Working Your Creative Process
Reducing Interference

During any creative process, things get in the way that can have a negative influence on performance. Some of this interference is internal. For example, we might get in our own way by allowing limiting beliefs to erode creativity or we might manage external circumstances poorly. And some interference is external. In these cases, it is important to know what can be changed and what is beyond our control.

Think of a current (or recent) project where you are venturing into uncharted territory as you consider some of the types of interference and the questions below.

Basic Needs
Basic, unmet needs can undermine our attention, rile our emotions, and limit our ability to think creatively. Here are a few examples that can cause interference:
Independence and social interaction. We all need independence and autonomy. But at the same time, we need to interact with others and belong to a group.
Exploration and play. We are driven by a need to understand our inner and outer world and how things operate. We also have an instinctive need for humor and to juggle ideas.
Self-expression. We each need to express our individuality and make a mark on our environment.
Definition of territory. We are driven to gain, maintain, and define both physical ("my office") and thematic ("my idea," "my expertise,") spaces.

• How do these needs serve you?
• What are some ways they can interfere with the creative process?
• How can you reduce interference caused by unmet needs?

Stress
The proper balance between stress and relaxation can open space for new ideas. But too much stress can block imagination and reduce the quality of creative output.

• What stresses you? Why? How can you manage stress more effectively?
• What are some ways that stress interferes with the creative process?
• How can you reduce interference that results from stress?

Limiting Beliefs
Here are a few common beliefs and assumptions that can shape our actions and limit what is possible:
1. Truly creative people have something I don't have.
2. Nothing is new. Everything has been done before.
3. We don't have the time (or money, resources, etc.) to be creative.
4. We have to avoid failure.

• What are some other beliefs you think might limit creativity?
• What are some ways these beliefs can interfere with the creative process?

External Conditions
The conditions in which you work can have a direct influence on your ability to imagine, focus attention, investigate possibilities, and evaluate progress. Here are some that might interfere with creative performance:
1. The amount of available light.
2. The amount and frequency of distractions.
3. The way workspace is arranged.
4. Difficulty getting things approved.
5. Slow decision-making processes.
6. Waiting on someone's input before you can proceed.
7. A lack of essential resources (time, materials, access to knowledge, etc.)

• What are some other external conditions you think might cause interference?
• What aspects of these conditions are within your control to change?
• How can you reduce interference caused by external conditions?

The Creative Process in Action

Some people say, "Necessity is the mother of invention." The fact is we live our lives steeped in assorted challenges, needs and desires.
• Some don't take much effort to resolve, but they may require that we do something differently.
• Others might require more effort, such as combining various available resources in an unconventional way.
• And sometimes, although we hunt for an answer or solution, no existing combination of knowledge, resources, and methods successfully resolves our challenge. In these cases, if we are motivated, we have to invent something completely without precedent.

Each of these situations requires some amount of creativity to push thinking beyond what is known and tested, imagine something new, and produce and test new solutions. We begin with the assumption that we all have this creative ability. But the quality of our solutions and the amount of creative effort required will differ – depending on a whole host of influencing factors.

To enhance creative performance, it is vital that people to take a closer look at their creative process: how they apply creativity to the challenges of their work. Once you know how the process works – and how you work the process – you can determine what will help enhance the quality of your solutions and optimize your creative effort.
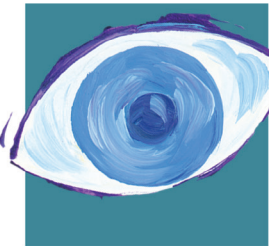
Try This:
First. Take a look at pages 2-5 that describe how the creative process works. Think about what you see and don't see during each phase of the creative process. Then, consider specific examples of how you have managed tensions that arise between the phases.

Next. Use the tools on pages 6-8 to help you enhance the quality of your creative process.

Finally. Take a look at the questions on the back of the folder to help you reduce interference in your creative process.

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Creativity is:
Our innate ability to generate and organize new, unprecedented solutions to challenges we face or design for ourselves.

The Creative Process is:
The sequence of interdependent phases we go through when we apply creativity to address a specific purpose.

How the Process Works
Four Core Phases
There are four core phases we engage in when applying creativity to resolve a challenge or fulfill needs and desires. Although we may talk about them as separate, distinct phases, they are highly interdependent in the creative process.

Clarifying Purpose. We are motivated to resolve an unanswered need, challenge or desire that requires the development of something new or different.

Envisioning. We develop a vision of a solution in our mind – imagining possibilities and searching for ideas, resources, and methods that might fulfill this purpose.

Producing. We work to realize our vision by experimenting, crafting, refining and adjusting tangible products, services, methods, etc.
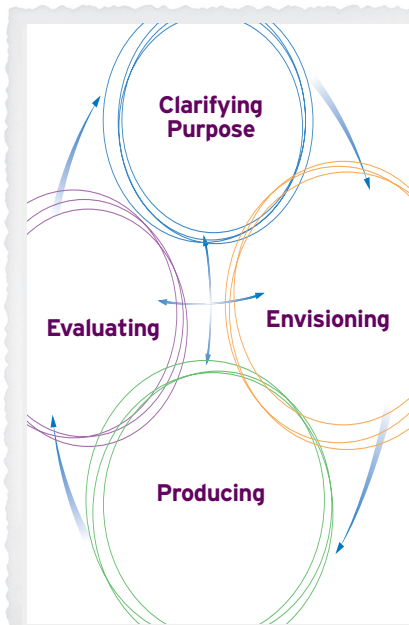
Evaluating. We continuously challenge, test and critique – first our vision and then the process and output of production – to ensure a sound outcome that generates value and serves our purpose.

What You See During the Creative Process
During each of the four core phases, there are certain skills, behaviors, personality characteristics, and external conditions that can make a difference to the quality of your process and creative output. The illustration on the opposite page shows some of the things you might see during each core phase.
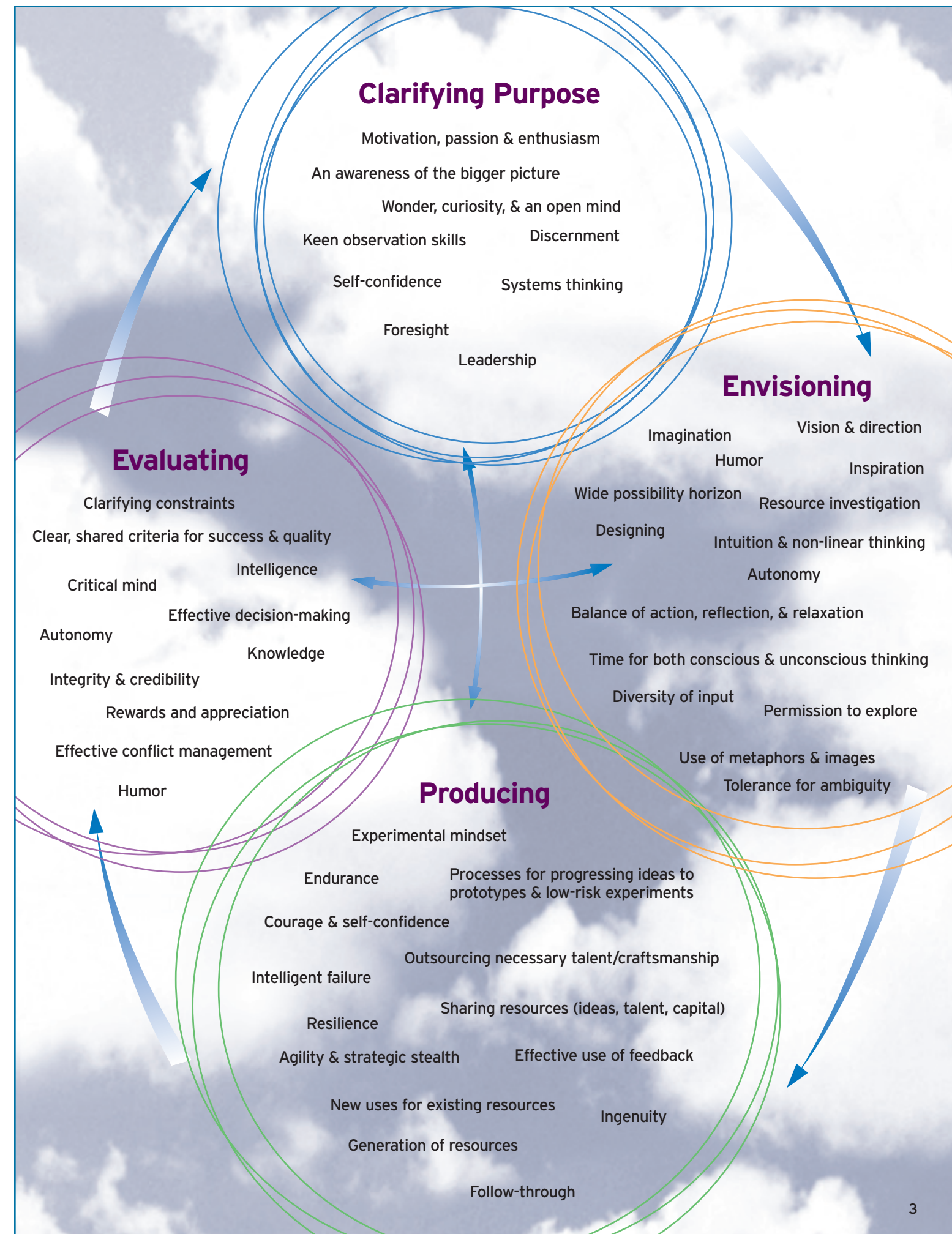
Try This.
Think about a successful, creative effort you were recently involved in. What about the situation required the development of something new and without precedent?

_____

_____

What was your purpose?

_____

How did a vision emerge of what you wanted/needed to create?

_____

What did you produce? Did you successfully achieve the results you were after?

_____

Use the space to the left to write down some of the behaviors, skills, characteristics, and conditions you observed and believe contributed to the success of your creative efforts.

What contributed to our success:
_____
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Clarifying Purpose
Motivation, passion & enthusiasm

An awareness of the bigger picture

Wonder, curiosity, & an open mind

Keen observation skills

Discernment

Self-confidence

Systems thinking

Foresight

Leadership

Envisioning
Imagination

Vision & direction

Humor

Inspiration

Wide possibility horizon

Resource investigation

Designing

Intuition & non-linear thinking

Autonomy

Balance of action, reflection, & relaxation

Time for both conscious & unconscious thinking

Diversity of input

Permission to explore

Use of metaphors & images

Tolerance for ambiguity

Evaluating
Clarifying constraints

Clear, shared criteria for success & quality

Intelligence

Critical mind

Effective decision-making

Autonomy

Knowledge

Integrity & credibility

Rewards and appreciation

Effective conflict management

Humor

Producing
Experimental mindset

Processes for progressing ideas to prototypes & low-risk experiments

Endurance

Courage & self-confidence

Outsourcing necessary talent/craftsmanship

Intelligent failure

Sharing resources (ideas, talent, capital)

Resilience

Agility & strategic stealth

Effective use of feedback

New uses for existing resources

Ingenuity

Generation of resources

Follow-through
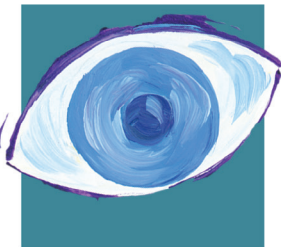
How the Process Works

Tension Between Activities

Although the four core phases of the creative process are highly interdependent, there is an implied sequence where each in turn takes center stage. The quality of work during each of these periods of activity is vital for creative performance. But it is the tension between the four phases that ultimately drives the process forward. Understanding these creative tensions will help your team and you reduce interference, optimize your efforts, and enhance results.

Tension between an unresolved purpose and an emerging vision.
As this tension increases, we become motivated to envision possibilities that will answer the need or solve the challenge.
Actions: Notice opportunities. Understand your strengths. Discover what is personally and collectively compelling. Clarify important questions. Believe in your abilities. Weed out competing needs, desires, and goals. Assess your current state. Explore similar problems for answers. Face the "blank canvas." Define success. Understand the gap between what you have and the result you want. Ask open ended questions.

Tension between envisioning and evaluating.
This tension helps ensure a viable vision. We imagine and evaluate options by balancing openness to possibility with our critical mind.
Actions: Focus the power of imagination. Critique possibilities without dampening inspiration. Balance stress and relaxation. Allow ambiguity. Take stock of resources. Open intuition. Understand constraints. Play.

Tension between producing, envisioning and evaluating
This tension keeps us creative while we implement options. We develop solutions by continuously testing, re-envisioning, and refining designs, prototypes, and experiments.
Actions: Use obstacles to improve results. Balance action and reflection. Build skills. Go "back to the drawing board." Take accountability for decisions. Test production against your purpose. Refine your vision. Allow multiple methods to achieve solutions. Manage conflicts.

Tension between evaluating and your purpose
This tension helps us evaluate results against the original purpose to determine if and when the solution successfully answers the purpose.
Actions: Re-affirm criteria and standards. Get feedback. Involve key stakeholders. Test and retest working parts. Live with the solution. Let it go. Share appreciation.

Managing Tensions in the Creative Process

Managed Successfully	Managed Unsuccessfully
1. Tension between an unresolved purpose and an emerging vision.	
2. Tension between envisioning and evaluating.	
3. Tension between producing, envisioning and evaluating.	
4. Tension between evaluating and your purpose.	

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> "There are no easy recipes for originality. Thinking tools are necessary to creativity, but, like the tools of any trade, they must be used with individual, even idiosyncratic, vision to yield innovative results."
>
> - Robert & Michele Root-Bernstein in Sparks of Genius

Try This.
Use the tools on these two pages (or adapt them) to help you enhance the quality of your creative process.

Working Your Creative Process

Once you understand how the creative process works, it is possible to begin enhancing the way you work the process. Working the process means that you are:
- Paying attention to where you are in the process and what skills and characteristics are required.
- Observing your inner experience – checking in to see how you are doing (mentally, emotionally, & physically) in relation to what is happening.
- Listening to hear what you are telling yourself about successes or failures along the way.
- Reducing interference from obstacles within your control (e.g. limiting beliefs, concern about performance, stress, etc).
- Learning about your needs and preferences (e.g. loose or tight feedback, time pressure, working conditions, balance of time alone vs. with others).
- Making sure that your efforts fit the circumstances and your purpose.

As you become more aware of factors that shape your creative style, you can begin coaching yourself to improve your enjoyment of creative work, reduce interference in your process, and enhance the quality of results.

Tracking Your Creative Journey

Use the chart below or adapt it to track your journey through the core phases of the creative process.
- Determine the length of time each column will represent
- At each interval, (eg. 1 week, 1 month) mark the phase that has taken center stage. What information do the results provide?

Core Activity	Intervals				
Clarifying Purpose					
Envisioning					
Producing					
Evaluating					

CP Check-In
Mark an "X" on the scale to the right of each question to "check-in" at various intervals in your creative process.

	Not At All	Moderate	Totally

How connected are you to your motivation for achieving your purpose?

Do you have a clear vision of your goal and direction?

Do you have clear, shared criteria for success?

Do your daily actions reflect your commitment to achieving your purpose?

Are you remaining open to new possibilities?

Do you have the necessary support and resources to help you?

Here are some things I can do to better align my motivation, vision, and actions:
_____
_____

Learning From Obstacles
What are some of the obstacles you have encountered?
_____
_____

Use the space below to identify some key learnings from these obstacles:

What we've learned:
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What we still need to know:
_____
_____
_____

Important Questions
Take some time at the beginning of a creative effort to answer these questions. Return to ask them again as often as needed.
- What is the need, challenge or desire we are working toward?
- What makes it compelling for me personally?
- How will we collaborate to generate a clear vision?
- What criteria will we use to evaluate our vision?
- What do we need in order to start experimenting, making and implementing solutions?
- How will we know if we are on track?
- What can we do to keep open to new possibilities when we encounter obstacles?
- What adjustments to our solution will improve the quality of results?
- How will we know when the solution is successful and complete?