



Foster An Innovative Climate One Step at a Time

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Do you want to improve the innovative climate in your team? Here is an approach to help you achieve that.

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To innovate in an organisation requires people to collaborate and think, logically and creatively. To enable this, you need to use a structured approach and tools to innovate, plus you need to foster an innovative climate. I consider that there are two types of innovative climate. One is the microclimate that you create in a workshop situation. The other is the macroclimate that you develop in the organisation.

Recently, we worked with the leadership team in a commercial organisation to develop innovative propositions. As part of the first workshop we used many of the “action dimensions” overleaf to develop a microclimate for people to innovate in. Having experienced this microclimate as a team, we asked them to use the Action Dimensions Table to assess the macroclimate in their departments. So enthused were they by this simple assessment, the managers took it upon themselves to carry out assessments with their teams after the workshop. They each chose three dimensions to address to begin enhancing their macroclimate. To understand more about climate and how to rate this, read on.



About Climate

Goran Ekvall carried out a well-known study on organisational climate for creativity. He identified dimensions on which to measure creative or non-creative climates in organisations and other researchers have extended and amended his original dimensions. James L. Adams also identified blockages to creativity in his book, “*Conceptual Blockbusting*”.

Later studies use different words but identify much the same concepts.

In the Table, I have amalgamated their ideas in my own words and turned them into key actions and guidelines that you can adopt to build the climate. If you work in a large organisation, you may not be able to influence directly the climate in the whole work place, but you can influence the climate for your team.

The Action Dimension Table

Action Dimensions	Guidelines
Create “Flow”	Create roles that balance the skill / capability of the individual and the challenges of the task.
Provide Autonomy	Set up the conditions that enable people to make decisions, find information and show initiative. You might call this “empowerment”.
Encourage Creative Thinking	Encourage people to be receptive to new ideas and put forward ideas and suggestions. Nurture fledgling ideas. Say, “Yes, and...” NOT “Yes, but...”. Develop the use of a structured approach to innovation, using logical and creative thinking tools.
Allow Time for Creative Thinking	Ensure people have time to follow a structured approach and to involve others. Allow time to iterate over the problem and avoid premature closure.
Build Trust & Openness	Create an environment in which people are happy to say what they think and offer conflicting ideas. Advise people to be open minded and suspend their beliefs, values and assumptions when facing a new opportunity.
Promote Playfulness and Humour	Make the workplace a relaxed and fun place to be and play with ideas.
Foster Open Debate	Have people engage in lively debates about issues, informally and formally. A “conflict of ideas” is healthy. “People in conflict” is not.
Accept Constructive Failure	Accept failure when people try new things and use the right approach. This is about your attitude to risk.
Make the Workplace Dynamic	Develop an exciting and dynamic atmosphere. Accept that confusion, ambiguity and uncertainty exist and embrace them. Commit resources to being more innovative.
Reduce Interpersonal Conflict	Encourage people to understand different styles of working and to flex their own style when necessary to reduce conflict.
Enable Open Communication	Enable junior people to communicate easily with higher levels of management in the organisation and ensure different functions network together.
Reduce Negative Stress	Help people to reduce negative stress that inhibits their creativity and innovative behaviour. You can achieve this by taking the actions described here.



Exercise Instructions

Consider your part of the organisation or the organisation as a whole. On the chart overleaf complete these instructions:

1. For “Create Flow”, consider key initiatives you have in place already that provide energy. Record these in column two.
2. Next, use column three to rate how much energy these initiatives create currently between “1” and “10”, where “10” is high. The higher the rating, the more energy. E.g., under “Create Flow”, you rate the energy “7” because you run good induction training.
3. Repeat instructions 1 and 2 for all Action Dimensions.
4. Next, in column five, rate the optimum energy for your team on each Action Dimension, e.g. you may decide that “6” is the optimum for “Make the Workplace Dynamic” because that is an acceptable level of dynamism for the type of work. (Your colleagues might not agree!)
5. Next, if your rating in column two is less than the rating in column five, record in column four what action you might take to move the energy one point up the scale towards this optimum point.
6. Finally, compare your chart with your colleagues. Don’t try to average the ratings. What is important is to discuss significant differences. Record the team ratings on a spreadsheet to compare at a later date.

How Much Energy?

How much energy should you apply on each dimension? Consider that if you are seeking radical innovation, you might need to apply greater energy on each dimension. If you are seeking more incremental or adaptive innovation, you might apply less energy.

However, before you wind up the energy to ten on each dimension, consider how the people on your team will react to this. Those people more inclined to adaptive change might find “10” an uncomfortable place to be.

Work with Your Team

Use this Action Dimensions tool with your team, but first let them experience an innovative climate in a meeting, as described on Page 1. Here is an example of how to create the microclimate for a meeting:

1. Have people work in pairs to talk for one minute each about their favourite holiday or other positive topic.
2. Review the purpose and outcomes of the workshop. Have people discuss with a partner their best hopes for the workshop, what they want to achieve and record this on a Post-it Note.
3. Have teams write four bullet points for what the facilitator must do and what they must do to make the workshop outstanding, [so they set the behavioural guidelines for the workshop, not you].
4. Have them do the “5 Minute Product” exercise. Here, the group invents a “product with a quirky feature”, e.g. a flip chart marker that improves your English. In small teams they have 5 minutes to develop a product name, a strap line and a jingle to present and sing to the group. [To have them collaborate, create quickly and take some risk].

After these 4 steps, have them review the Action Dimensions and identify which dimensions were included in this exercise, (many of them).

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Action Dimensions	What initiatives have you in place to move you up the energy scale?	Rate	What action would move your team one point up the energy scale?	Rate
Create "Flow"				
Provide Autonomy				
Encourage Creative Thinking				
Allow Time for Creative Thinking				
Build Trust & Openness				
Promote Playfulness and Humour				
Foster Open Debate				
Accept Constructive Failure				
Make the Workplace Dynamic				
Reduce Interpersonal Conflict				
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