

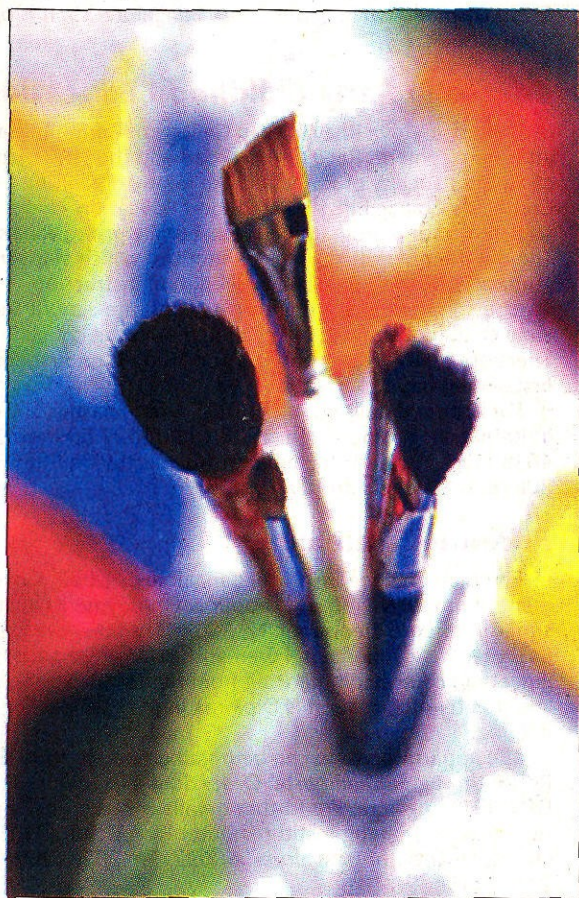
DH Education

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DECCAN  HERALD III

Creativity and information

A hallmark of successful creative thinkers is the ease with which they can make strange things familiar and the familiar strange.



Creativity is an elusive state of mind. As some one put it 'we can't tell you what it is, but we know it when we see it'. Even though it can be argued that everyone is creative and it exists in varying degrees, the relationship between creativity and information-seeking behaviour of creative persons help us to understand it better.

A lot of information is consumed by creative per-

sons as input to their creative process. A few geniuses may be exceptions. An important characteristic of creative persons is that they tend to accumulate an over abundance of data and information with willingness to ultimately discard. It is this willingness to discard the amassed information that distinguishes them from ordinary persons. Many creativity techniques like brainstorming, brainwrit-

ing, synectics, bionics, morphological analysis, etc. generate enormous information and it is a creative person who can cope with the problem of information overload.

One of the habits of successful creative thinkers is that they are at ease in making strange things familiar and the familiar strange. In other words, the accumulated information and knowledge is, at choice, disowned and they can easily slip selectively into a 'no knowledge' zone.

In fact, the cardinal principle of synectics is 'trust things that are alien, and alienate things that are trusted'. One of the three basic principles of even directed creativity is 'escape' (the other are 'attention' and 'movement'). In other words, they are involved in pitting themselves against the unknown. Among the four surrounding ideas which yield solution to a creative problem (propounded by Bruce Wanders in his book *Digital Creativity*) 'Immersion' and 'Isolation' (the other two being 'Inspiration' and 'Iteration') also indirectly talk of having information and at times distancing from it.

If 'immersion' requires adequate research and gathering information and material, 'isolation' refers to the opposite of information to clear the mind of everything and allow ideas to enter. It is like meditating and working in an 'alpha state'. Sleeping is con-

sidered to be an extreme form of isolation.

Even other characteristics and habits of successful creative thinkers, directly or indirectly, indicate that they are different in their ways of handling information. For example, it is very difficult for an ordinary person to resist passing judgement and/ or criticism on any idea or thing if his information and knowledge demands so.

On the other hand, creative persons tend not to criticise any idea prematurely but suspend their judgment. It is creative persons who can tolerate ambiguity in information and material gathered. They not only travel and listen to ideas with an open mind but use reading as a stimulus for creative thinking. They like the challenges presented by contradictions, exceptions and apparent disorder. Normally, the human memory stores new information by association. Ordinary persons reject contradictory and ambiguous information, which fail to fit into neatly developed categories already in the memory.

On the other hand, creative persons not only hold ambiguous and contradictory information, but look at it as a source for their creativity. Yet another characteristic of creative persons is to challenge the assumptions. Rejection of

conformity in thinking is their hallmark. They keep on struggling for freedom from fixed ideas. In this process, they go beyond the boundaries of the problem as well as the area of specialisation by expanding their span of attention and relevance. This is the tendency towards what are called 'cross fertilisation' of ideas and 'hanging loose'. A noble laureate says that 'any normally brilliant fellow who allowed himself to be sensitive to creative ideas could, by being in the right lab at the right time, luck into some awesomely simple insight and it was just a matter of hanging loose'.



In their information-gathering pattern, creative persons don't wait for inspiration, but keep working with constant updating of their knowledge. This process often leads to what are called 'accidental or chance acquisition' of relevant and useful information. Such 'lucky accidents' have great serendipity value and creative persons try to practice

serendipity by welcoming chance intrusions and by holding a broad area of interest always alive in the mind.

The creative process is not a comfortable thing as it involves urge and pressure, i.e., some kind of stress application on the person. Creative persons tend to have a unique set of values, which may at times, be at loggerheads with immediate goals of employed organisation. They are also characterised by broad interest in intellectual activities, reasoning, intelligence, common sense, analytical ability, curiosity, sensitivity to encouragement, divergent thinking, initiative, enthusiasm, excitement and preparedness to undergo hardship. Despite extensive knowledge through formal education and training, creative persons most endure their self-acquired information, knowledge and education. They are quite open to the 'irrational' in themselves. They are also great optimists with a high degree of self-confidence, which at times may reach the point of objectionable arrogance.

We cannot think of a creative person without information and knowledge. That is why the creative Wilbur Wright, the inventor of the airplane, once said that 'it is possible to fly without motors, but not without knowledge and skill'.

About the Author

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