The Conceptual Manager and Integration

Extract from *Conceptual Toolmaking: Expert systems of the mind*,
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What really matters is how to integrate relevance with creativity, where the conceptual manager excels. Relying on relevance alone is too limiting. Many people have felt it better to extend into the wider area of feelings. Much behavioural training has been sited solely here. But it is simply not good enough either, to confine oneself entirely within the subjective and the personal. Feelings must be related to what is sound and rational as well, otherwise bridges fall down, systems collapse and order is drowned in a sea of emotion.

For a few years I took the other route and made the mistake of focusing too much on the creative field. It was my way of compensating for the lack of creativity in the business world. My first conscious recognition of my own creativity came during a half-day on creativity in a management programme run by Rank Xerox in Noordwijk, Holland. The group was given the now famous exercise of individually listing as many uses of a paperclip as possible in a matter of minutes. To my surprise my list was miles longer than anyone else’s. It was a revelation to me that I was at all fluent with ideas. From my childhood, growing up under the influence of my father who was a portrait painter and my mother who was a gifted musician, an elder sister and an older brother both with beautiful singing voices, another older brother who wrote poetry and composed, a grandmother who was a concert pianist and a grandfather who was an architect, I had taken it that I was not of their creative ilk.

Following the Noordwijk experience my interest was roused to explore further. Before he died, I started corresponding with Alex Osborn, the father of brainstorming, and joined his Creative Education Foundation, Buffalo, USA. Creativity became a hobby which was reinforced when, two years later, running a course myself, one of the managers remarked on my unusual and prolific use of analogy in the way I taught. Putting two and two together, all too fast, I twigged that I might be more creative than I had ever thought.
Today my emphasis is upon drawing the flow of ideation into the domain of relevance just as much as the other way round. I look back with some sadness that it took me so many years to discover and then release my own brand of creativity fully into my work. Not wanting others to suffer the same confinement, I have made it a prime ambition to show managers how to bring creativity and relevance together directly into daily problem-solving.

My ideal of the conceptual manager is one who has integrated his/her thinking, and who is able to work consciously and congenially with all his mental faculties both in his job and with family and friends. The path towards integration never ends. It has been a long haul from those days of my first recognition of creativity to the present book. Nailing my colours to the mast, in more ways than one, this is a summation of half a life-time’s work.

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