

# HOW TO CREATE A CREATIVE LEADER



## START WITH THE INNOVATION GENOME

### WHAT MAKES A CREATIVE LEADER?

Descriptions of creativity have become like descriptions of obscenity: I know it when I see it. These highly subjective views of creativity become devalued and useless when they include everything and everyone. There is no shared definition as to what makes a person creative or how they differ from everyone else. If we have any hope of actually developing creative leaders we must start by recognizing the various forms of creativity and types of leaders who are most likely to possess and master them.

Pared down to its most elemental description, creativity is simply useful novelty. It is a form of positive deviance. This means that creativity cannot be understood as an idea in itself, but rather an idea in relationship to more conventional ideas. So it is the context or situation that defines what is creative. For example, the leadership skills required to develop a celebrated haute couture house of fashion have little in common with those required to lead a biotech company to the discovery of a miracle drug. There is no checklist or one personality type that makes a leader creative.

Creative leaders are those who can produce these valuable forms of variation in the appropriate situation. What makes a leader creative is different depending upon the context: industry, region, strategy, organizational culture and competency, etc. This is where tools such as personality tests or typing indicators fall short. They only identify the interactions between types regardless of what creates value in the specific situation and the relative ability of an organization to produce it.

### IDENTIFYING AND DEVELOPING CREATIVE LEADERS

For the better part of thirty years I have been researching what makes a leader creative. What are their attributes? How do they come to possess these attributes? What makes their creativity valuable? The answers to these questions are so complex that a map is required to codify and organize the various qualities of creative leaders and identify the strategic situations, structure, and dynamics where they are most valuable to an organization. This map is called the Innovation Genome.

The Innovation Genome is a metaphor and model upon which a wide variation of creative leadership types can be compared and evaluated. The Innovation Genome has three basic components:







1. Levels
2. Structure and Dynamics
3. Types

## LEVELS

First, the Innovation Genome functions across three inter-related levels. Think of them like Russian nesting dolls where each level is subsumed by the greater level. The levels are:

1. Purposes – Outcomes, or the value propositions the organization intends to create
2. Practices – Culture, competency, and processes of the organization
3. Personal – You, a leader, an individual

Whereas most typing indicators assume that the situation in which leaders lead is neutral, the Innovation Genome does not. Just as some investors prosper in bull markets while others succeed in bear markets, what makes an effective creative leader is determined almost entirely by the strategic situation.

To succeed in particular strategic situation, creative leaders need to develop the appropriate culture and competencies to produce the desired value propositions such as profitable growth. The success of the organization is determined by the creative leaders' ability to diagnose the situation and synchronize the organization to pursue and produce specific value propositions. Developing this ability is no simple matter and

---

**Dr. DeGraff** is Professor at the Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan. His research and writing focuses on leading innovation. Dr. DeGraff founded the Innovatrium Institute for Innovation, with labs in Ann Arbor and Atlanta. He has consulted with hundreds of the world's most prominent firms and has developed a broad array of widely used innovation methodologies. Learn more at [www.jeffdegraff.com](http://www.jeffdegraff.com).

is what differentiates a great creative leader from a good one.

However, while there are clear connections between outcomes and the organizational culture and capability required to capture them, creative leaders typically favor innovation practices that closely resemble their own preferences instead of changing those practices to fit the situation, to the detriment of the organization.

Organizational Innovation Type	This is dominant culture of the organization
Strategic Situation	This is when and where this creative leadership type will be most effective
Speed/ Sustainability	This is how fast and how sustainable this creative leadership type typically innovates: fast, moderate, or slow
Magnitude/Risk	This is how much and how risky this creative leadership type typically innovates: high, moderate, or low
Focus	This the fundamental way in which this creative leader innovates
Motto	This is the inner voice of the creative leader
Creative Value Propositions	This is the typical outcome this creative leadership type pursues
Desired Work Environment	This is the affective appeal of the workplace for this creative leadership type
Negative Zone	This is what happens when this creative leadership type is taken too far

## STRUCTURE AND DYNAMICS

Second, there is an organizational structure and dynamics associated with creative leadership types. These include:

### TYPES

Third, there are four fundamental creative forces that produce innovation by pulling us, our communities, the imperceptible climate, and all the constituents in our situations in different directions: Collaborate, Create, Compete and Control. These forces drive or thwart innovation in dyadic oppositions: Collaborate versus Compete, and Create versus Control. This constructive conflict between these

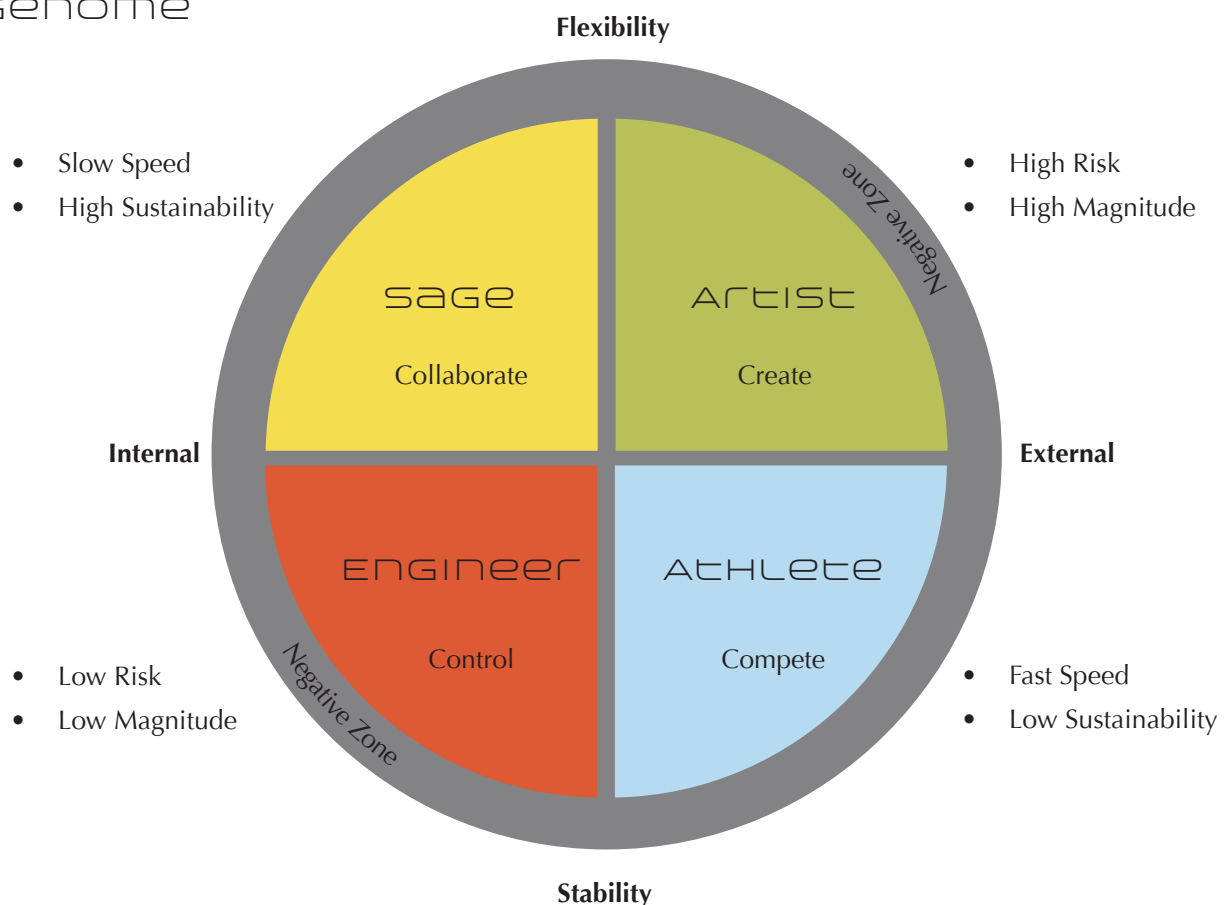
forces produces the power that generates innovation. Innovation happens in the white spaces of the organization and is created by leaders of different types pursuing common ends.

Each creative leadership is closely associated with one of these creative forces:

1. Create: The Artist
2. Compete: The Athlete
3. Collaborate: The Sage
4. Control: The Engineer

Let's take a quick look at all four types:

## INNOVATION GENOME



# THE ARTIST

## Characteristics of this Creative Leader

They tend to...

- Take risks
- Incite change
- Focus on the future
- Discover opportunities
- Envision new products or services
- Experiment through pilot projects
- Test boundaries
- Find new ways of doing things

## Creative Leadership Type Description

The Artist is clever and creative. They envision change, so their influence is based on anticipating a better future and generating hope in others. Innovation and adaptation are actively pursued. This type is driven to express themselves in spontaneous, creative responses to their surroundings. They are imaginative, able to handle a high degree of ambiguity and comfortable with abstract ideas. Success for this type is defined by expressing new ideas and prototyping those ideas when possible. Being original is highly prized.

## Examples of this Creative Leadership Type

- Larry Page (CEO of Google), Jeff Bezos (CEO of Amazon), Peter Diamandis (CEO X PRIZE Foundation) and Elon Musk (CEO of Tesla)

## Structure and Dynamics of this Creative Leadership Type:

Organizational Innovation Type	Create
Strategic Situation	Big changes require radical new approaches and high degree of risk. Breakthrough innovation brings discontinuity
Speed/Sustainability	Moderate speed/moderate
Magnitude/Risk	High reward/high risk (not easily scalable)
Focus	Vision
Motto	Do new things
Creative Value Propositions	Breakthrough Innovation and organic growth
Desired Work Environment	Unstructured, flexible
Negative Zone	Chaos



## THE SAGE

### Characteristics of this Creative Leader

They tend to...

- Develop people
- Manage relationships
- Build community
- Pursue commitment
- Manage conflict
- Seek consensus
- Influence through empowerment
- Facilitate learning

### Creative Leadership Type Description

This type is caring and empathic. The Sage is aware of others and cares for the needs of individuals. This leader is skilled at both building a community of people and sharing knowledge between them. They seek interaction among community members and allies, therefore they use processes such as conflict management and consensus decision making as a means. Their success is defined by the creation of strong relationships through dialog, trust, and understanding. Outcomes of these collaborative practices are shared values and commitment. They use their team orientation and cooperative nature to accomplish their goals. Morale and commitment are actively pursued.

### Examples of this Creative Leadership Type

Jimmy Wales (CEO of Wikipedia), Jack Ma (CEO of Alibaba), Geoffrey Canada (President of the Harlem Children's Zone) and Mary Barra (CEO of General Motors)

### Structure and Dynamics of this Creative Leadership Type:

Organizational Innovation Type	Collaborate
Strategic Situation	Long term development of a community. Sustainability is essential. Well being of associates is paramount.
Speed/ Sustainability	Low speed/high sustainability
Magnitude/Risk	Moderate reward/moderate risk
Focus	Values
Motto	Do things that last
Creative Value Propositions	Community building and knowledge development
Desired Work Environment	Harmonious, communicative
Negative Zone	Country club



# THE ENGINEER

## Characteristics of this Creative Leader

They tend to...

Apply technical expertise

- Analyze and manage data
- Make incremental improvements
- Refine methods and processes
- Develop policies and procedures
- Establish technological systems
- Maintain the structure and flow of work
- Influence through objective information

## Creative Leadership Type Description

The Engineer is a well informed technical expert. They are diligent, meticulous, and function-based. Monitors track and document details and influence others based on the control and management of information. Improving efficiency through process redesign and the implementation of reliable technology is a hallmark of the Engineer. Success for this type is in improving quality through the use of procedures. This leader is risk averse, and seeks to take variation out of the system, valuing standardization and consistency. Measurement is used as a tool to achieve these values.

## Structure and Dynamics of this Creative Leadership Type:

Organizational Innovation Type	Control
Strategic Situation	Large scale with significant complexity, highly regulated to reduce the chance of risk. Failure is not an option.
Speed/Sustainability	Moderate speed/moderate sustainability
Magnitude/Risk	Low reward/low risk (scalable)
Focus	Process
Motto	Do things right
Creative Value Propositions	Efficiency and quality
Desired Work Environment	Clear roles and responsibilities, orderly
Negative Zone	Static bureaucracy



## Examples of this Creative Leadership Type

- Michael Bloomberg (former mayor of New York City), Alan Mulally (former CEO of Ford), Xi Jinping (President of the People's Republic of China) and Warren Buffett (CEO of Berkshire Hathaway)



## THE ATHLETE

### Characteristics of this Creative Leader

They tend to...

- Pursue key goals
- Aggressively strive to win
- Focus on competitors
- Redeploy resources
- Focus on strategic projects
- Overcome barriers
- Solve challenging problems
- Influence through logic

### Creative Leadership Type Description

The Athlete is aggressive and decisive. This leader actively pursues goals and targets and is energized by competitive situations. Winning is a dominant objective, and the focus is on external competitors and market place position. These leaders are hard drivers and producers, very demanding of themselves and others. Speed, stealth and discipline are key to their approach. Success for this type is in energizing employees by expanding opportunities for problem solving and redeploying resources. Power is key.

### Examples of this Creative Leadership Type

- Angela Merkel (Chancellor of Germany), Indra Nooyi (CEO of PepsiCo), Jamie Dimon (CEO of JPMorgan Chase) and Tim Cook (CEO of Apple)

### Structure and Dynamics of this Creative Leadership Type:

Organizational Innovation Type	Compete
Strategic Situation	Rapid action, results focused. Competitive position determines standing with group, High performance is expected
Speed/Sustainability	High speed/low sustainability
Magnitude/Risk	Moderate reward/moderate risk
Focus	Goals
Motto	Do things fast
Creative Value Propositions	Money and speed
Desired Work Environment	Challenging, winners and losers
Negative Zone	Sweat shop



## HOW TO BECOME A MORE EFFECTIVE CREATIVE LEADER

There are few simple rules of thumb when it comes to recognizing and maximizing creative leadership talent:

1. You Are Only as Good as Your Weakest Quadrant: Partner with someone who is your type opposite. This will create the positive tension required to have new and better ideas and to see them implemented.
2. Actively Manage Your Portfolio Life: One size never fits all. Lead according to the outcome you seek. If you lack range, be aware of it and enlist others as needed.
3. How You Create Is What You Create: Start at the end with what you seek and work backwards to identify the associated culture, competency, and leadership type required to create it. Most importantly, engage those types that are the most likely to succeed in creating your intended value proposition.

Innovation is form of positive deviance which requires that we deviate from our normal way of leading. What are you willing to give up to be a more effective creative leader?

## HOW TO RECOGNIZE AND DEVELOP CREATIVE LEADERSHIP TALENT

Effective creative leaders are highly practiced at recognizing and developing talent. Here are some ways to start:

1. Act like an Anthropologist: Go on excursion to where there are high performing innovators. Take photos, notes and most importantly, take notice. Spot tendencies and patterns. Reflect on where these leaders are effective and where they are not.
2. Act like a Talk Show Host: Seek out interesting guests to interview. Ask them about their best practices, what works, and what doesn't. Notice how different types approach the same challenges and opportunities.
3. Act like a Manager of a Sports Team: Experiment with your team. Put together different combinations and see which ones are the most effective at making innovation happen. Rotate players in and out of these teams to keep them fresh and moving forward.

It is the job of the creative leader to develop the culture and competency in the organization to make innovation happen everywhere, everyday with everyone.

The greatest act of creative leadership is helping others create and re-create themselves. **TQ**

To learn more about your Innovation Genome type take the free online innovation leadership assessment at [www.jeffdegraff.com](http://www.jeffdegraff.com).