



HUMAN CAPITAL
BY ALLA TKACHUK

Creative human capital

The driver of economic growth

In the 21st century growth and prosperity are driven by creativity and innovation. "Around 85% of productivity gains are related to innovation" says the World Economic Forum. Creative and innovative human capital, therefore, is critical to a nation's success.

Creativity now is a fundamental skill employers seek in employees. Creative, they are better prepared for the increasingly complex work environment. Thinking 'outside the box' is becoming a far bigger part of job tasks than a generation ago; academic qualifications are not enough. As GlaxoSmithKline Ceo Ann Byrd said: "We need creative people. They know how to think outside paradigm, to kick-start a new idea, to get a job done better."

Creativity training is, therefore, now a major concern around the world. Yet, in many regions, training for creativity remains elusive. 85% of employers say they are having difficulty finding employees that are creative: school-leavers are 'deficient' in creativity and only a few college graduates are adequately creative. 75% of Africa-based chief executives say that the lack of creative talent threatens their companies' growth and even survival. (Ernst & Young, PwC).

WHAT IS CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION?

When asked, business leaders describe 'creative employees' as those who are able to 'see the problems that no one else sees', and generate new solutions. Innovation - is bringing new ideas to market. Without creativity there is no innovation.

SCHOOLS BUILD CREATIVE WORKFORCE

Creativity must be strengthened from the early years. According to research, if neglected it deteriorate from 98% of 5 years-old children being creative to only 2% of adults being capable of generating any new ideas. Strengthening creativity in adults is more difficult and costly than in the young.

Creativity has to be at the center of education. Currently, 'schools kill creativity' says Professor Ken Robinson, adding that 'universities finish off the other 25%'. Lack of pedagogy is one of the main reasons.

Having spent a decade developing effective creativity training programmes, I believe creativity needs to be taught in school 'directly' as a 'subject' in a structured and informal way through after-school 'creativity clubs'.



Strengthening creativity is the responsibility of company leaders who should take up available creativity training opportunities, and work with outside creativity/innovation consultants.

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Facilitated by purposely trained facilitators who know how to set up the right 'creativity learning environment', students strengthen their creativity through activities such as the 'experimenting through the arts', 'creative thinking exercises', and 'step-by-step approach to leveraging creativity for entrepreneurship and leadership'.

Art practices are the best tool to foster creativity. Sadly, art studies are highly limited in most schools in Africa. Why? Some educators and policy-makers wrongly assume that art education is only about imparting the artistic skills - which can be seen as luxury in the time of more pressing needs - while failing to recognise the most important outcome of art education - the ability to think creatively.

BUSINESS BUILD CREATIVE WORKFORCE

The 2016 Human Capital Report of the World Economic Forum states that 'countries in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa might have a remaining window of opportunity of at most 10 years before technology permanently closes the door on the strategies' that develop the skills demanded by the 21st century.

To survive and succeed, business - whether traditional or new - has to invest in creativity of the workforce. Companies cannot be the consumers of 'ready-made' human capital anymore. If businesses are to increase their productivity and competitiveness, they must become the key contributors of enhancing creativity of the current and future workforce.

I believe, there is a pressing need to create a workgroup that can engage business and educators in Kenya in a dialogue on how to enhance creativity of the workforce. To start, the group should help education and business leaders to align their perspectives on these critical issues:

Creativity and innovation definition:

Schools define creativity as the ability to solve problems, businesses, however, see 'problem solving' as a fundamental skill for employees, and do NOT define it as 'creativity'.

Disruptive innovation:

Educators and business leaders should agree on why creativity is of increasing importance. Currently, businesses believe the 'disruptive innovation' (radical change) is the reason, schools - the 'continuous innovation' (gradual change, the opposite to disruptive innovation).

Indicators of creativity:

Employers say that 'art studies' and 'entrepreneurial experience' are the most significant indicators of potential creative worker. In Kenyan schools, art that encourages creativity is dangerously limited.

Creativity assessments:

Currently, there is a gap in how schools and business assess creativity of students: schools believe the majority of their students are creative, business's assessment is significantly lower.

ON-THE-JOB CREATIVITY TRAINING

Company's success depends on creativity of

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employees at all levels. Strengthening creativity is the responsibility of company leaders who should take up available creativity training opportunities, and work with outside creativity/innovation consultants. KEPSA currently offers a 'Leading and Managing Innovation' workshop.

Without creativity there is no innovation. Creativity is not 'art' of 'soft' skill. Occurring in all aspects of life it is a highest form of intelligence.

If companies want to attract and retain creative talent, they must establish dynamic corporate innovation culture. Creative people are rarely motivated by money alone. They are put off by red-tape and hierarchy. They need freedom to work in the areas of interests, stimulating colleagues, and 'permission' to take risks. They need to be able to advance in a job in various ways, and be properly rewarded and celebrated as 'agents of change'.

When hiring new employees creativity profile tests and face-to-face interviews can assess their creative potential.

WHAT CAN BE DONE RIGHT NOW

In accordance with the Kenyan 'Science, Technology, Innovation Policy and Strategy' developed in 2009, the agencies such as the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation, the National Innovation Agency, the National Research Fund, the National Research and Education Network - in collaboration with Kenyan businesses - should launch pilot programmes and scale them up.

Organisations such as the MASK School for creativity and Innovation (MASK) is well placed for this. Since 2007, MASK successfully implemented its training in more than 20 schools in Kenya. For its innovative approach to creativity training, it has been listed on the Harvard University's Global Innovation Education Initiative, and the Results for Development's Center for Education Innovation. MASK Creativity Teacher's Guide, which it is hoped to be endorsed by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, would be disseminated to schools across Kenya.

In 2013, the organisation established the successful creativity competition, MASK Prize. Supported by the Media Partner, the newspaper The Star, the programme is a effective model for catalysing innovation culture amongst new workforce entrants.

It has attracted thousands participants in East and South Africa. Awarding 300,000Ksh in prizes, MASK seeks corporate partners to take the awards to 1 million.

We all, governments, business leaders, education institutions and individuals, must understand the magnitude of the change underway in the 21st century. To successfully navigate the change we need to be creative. This must be a high-priority.

Alla Tkachuk is creativity and innovation consultant and facilitator. If you want to increase creativity of your workforce, contact@creativity-gym.com

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