

Creative Facilitation

Cover picture: Biblioteca España - Giancarlo Mazzanti (2007) – Medellin, Colombia.

The Spain Library is located on top of one of the highest mountains surrounding the city of Medellin. It is both a social centre and a landmark supporting and symbolizing the efforts from the city of Medellin in developing one of the most violent quarters of the city into a safe and sound community. It sits at the top of an extension of the Medellin Metro, a Cable Car that runs up the mountain like a blood vessel feeding and connecting this neighborhood with the rest of the city.

The Biblioteca España, as it is called in Spanish, contains a library, a concert hall, day care for children and other social institutions to support the community. And through its architectural qualities - aesthetics, fit in the surrounding scenery, a landmark overlooking the city, and its careful and practical execution - it is also a wonderful demonstration of a city that wants to invest and care for its people.

More info:

www.giancarlo Mazzanti.com/

www.plataformaarquitectura.cl/2008/02/19/biblioteca-parque-espana-giancarlo-mazzanti/

Creative Facilitation

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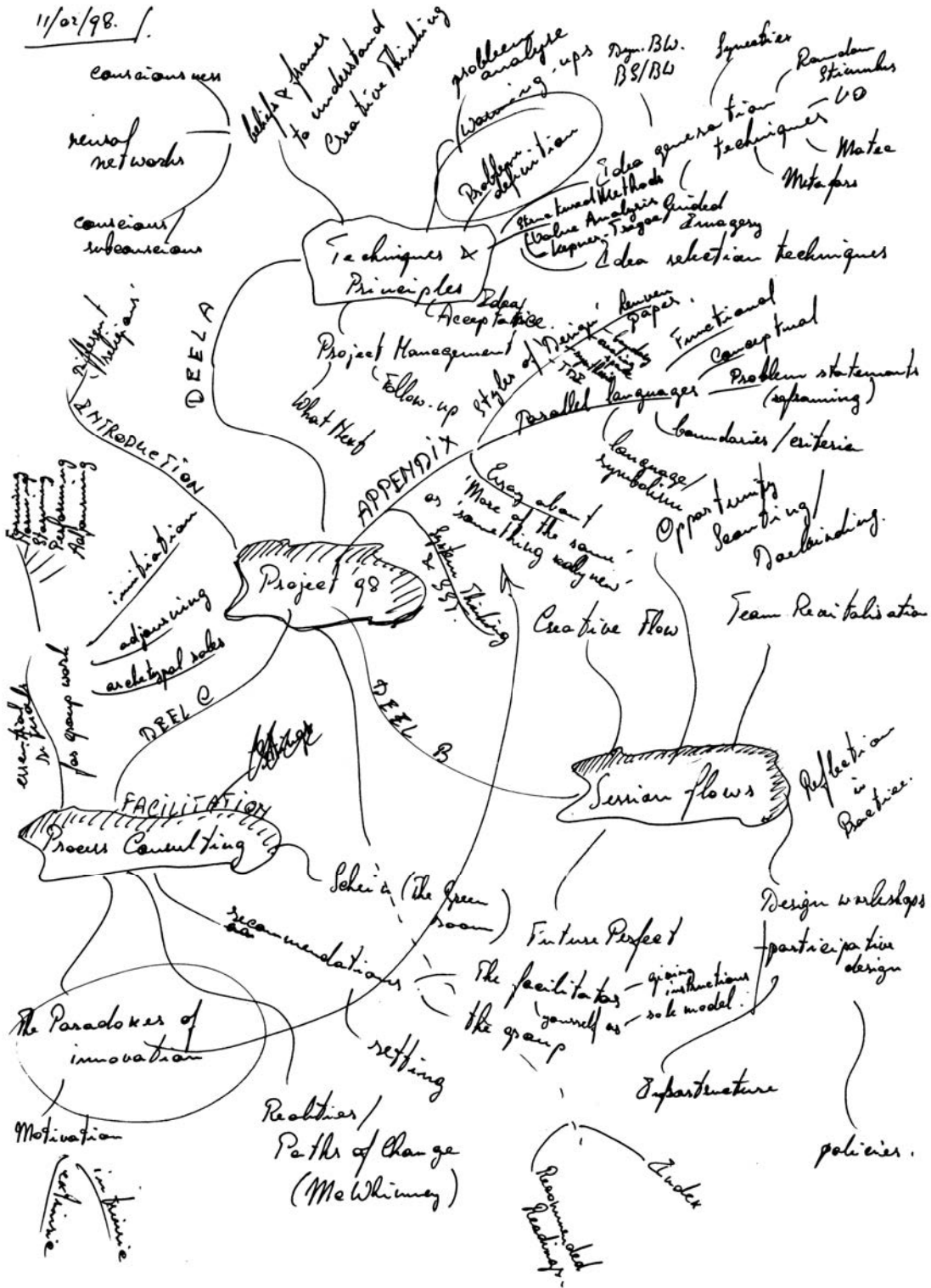
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The Mindmap that started it all (1998)

Preface

Why write a book on Creativity when there are so many on the market? A first reason is a personal one: to realize a synthesis of the many thoughts, ideas, models and experiences I have adopted and practiced over the years; it is about cleaning up conversations between practice and theory and the development of new approaches in the projects I have been involved in. The second reason is to have a document which addresses the specific educational demands of design engineering students at our faculty of Industrial Design Engineering when learning to design new industrial products. And finally, it comes forth from the idea that, although there are great books on the matter, I haven't come across 'my' ideal book. Now, I am not implying that this is exactly that book, but in its development over the years, at least it does approach this idea more closely.

This document is a work in progress. When coaching or running sessions, I often find myself discovering, or even explaining things live in a way that I haven't seen documented that way before. Sometimes it is questions from participants that make me discover new important issues. So, this book has seen a whole range of editions, starting in 1998, at first in Dutch, later on set forth in English. In each edition, new ideas have been included and others skipped, and it will probably continue to evolve this way in the future.

My roots in the field can be traced back to my youngest age, both in hobbies and in professional life. Designing speakers or surfboards, or when coming up with an easier production system for mechanical parts, creativity has always been part of my equations.

A more systematic approach of creativity and facilitation can be traced back to the participation in courses on Creative Problem Solving by Jan Buijs and Kees Nauta at the Delft University of Technology (1989). Other important inputs come from a course on 'Expertise in the Application of Creative Techniques' with the Centre for the Development of Creative Thinking (COCD, Antwerp, Belgium, 1991) with Roger de Bruyn, Manu De Bruyn and Pros Vanosmael, a course on Creative Visualisation by Ghislaine Bromberger, and my collaboration with the TNO Innovation Consulting Group (TNO-IAG) with Patrick Colemont and in parallel my assistance and participation in a number of Creativity & Innovation Conferences organized by the European Association for Creativity and Innovation (EACI, 1991 - 1997), which in turn led to contacts with people like Chris Barlow and Janet Finley at the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT), Robert Alan Black from Cre8ting (Athens, Georgia, USA), and Will McWhinney with whom I have conversed and collaborated on Creativity, Organisational Development, Systems Thinking and setting Paths of Change

for many years. Will passed away in 2007, but his friendship, ideas and critical assistance continue to resonate profoundly throughout my being.

Although theoretical knowledge and understanding are important and useful, the real learning happens in a conversation with experience. That's why I am immensely grateful to the clients who gave me the opportunity to be a facilitator in key innovative projects, among many others: Pierre Brisson (European Space Agency), Igor Heller (RWS–RDZH), Rolf Jongedijk (City of Rotterdam), John Weebers in the project Wegverlichting, RWS (Ministry of Infrastructure), André Noordegraaf and Ad de Rooij with projects like Kritallisatie 21 and 4B Consulting, also from RWS and Hester van Leeuwen and Rob van Berlo from the City of The Hague.

Another source of learning and testing assumptions are the countless almost daily conversations when coaching IDE students through their first facilitation steps at the faculty of Industrial Design Engineering in our course on Creative Facilitation. Time and again they are the living proof of how fruitful creative practice is in both professional and personal development.

In 2006 Paul Karis and myself produced the original English text in three weeks time! I want to thank Paul for his wonderful enthusiasm and commitment to take up such an almost impossible task and assist me in producing this English material for our Master course at the Faculty of Industrial Design Engineering: Creative Facilitation. Also a word of thanks to Joanna Facey and David Bloch for their insightful comments and Hanneke Bergmans who took up to redo the lay-out and produced many extra illustrations and overviews to facilitate the reader's experience.

I owe a lot to my partner and colleague Helga Hohn, with whom I reflect on these subjects all the time, supporting and complementing each other in our respective projects, (me being more an object oriented engineer, she being more a people's person) and who has been a continual support in developing ideas for this book.

And a special word of thanks to Jacques Schievink of the VSSD for helping me getting this publication 'on the road' and delivering the finishing touch with each new edition.

Delft, March 2009

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0 Introduction

As far as we can look back in human history, we see products being imagined and developed to deal with specific needs like procreation, hunger, thirst, protection from the climate and dealing with danger, and stories to explain the inexplicable. And so, creativity is an integral part of our human talents and functions, together with intelligence, memory, intuition, social skills and emotions. It is everywhere: in our mind, in our fingers, in our body and in our senses; maybe it equates to consciousness, encompassing physical sensations, through abstractions such as signs, symbols and language, up to notions such as values and including a sense of beauty¹. So the dancer and the musician in Figure 0.1 create and thereby make a story come to life. All that is what creativity is about.

Seen from another angle, listening and reading are also creative activities. Everyone transforms words into inner images of their own. According to Kees Fens, journalist with the Dutch newspaper De Volkskrant: “It is not you reading the book, it’s the book reading you”. What he meant was that when looking at the little black dots on a page, which we call letters, words and sentences, we, ourselves, in our minds, conjure up the images that we see while reading. These internal images are also the outcome of a creative process. This is supported by the idea that people often comment that “the movie wasn’t as good as the book”. In a movie, details are ‘coloured in’ by a film director; when reading a book you do this yourself. Watching a movie is a much more passive experience. I believe that part of the pleasure of reading comes forth from this active visualization triggered by the markings on the page. In fact no communication would be possible without at least some form of creativity.

0.1 Learning to Create

A question that often arises is: ‘Can one learn to be creative?’ In my view, the question is similar to questions such as ‘Can one learn to eat?’ and ‘Can one learn to breathe?’ We all do it, but one can specialise oneself, one can learn to make delicious Japanese sushi, or some heavenly Genovese pesto, or one practices yoga or scuba diving and learns to breathe more efficiently. The same can be said about creativity: everyone is creative, but it can be enhanced and sharpened, and practiced with much more scope, richness and quality.

¹ Question: “When you have a bee in your hand, what’s in your eye?”
Answer: “Beauty, since beauty lies in the eye of the beholder”

Although there are probably innate capabilities and traits, learning to use one's creative capabilities more acutely happens through experience: observing people with creative tasks, trying new recipes, finding out what works and what doesn't, and last but not least, discovering oneself in the context of such creative tasks. So the answer is 'Yes, you can learn to be creative' but, like eating and breathing, we all do it by nature already.



Figure 0.1: Dancer and Musician (Source: Charles Jencks, Post-Modernism, 1987)

0.2 The Creative Facilitation course

At the Faculty of Industrial Design Engineering (IDE) a course on Creative Problem Solving has been running since 1987, with well over a 1000 students participating over the years, earlier on in groups of twenty, but more recently also with groups of eighty and more.

The course used to be called Creative Problem Solving (CPS), mainly as a reference to the Buffalo CPS process as developed by Alex Osborn and Syd Parnes. Since the start of a new Master programme at our faculty in 2003, we changed the name into Creative Facilitation. This led to a change of emphasis in the course. Over the years, many of the techniques introduced in this course have diffused into other courses and design exercises throughout the IDE curriculum. The students who now participate often have prior knowledge and experience of basic creative skills like brainstorming, –writing, –sketching, using post-it’s and flip charts, and sometimes even facilitating their own sessions, before coming to this course. So, besides elaborating and expanding creativity techniques, a higher emphasis is now put on facilitation, in other words the designing and leading of creative processes in teams.

The whole course is run over a period of about seven weeks. It starts with a two hour introduction upon which students have to study the literature (this book) and write a personal learning contract on “What I intent to get out of this course for me personally”.

General structure of the course

- Introduction;
- Stories and pictures from earlier courses;
- Personal contract: ‘What do I plan to achieve during this course’;
- Using a white book or Dummy to collect learnings;
- Literature study;
- Guided exercises as introductions to new techniques and procedures;
- Fish bowl sessions;
- Writing / designing session plans;
- Executing sessions with real problem owners;
- External sessions with real problem owners and non creativity trained participants;
- A report with personal experiences and reflections.

From the 2nd week till the 6th week, students work one day a week on creative facilitation, starting with guided exercises, gradually moving towards more and more independent facilitation. During the last week, a three day block is set up during which external problem owners are invited to join the group and work on their problems together with students, sessions generally taking half a day.



Figure 0.2: Some personal contracts



Figure 0.3: Using a Dummy to take notes and reflect on experiences

This is preferably done outside the faculty, often in ‘Nature Friends Homes’ (Nivon) with simple lodging and self cooked meals. It is a very intensive three day conference, full of sessions, with problem owners (e.g. managers, designers, entrepreneurs, colleague students) joining us for a couple of hours and leaving with a bunch of ideas under their arm. Once students have experienced participating in sessions and at least led one session within the student group, they have to set up their own external session. So, after having experienced all types of creative processes and techniques within the familiar group, students now have to run a session outside this group with non-CF participants. One might call this their master’s project in Creative Facilitation. And to round it of, all these experiences have to be ‘cleaned up’ and reflected upon in an individual report.

0.3 Group or Individual?

This book is written from the perspective of collaborative creative work. But what about some of the great creative minds of our society, such as painters, architects and composers? Although these professionals may have ‘assistants’ they often rely on their own intuition and expertise. Creative work also depends on focus, and this does get lost sometimes when shared and discussed too widely. An important part of the process is intuitive with a combination of idea generation, knowledge, experience, and critical reflection, sometimes at such a deep level that only very few can acknowledge and understand. Some sharing with others will take place, but mostly limited to trusted friends and colleagues; the actual pushing forward of the idea will be the work of that individual. In such cases, focus and concentration seem to be the essential ingredients to come to really valuable and fruitful concepts.

Another observation of creative process is that ideas don’t come for free. They are the result of hard work, experimenting and reflecting, sometimes letting go for a while, coming back to a subject, etc. Disappointment, failures and unexpected costs are all part of the process. Creativity can be extremely demanding, and only those with enough motivation, enthusiasm and energy will be able to pull through such journeys.

At the same time, there is a trend in having more and more creative work done in teams, in all kinds of multi-disciplinary and multi-cultural settings. Issues that are put on the agenda grow in span and complexity, e.g. presently more and more taking into account sustainability and globalisation. More stakeholders with extending multidisciplinary views have to be involved at earlier stages in development projects.

So, in my view, there is not necessarily a discussion about whether individual or group creative work would be better. It all depends of the context. But it should be noted that this book is primarily aimed at creative sessions and workshops, creative collaboration and the design and facilitation of creative processes in such multifaceted social contexts.

0.4 Objectives for this book

- To develop a common language among students to be able to share experiences, reflections and learnings;
- to provide a range of techniques and interventions to design and execute creative processes;
- to provide insight in the theoretical backgrounds of creative processes;
- and hopefully an encouragement to use every opportunity to experience creative processes.

0.5 Structure of the book

It would seem logical to present subjects in the order as they would typically be used during a creative session. As described in Chapter 1, over the years I have discovered that students follow a different sequence in terms of discovering and developing facilitation skills and I came to the idea to use this sequence as a basis for this book's structure.

After reading the first couple of chapters (at least up to chapter 3), you are encouraged to participate in creative sessions and acquire real experience of creative group processes after which you can come back to the book to continue learning and expanding your facilitation skills.

The first part, i.e. Chapters 1, 2 and 3, will provide a general view and introduction on creativity and principles of idea generation. We will also have a look at learning processes, and more particularly at learning to become a creative facilitator. Then, we'll build an overview of the whole process, after which rules will be presented, rules that will be helpful when a group is working together to generate fruitful ideas and concepts.

After these introductory chapters we'll dive into specific techniques with respectively Chapter 4 on Idea Generation, Chapter 5 on Selection, Chapter 6 on Problem Analysis and finally Chapter 7 on Presentation and Implementation.

Then, we come to the third part, which is about how to fine-tune one's session's and facilitation skills. Chapter 8 will be specifically oriented at Facilitation and Process Consulting; in Chapter 9 you'll find suggestions on what might be needed to set up really great sessions, and in Chapter 10 you'll find an account of such a great session as an example of all the previous.

A recommendation: don't just read the book! Get involved in sessions as soon as possible, and as often as possible, and then use this book as a companion.

And may you then experience many wonderful sessions.

1 Setting the Scene

The term ‘Creativity’ should not be pinned down to one single description or definition. Different geographical cultures will ascribe different meanings to the term. For example, take the difference between the more Anglo-Saxon oriented societies (USA, UK, the Netherlands, Germany) and the more Latin approaches in France, Spain, Italy and Mexico². Being at home in both worlds, I presume to say that the Latin approach might be more people oriented, poetic and anecdotal, whilst the Anglo-Saxon approach might be more functional and business oriented. Between professions interpretations may also differ. To an engineer creativity is different than it is to a business manager. And artists will have yet other ideas about creativity.

Within the context of product development, I like to use the perspective as put forward by Roger De Bruyn (COCD, 1991) who states that ‘creativity’ encompasses the conceptual part, and that ‘innovation’ contains both this conceptual part and its implementation. This division has a practical value, as creative sessions are often restricted to mental and hypothetical exercises. The material implementation follows when moving to the implementation phase.

But although this distinction is often made, it remains artificial. When visiting the industrial designer Paolo Orlandini in Milan I discovered literally hundreds of scale models of chairs. In this office one makes relatively few sketches. Models are being produced, first small, but gradually progressing to life size. Quite “sketchy” at first, these models gradually become more and more detailed toward full scale working prototypes. Each in-between stage is tangible and therefore a good guide for reflection and consideration of consecutive development steps. As such I reckon it would be wrong to separate thinking, doing and experiencing into distinct activities.

Building on De Bruyn’s earlier distinction, one might say that the ideas and concepts generated during a creative session are not so much a conceptual (mental) exercise as they are hypothetical. In the follow-up of a session, concepts will be further tested before being elaborated, materialised and implemented. During the session itself, one might say that the closer participants can be to the outside world ‘real’ experience, the better it would be to get a grip on what is essential. And now, instead of just verbalising ideas during a brainstorm, we open up a space with many more techniques. To name but a few: sketching, storyboards, collage, model building, collages, guided fantasy, dance and choreography, and improvisation theatre.

² The Mexican scholar Mauro Estrada Rodriguez has done extensive research on the subject of differences between Spanish-Mexican and Anglo-American approaches (Rodriguez Estrada, 1986).

In our day-to-day activities we are so accustomed to use text, almost automatically implying all kinds of rules and associations about reasoning, truth, political correctness, etc. and we forget that all these happen in a domain full of abstractions distancing ourselves from the actual issue or experience. By using alternative media (like drawing or miming), we allow other dimensions in our perception or consciousness, e.g. emotions like hope and fears, uncertainties, convictions, intuitions and aesthetics to name but a few.

On the one hand, it's about being conscious and gaining worthwhile observations of an issue, and on the other to have a space where we have more liberty to generate surprising and useful ideas.



Figure 1.1 Creating through models - Paolo Orlandini (source Conti, 1993)