuading all participants to suspend judgement – of one another, and of one another’s ideas – while the group explores possibilities.

It is during this *Possibilities Excursion* that the participants really *connect* with one another through confirmed mutual understanding of one another’s perspectives. Understanding others’ views, and being understood themselves, the participants look for the **sources of power** in ideas put forth, as well as the **power drains** in those ideas. Quickly, the group moves to combining power sources and reshaping the power drains to generate wonderful and fresh *inspirations* to dealing with the business at hand.

The final step is converting these ideas into reality through both collective and singular commitments to *action* which can be monitored and continually refreshed by the group.

As the natural skills are most often submerged under layers of “learning” and “practicality,” we need to introduce and require compliance of the “rules of engagement” for each session, and in the process, model the behaviour we are trying to inculcate.

While formal training and coaching are most often required to instil the ongoing and regular use of these regenerative skills, many can leave a two-day business retreat and put some new – read “long-forgotten” – behaviours back into practice.

Bob McCulloch has been consulting in the strategy development arena for over twenty years. His experience includes IBM sales, management, and customer executive programs, DMR Group executive consulting and management of leadership and professional development, and founding partner of Johnston Smith International – a Toronto-based consulting firm focusing on change management – as head of the Firm’s Strategy Practice. Bob has a BSc from the University of Toronto and an MBA from the University of Western Ontario. He is a Fellow of the Institute of Certified Management Consultants of Ontario, and served as its president in 1989.