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# An Innovation Culture Assessment Plan for a Department of a Fortune 500 Company

Vincenzo Piscopo  
*Buffalo State College*

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*An Innovation Culture Assessment Plan for a Department  
of a Fortune 500 Company*  
by

Vincenzo Piscopo

An Abstract of a Project  
in  
Creative Studies

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

Master of Science

December 2008

Buffalo State College  
State University of New York  
Department of Creative Studies

**ABSTRACT OF PROJECT****An Innovation Culture Assessment Plan for a Department  
of a Fortune 500 Company**

This project presents an approach to assess the creative climate of a department of a Fortune 500 organization. This project includes a review of the approaches other organizations have taken to assess innovation climate, an evaluation of the approach the focal company currently uses and finally, a plan to assess the innovation climate for a department of the focal company. The proposed plan incorporates learnings from the reviewed literature, best practices from companies such as ?What If!, and institutions such as International Center for Studies in Creativity (ICSC), and my perspective on my experience with innovation in Corporate America.

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Signature

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Date

Buffalo State College  
State University of New York  
Department of Creative Studies

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Dates of Approval:

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Dr. Susan Keller-Mathers  
Assistant Professor

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Vincenzo Piscopo  
Student

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## **SECTION ONE: BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT**

The last 10 years have been particularly difficult for Corporate America. Globalization and the unfronterization of information have made it difficult for companies to satisfy customers. Every year consumers have more choices available than the year before and have access to information that allows them to be more selective in their decision making. Consumers are becoming less loyal to products and are more prone to be variety seekers. As a consequence, players in each industry are becoming more aggressive in order to capture and retain its consumer (Koprowski, 1997). The pace of change in the next five years will be relentless. The companies that best understand the dynamics of this change and adapt fastest to the emerging business landscape will be the likeliest to prosper (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2007). The vast majority of companies place their survival hopes on innovation. However, innovation investment portfolios are performing well below expectations (Piscopo, 2007). The question of why these company innovation efforts are not generating the intended results, and the impact that creative climates have into building

sustainable innovation driven organizations (Amabile et al., 1996) inspired me to choose this topic.

### **Description**

As a Director of Innovations for a Fortune 500 company, I've been charged to impact the culture for Innovation of the organization. Through my experience I've learned that to impact the culture for innovation of a company, it is necessary to first assess the state of its innovation culture. After understanding the state of the culture, it becomes easier to develop an intervention plan that addresses the areas where more attention is needed. Therefore, the initial focus of this Master Project was the development of an approach to Assess the Innovation Culture for a top Fortune 500 Corporation.

Since culture refers to the deeper and more enduring values, norms, beliefs, history, and traditions that reflect the deeper foundations of organizations (Ekvall, 1996) assessing an innovation culture becomes a difficult and complicated task. Climate, on the other hand, is a more objective characteristic of an organizational reality (Ekvall, 1996) and can be

regarded as a manifestation of culture. Therefore, climate was used in this project as a proxy to culture.

Although many aspects of an organization's culture can be homogeneous, many others can vary considerably. As a consequence, different teams or groups within an organization might experience different work environments (Amabile et al., 1996). Based on such variability, for this Master Project, I assumed that in a large multinational company, as the focal one, each department or each region of the company might have different degrees of innovation and creativity in their cultures. The individual cultures of each department contribute to the culture of the organization as a whole. Therefore, it was necessary to address the innovation climate of departments and region individually. The assessment of each department and region individually will constitute the puzzle pieces that, along with the global common characteristics of the organization, will make the assessment of the organization as a whole.

This research project focused on one specific department. The assessment of the organization as a whole is out of the scope of this Master Project and will be examined at a later time.

The outcome of this project is threefold. First, it provides a summary of best practices and existent knowledge on innovation climate assessments. Second, it delivers an evaluation of the approach the focal company uses to assess innovation climates; and third, it proposes a plan to assess the innovation climate of a department of the focal company.

### **Rationale for Selection**

When thinking about how to impact the culture of a large organization, it immediately became evident the necessity to determine the current status of the innovation culture of the organization. Although, the organization has hired agencies to help with some of the assessment and has adopted an assessment approach, there was an opportunity to enhance the approach by enriching it through inquiry into the contribution of academics experts in the area of innovation climates and best practices from other organizations.

### **Project Contribution**

The knowledge I have acquired from the International Center for the Studies in Creativity (ICSC) about creativity, creativity assessments and

corporate innovation climates, in conjunction with my knowledge and experience in training and leading innovation projects, allowed me to evaluate the process currently in use to impact innovation cultures, determine gaps and propose a process that fills the gaps.

This project helped me establish an approach to assess innovation and creativity climates that would be consistent across the organization. Similarly, it provides a common language to benchmark the different company regions and departments.

In addition, if proved successful, this project will allow the company to save several millions of dollars in agency and consulting fees. Finally, it will allow me and my group to make an impact in the overall company culture for innovation by providing a successful approach to assess creative climates. As an individual, this project will allow me to become a better leader by understanding the impact that I can make in influencing the creative climate of my organization.

## SECTION TWO: PERTINENT LITERATURE

From the literature reviewed, I identified three areas that assisted in deepening my understanding of the topic of creative climates and provided the framework under which this project was developed: (a) key definitions that help understand creative climates, its variables and its output as it relates to creativity and innovation; (b) The academic discussion on how and what impacts creative climates and the influence that perception has on creativity and the leader's behaviors that drive the perception; (c) the review of several creative climate assessments and (d) the role of physical space in creative climates.

### Some Key Definitions

The following definitions are key throughout this master project (Isaksen, Lauer, Ekvall, & Britz, 2001):

**Climate** is defined as the recurring patterns of behavior, attitudes, and feelings that characterize life in the organization (p.172).

**Climate for creativity** is that which promotes the generation, consideration, and use of new products, services, and ways of working (p.172).



**External environment** is any condition or situation that is outside the organization itself (e.g., the market, global financial conditions, government, the larger political and social system, technological and scientific developments P.173).

**Leaders** may be senior managers, supervisors, and others who hold formal positions of influence on others (P.173).

**Mission and Strategy** define what the business is going to do and subsequently how it will achieve its aim (P.173).

**Structure** refers to the way people and functions are arranged. It deals with levels of responsibility, decision-making authority, and formal reporting relations with others in organizations (P.173).

**Resource and Technology** are the basic tools an organization have at its disposal to complete business. These include the people, capital, machines, equipment, materials, patents, and copyrights that the organization has acquired for use in its operations (P.174).

**Task Requirement** are the mixture of skills, knowledge, and capabilities needed by the organization to perform assignments effectively (P.174).

**Individual skills and abilities** are the capabilities and knowledge held by individuals within the organization (P.174).

**Management practices** refer to the behaviors managers use to run the day-to-day business and are aimed to at maintaining the stability and order of the organization (P.174).

**System, policies and procedures** are the mechanisms that facilitate the work and provide structure for the organization (P.174).

**Individual needs, motives, and styles** are the psychological factors that provide a sense of worth or desire for people's actions and thoughts (P.174).

### **What Impacts Creative Climates**

Creativity and Innovation does not only come from great organizational missions, strategies and resource availability. Creativity and Innovation are also driven by the brains of individuals in organizations and the

synergies that these individual's create within their teams to execute the organizations' strategies (Schatzel, Moneta, Kramer, & Amabile, 2004).

By the same token, the level of quality and innovative nature of the work that each employee will deliver individually and in teams will depend on each individual's characteristics, activated by the work environment they perceive around them. The environment of organizations is driven by the leaders' behaviors and styles when directing and evaluating subordinate's work, providing resources and information, and by their interpersonal relationships with each of their subordinates (Schatzel, Moneta, Kramer, & Amabile, 2004).

The creativity of employees is triggered or blocked by both perceptual reactions and affective reactions to the support they receive from their managers and the leadership of their organization. Schatzel, Moneta, Kramer, & Amabile (2004) consider the perceptual and affective effects as subordinate's reactions to leader behavior and these behaviors ultimately impact subordinates creative performance.

Previous research further suggests that perception of manager's bad behaviors is, if not more important, at least as important as the perception of good behaviors

(Amabile, Khaire, & Amabile, 2008). In summary, this suggests that subordinates' creativity is a function of their perceptions of the general work environment for creativity, and the environment for creativity is a function of the relationship that subordinates have with their direct managers. This is the reason why the majority of Creative Climate Assessments have a strong focus on leadership behaviors.

### **The Role of Physical Space in Creative Climates**

A surprising finding in my search for variables that impact creative climates was the absence of the spatial dimension as a variable that impacts creative climates. There is no empirical research on the impact that physical work environments have on creativity. Therefore there is no information on how the physical space enhances or not creativity (Haner, 2005). However, work environments have become integral parts of innovation strategies. In fact, some established organizations are implementing dedicated facilities for encouraging creative behaviors and supporting innovative projects (Haner, 2005).

### **Creative Climate Assessments**

Two assessment tools were identified that focus on variables that are closely linked to leadership behaviors. They include KEYS and Creative Climate Questionnaire (CCQ) (Ekvall, 1996). Teresa Amabile and Goran Ekvall were the authors that I found most cited in the area of creative climate assessments. Teresa Amabile (a Harvard Business School professor) has written a large amount of papers on the development and execution of KEYS and Goran Ekvall has a large body of scholarly work on the development and execution of CCQ.

KEYS is an organizational survey that assesses the climate for creativity and innovation within a work group, division or organization. This survey was designed by the Center for Creative Leadership and Teresa Amabile. KEY measures the managerial practices that impact the workplace and encourages innovation.

KEYS includes six management practices that encourage creativity (organizational encouragement, supervisory encouragement, work group supports, sufficient resources, challenging work and freedom), two that inhibit creativity (organizational impediments and workload pressure) and two that determines how

productive and creative an organization is (Amabile et al., 1996).

The Creative Climate Questionnaire (CCQ) is 50-item questionnaire covering 10 dimensions containing five items each. The 10 dimensions are challenge, freedom, idea support, trust/Openness, dynamism/liveliness, playfulness/humor, debates, conflicts, risk taking, and idea time (Ekvall, 1996).

### **SECTION THREE: PROCESS PLAN**

This project has three key steps in its plan. The first step reviews some of the literature in the area of creative climates. The second step reviews the creative climate assessment approach the focal company and other companies follow. The third step uses the key learnings from step one and two to develop an alternative approach for one of the departments of the focal company.

#### **Review of some Literature in the Area of Creative Climates**

In this step I explored some of the articles that cover the subject of creative cultures, creative climates and creative climate assessment tools. This review allowed me to understand the different variables that impact creative climates, the way these variables can impact climates and ways to assess creative climates. This review helped me shape a framework under which to analyze the focal company approach and under which I developed the alternative approach.

#### **Focal and Other Companies Approach**

Based on the creative climate variables and creative climate assessment tools identified in the

literature reviewed, this step examines the approach the focal company and other companies have used to assess creative climates. Of the approaches used by the different companies, this step tried to identify the areas that are supported by the literature, the areas that are not supported by the literature but make intuitively sense and potential gaps.

### **Development of an Alternative Approach**

The third step presents an alternative plan to assess the creative climate of one of the department of the focal company. In this step, I developed an alternative plan for the focal company that incorporates some of the variables and tools learned from the literature and from other companies. This step seeks to make the approach more holistic by filling some of the gaps identified in the previous steps.

### **Project Final Timeline**

#### ***Week 1***

- Read different master projects to get inspiration for my master project (4 hours)

#### ***Week 2 and 3***



- Meet with professor to discuss different ideas for master project (1 hour)
- Decide on topic for the project (1 hour)
- Write concept paper; submit for peer and professor review and feedback; make changes and submit final version. (15 hours)
- Conference Call with professor to discuss project (1 hour)

***Week 4 and 5***

- Research for papers in the field of creative and innovation culture, select relevant papers and read papers. (40 hours)

***Week 6 and 7***

- Master's Project whole class chat on Angel (3 hours)
- Write chapters 1,2 and 3 (20 hours)
- Submit electronic draft version of sections 1, 2 & 3 of project

***Week 8 and 9:***

- Incorporate professor's feedback on Chapters 1,2 and 3 draft
- Master's Project whole class chat on Angel (3 hours)

- Conference call with Dr. Keller-Mathers to discuss project (1 hour)
- Analyze and write focal company approach using the literature lens (10 hours)
- Develop proposed approach for focal company (15 hours)
- Finalize approach for focal company (5 hour)

**Week 10:**

- Write chapters 4,5 and 6 (20 hours)
- Submit draft version of sections 4, 5 & 6 of project

**Week 11 and 12:**

- Incorporate professor's feedback on Chapters 4,5 and 6 draft
- Finalize deliverable (10 hours)
- Prepare presentation for class (10 hours)
- Conference call with professor (1 hour)

**Week 13:**

- Present final output to class (4 hours)
- Mail final write-ups of project to International Center for the Studies in Creativity in both bound/signed and CD form.

#### **SECTION FOUR: OUTCOMES**

The purpose of this project is to identify best practices in innovation climate assessments and to draft an approach to assess the culture for creativity and innovation at a department of a large fortune 500 company.

This project included: A review of the approaches other organizations have taken to assess innovation climate, an evaluation of the approach the focal company currently uses and finally, a plan to assess the innovation climate for a department of the focal company. The proposed plan incorporates learnings from the reviewed literature, best practices from companies such as ?What If!, and institutions such as International Center for Studies in Creativity (ICSC), and my perspective on my experience with innovation in Corporate America.

##### **A Review of The Approaches Other Organizations Have Taken To Assess Innovation Climate**

To leverage the learning other organizations have had in the area of creative assessment, a search of best practice was conducted. Although the existent literature showed many examples of initiatives

companies have overtaken to impact their innovation outcome (Mauzy, 2003), it did not provide details on which specific companies have done creative assessments or how companies have executed such assessments. To overcome the lack of specificity found, I decided to take a look at firms and organizations that offer "creative or innovation assessments" as part of their services. Based on leadership and expertise in the area and because of the differences in their approach to creativity assessment, I selected: *What If! Innovation Company* and the consulting services offered by Dr. John Cabra and Dr. Gerard Puccio from *The International Center for Studies in Creativity (ICSC)*. Both organizations provide services in the area of creativity assessments to many companies in the world.

*What If! Innovation* (personal communication with Simon Brey, November 1, 2008) approaches the assessment of creative cultures using a proprietary tool called Mirror. Although the process is adapted depending on the needs and specific goals of the client, it generally starts with open ended, one-on-one interviews with the leadership team of the

organization and their teams plus focus groups with cross-functional members of the organization.

Once the interviews and focus groups are executed, ?What If! distils and presents the information collected into a series of provocative insights with the use of verbatim quotes and illustration. The objective of this phase is to stimulate debate around how to bring the values to life and get leaders to take responsibility for the role they play and need to play in the future. This process creates and confronts a picture of current reality, exposing the organization's key challenges. The process also identifies potential structures to support any cultural or behavioural changes identified and determines the role of leadership to address these challenges.

ICSC uses more structured and formalized approaches (Puccio & Cabra, 2007). Depending on the goal of the client, ICSC might assess work environment for innovation through KEYS and through the execution of structured interviews (qualitative data collection). As part of creative climate assessments, ICSC could also measure leadership skill sets using quantitative tools such as Leadership

Practices Inventory (Quantitative). Based on the assessment results, to address the areas of opportunities, ICSC crafts an intervention plan based on training for the organization (including senior management), leadership coaching and support group discussion (what's helping/hindering innovation).

### **Evaluation of the Approach the Focal Company Uses**

The focal company believes that an innovation culture is made by the synergies of 4 main pillars: (1) Conditions (2) Behaviors (3) Capabilities and (4) Metrics (see Figure 1 below).

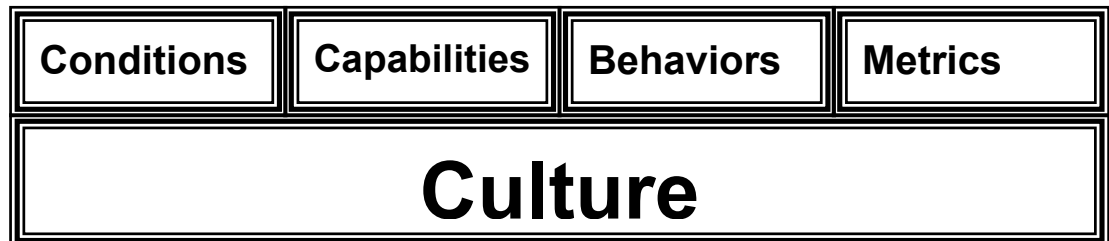


Figure One. Focal Company Culture Model

To have a strong innovation culture in an organization the right conditions, behaviors, capabilities and metrics need to be in place.

**Conditions**

The key conditions the focal company consider indispensable in any innovation culture are: (1) Speed and Efficiency, (2) Tireless Curiosity and Intuition, (3) Entrepreneurship & Risk-Taking, (4) External Orientation and (5) Fluid Resource Allocation. For innovation to occur, these key CONDITIONS need to be firmly yoked in all aspects of the business, including goals & strategies, metrics, resource allocations, review systems, and the selection, promotion, and reward of key colleagues.

**Behaviors**

The focal company identified 8 key behaviors that need to be acted in the organization for it to develop a culture fertile for innovation. These behaviors were identified by the English Company ?What If! Innovation. These behaviors are:

1. *Greenhousing*. Protecting ideas or insights when they are at their most vulnerable and nurturing them into healthy growth.
2. *Bravery*. Daring to be different, exposing yourself to potential judgment, and embracing risk.

3. *Curiosity*. Being interested enough in your issue to dive deeper than your competition.
4. *Playfulness*. Considering 'reasons why' that may seem outlandish at first, but may actually be true.
5. *Signaling*. Communicating where you are in the creative process ... do you want people to judge your idea or help you grow it and make it better?
6. *Realness*. Communicating the value of ideas by making them as real as possible as early as possible.
7. *Momentum*. Creating passion and energy that propels you from Insight to Ideas to Action.
8. *Freshness*. Continually exposing yourself to different perspectives and experiences in order to stretch your thinking and make new connections.

### ***Capabilities***

The focal company believes that for an organization to foster a culture for innovation, its members need to understand the creative problem process and understand the behaviors that enable the creative process. The focal company believes that the whole organization should have general awareness on the creative problem solving. In addition, the organization should have a



group of associates with the core skills around the innovation process so that they can help manage innovation projects and facilitate creative sessions. Finally, the organization should have a limited and selected number of associates to become innovation experts who have the flexibility, toolkit and experience to be able to unlock, coach and manage creativity and innovation on an individual, project or functional level.

### ***Metrics***

Finally, the focal company believes that a series of innovation metrics need to be in place to monitor innovation health and progress. The metrics the company recommends are:

*Freshness Index.* % of Revenue associated with new ideas beyond new products and packages

*iPipe.* Value of current innovation pipeline and how well balanced it is with short and long term ideas

*Cycle Time.* Speed of execution. Time from idea conception to market execution.

To assess the state of the innovation culture of the organization the company uses a group within the Consumer Research department that is charged to

developing a culture for innovation for the organization. This group has the responsibility of assessing the state of innovation of the organization and developing intervention plans that develop a culture that is fertile for innovation.

Using the Innovation Culture Model described, the assessment is done with a two phase approach: the first phase is done by conducting interviews with key stakeholders of the organization around the overall state of the department or division with the objective of understanding how the organization acts on relation to the key conditions, behaviors, capabilities and metrics.

The second phase is done using an interactive, approach where a selected cross-functional and cross-level group of associates are trained to go out in the organization to "hunt for clues" related to the current state of the culture for innovation of the organization. During this clue-hunting process these individuals interview associates from different areas of the organization from hourly employees all the way to senior managers. In addition, this group goes around the organization observing the employees work and interact. From the observation and interviews, this group uncovers the state of the culture of the organization. The

observations (clues) are then grouped and analyzed to determine the areas of opportunity to improve the culture of innovation of the organization. As outcome of this process, there is not only the state of the culture but a potential intervention plan to address the areas of opportunity.

### **Plan to Assess Innovation Climate for the Focal Company**

The recommended approach is anchored in the focal company model for innovative cultures (Figure 1) and incorporates best practices I considered were appropriate for the case of the focal company. I developed a holistic approach to assess the creative climate that includes both qualitative and quantitative data. Although, no specific assessments were found in the literature regarding creative physical space, I considered this dimension to be important in determining the overall climate for innovation of the department (Haner, 2005); therefore a physical space assessment was included. By having a holistic approach, I believe that it becomes easier to uncover the insights that might be impacting the creative climate of the department.

The approach recommended is made up of seven steps (see Figure two below):

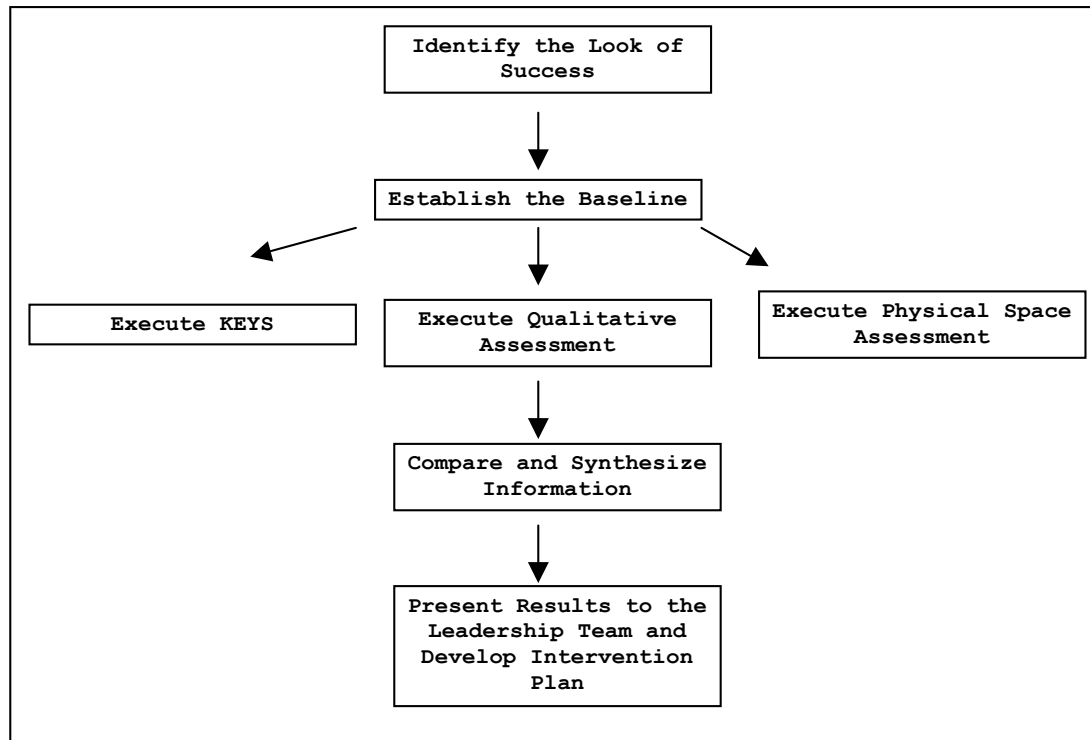


Figure Two. Proposed Approach

### 1) *Identify the Look of Success*

This step aims to understand what the concrete output is if success is accomplished. In this step, the output has to go beyond creating a culture for innovation for the department, it has to focus on the why there is a need for a culture for innovation. For example, an output could be for a consumer research department, to make the culture of the department more innovative so that the department can uncover at least one game changing insight each time a consumer research is executed.

To perform this step, I recommend the execution of two "Exploring the Vision" tools of the Creative Problem Process: Wishful Thinking and Success Zones (Murdock, Mance, & Puccio, 2007). These tools should be executed with the leader of the department as a minimum and with his leadership team as optimal.

## **2) *Establish the Baseline***

Once the output of the look of success has been established, I recommend determining a baseline as a reference, to compare the output of one year from now, to the output of the current year. In other words, following the previous example, if the key output is to generate at least one "game changing insight" for each consumer research study, the number of game changing insights generated in the base year should be identified. This will be the number that a year from now, the output should be compared to determine if success has been accomplished or if a modification of the intervention plan should be implemented.

### **3) *Execute Quantitative Assessment:***

The third step is the actual execution of KEYS, the organizational survey that assesses the climate for creativity and innovation that exists within a work group, division or organization. The KEYS survey should be sent to all the associates of the department.

As explained in The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL)'s brochure *KEYS® to Creativity* (2008), the standard KEYS report will compare the department with The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL)'s database of 78 company groups. The report will include the compiled results of all the questions in the survey and how the department rates on each of the scales. The report will also include data on several questions that will facilitate the development of an intervention plan.

Since KEYS® provide quantitative data around creative climate, KEYS® will allow tracking improvement by comparison year to year results.

I selected KEYS as the quantitative creative climate assessment tool because KEYS assesses management practices that are consistent or can be easily linked with the behaviors and conditions on

which the focal company anchors its innovation culture approach.

#### **4) *Execute Qualitative Assessment***

The 4<sup>th</sup> step is the execution of a qualitative open-ended assessment. This assessment will allow to uncover any additional insight that might not be covered by KEYS® or will validate KEYS®.

This assessment is performed by a trained team of associates, some members from the department, some members from outside the department. Having a team with outsiders allows the team to have a non-biased perspective. The team will spend a full day collecting information "clues" around the creative and innovative culture of the department. The specific focus of the questions will be determined by the Vision of the project agreed on step 1. The clues will come both from the team observing the members of the department performing their daily job and interacting with each other and from informal interviews with members of the department and direct and indirect clients of the department.

Once the team has collected all the "clues", "clues will be posted in a wall. The team will identify

patterns on the data that will help understand the strength and weakness of the creative culture of the department and areas of opportunity. This step will also uncover areas that although non-related or external to the creation of creative climates, are having an impact on how the associates feel with their work and the environment.

#### **5) *Execute Physical Space Assessment***

The objective of this step is to assess how the physical environment under which the department works is conducive of creativity and innovation. This assessment will analyze 4 components of the physical space:

- **Playfulness of the space:** is the physical space where the team lives and interacts sterile looking and formal or is it an inviting space full of colors and stimulus.
- **Places to Diverge:** Does the department have enough and appropriate space for their associates to diverge? Do the employees work in square cubicles with no natural light? Are there enough appropriate rooms for associates to gather and generate ideas?



- **Places to Converge:** Does the department offer enough places for associates to get into converging thinking? Are there enough quiet places where associates can think and work with no interruption?
- **Access to stimulus:** Is there easy access to different stimulus to allow for divergent thinking? Or is the department located in an isolated space with no access or far away from any kind of external stimulus?

#### **6) Compare and Synthesize Information**

The objective of this step is to analyze and synthesize the information generated by KEYS®, the qualitative analysis and the physical space assessment. The output will draw a picture of current reality and will expose the key challenges. The three assessments will draw a picture of the current state of the department's creative climate.

The output of this step will be the summary of the results that will be presented to the leadership team of the department.

**7) Present Results to the Leadership Team and Develop  
Intervention Plan**

The objective of this step is to present the results of the three assessments to stimulate debate among the leadership team and get the leaders to take responsibility for the role they play today and need to play in the future to impact the culture of innovation of the department. The output of this step will be the crystallization of an intervention plan that will address the areas of opportunities summarized in step 6. Such intervention plan might include but not be limited to, potential structures and trainings to support any cultural or behavioural changes identified.

## **SECTION FIVE: KEY LEARNINGS**

The development of this Master Projects was a very productive experience enriched by many learnings in the area of creativity, barriers to creativity and creativity assessments. The knowledge I have so far acquired from the International Center of Studies in Creativity, my 15 years of experience working in the area of Innovation in Fortune 500 corporations and the knowledge I obtained from the literature I reviewed for this project, allowed me to create a product that was sourced from a nice balance of academic literature and business experience. Following are some of the most relevant learnings I acquired during the development of this Master Project.

### **Not Many Creative Climate Assessments**

When I first thought about pursuing the area of creative climate assessments, I had the expectation I would find several creative climate assessment tools. However, after reviewing some of the literature, I realized there are not many creative climate assessment tools available. My hypothesis on the reason why there have not been many creative climate assessment tools

developed is the complexity of understanding organizational cultures and climates in general and creative culture and climates in specific. The most talked about creative climate assessment tool was KEYS developed by Teresa Amabile and the Center for Creative Leadership and The Creative Climate Questionnaire (CCQ) developed by Goran Ekvall. Coincidentally, these two authors: Teresa Amabile and Goran Ekvall are the ones I found more cited in the topic of creative culture, climate and creative climate assessments.

#### **The Perception Chain on Creative Climates**

One of my biggest and most fascinating learnings in the development of this Master Project was how subordinates' creativity is a function of their perceptions of the general work environment for creativity, and how the environment for creativity is a function of the relationship that subordinates have with their direct managers. The realization of the impact my actions as a leader can have on the climate of my organization was an eye opening learning for me.

### **Tighten the Scope of Assessing Creative Cultures**

From the experience drawn during this Master project, one of the key learnings was how complex organizational cultures are. This learning made me realize that trying to assess the state of creativity or innovation of an organization culture as a whole can be very ambitious and therefore can make the assessment a lengthy and complicated process. I learned that it is extremely important to understand what are the objectives management are trying to accomplish and use these objectives to determine the area of focus and scope of the assessment.

### **The Creative Climate or Culture Can Be Impacted by Variables Unique to the Organization**

Another key learning from this master project was the overwhelming amount of external and internal variables that can impact the culture of an organization. As a consequence, any given assessment can be impacted by any new or unique variable specific to the organization. A key learning was the importance of incorporating qualitative components in the assessment to allow different and unique variables affecting the culture to arise.

### **Creative Climate Assessment a Journey not a Destination**

During the development of this Master Project, every time I explored an area from which I could draw knowledge for the project, many other areas would arise. By trying to analyze each new area that arose, I would lose focus and as a consequence, impact my productivity. If I were to do this project again, there are several actions that I would do differently:

- In this project I used the words culture and climate very loosely. Although climate is a component of a culture, concentrating only on climates as a start, would have focused my work and allowed me to go deeper.
- The reasons and expectations from creative assessments vary from leader to leader. I tried to incorporate senior management input at the middle of my master project. Unfortunately, senior management was not available during the time I had planned to incorporate their feedback to guide the project. Since the timeframe of this Master Project is very tight, I was not able to schedule time with management during the project and thus incorporate their feedback and direction. If I were to do this

project again, my first step would be a meeting with senior management. This meeting would have allowed me to better understand the vision and expectations management had on the creative climate assessment. Therefore, it would have helped me narrow the focus of the work towards the vision and expectations of management.

- Although the objective of this project was the development of an approach to assess creative climates for a specific department of a Fortune 500 company, I let the fact that the master project was an academic requirement led to expansion of the scope of the project. I expected the project to apply not only to the focal company but to any organization. As a consequence, I forced the development of this project to generate an approach that would fit any part of the organization or any organization. Trying to use a "one fit all" approach made me explore many areas and not get deeper enough in any. If I were to do this project again, I would limit my focus only on the specific department and for the time being, ignore the possibility of expanding the use of the approach to other departments or organizations.

- As part of the output of this project, I naively, expected to present a summary of organization best practices in the area of creative climate assessments. I expected to find examples of what approaches other big corporations used to assess creative climates. Since Innovation is a core competitive advantage of organizations, the topic of creative climate assessments is confidential. Therefore, I did not find many examples or business cases on what other companies are doing in the area of creative climate assessments. When I realized this obstacle, I decided to focus on consulting firms that offer creative climate assessments as part of their services. However, the short time available, allowed me to only approach one consulting firm. If I were to do this Master Project again, I would spend sometime researching more firms with creative climate assessment expertise and allocating time to interview them, as opposed to relying on data available in the literature and internet.
- Although at the beginning of this project, I had an idea on how I would go about on developing this project, I did not manage my time wisely. During



the development of the project I was faced with many unexpected personal/business circumstances that took time away from the time I had originally planned to allocate to the project. If I were to do this project again, I would first develop a realistic timeline with a very detailed task by task plan. I would use this work plan to help me be on track. Secondly, I would build enough time in my work plan to deal with any unexpected circumstances that would stop me to follow my work plan.

## SECTION SIX: CONCLUSIONS

There are many external and internal variables that influence the creative and innovative culture of an organization. Many of these variables are well known and studied in the literature. However, in addition, each organization might have their own different and unique variables that impact the state of their culture. The importance or relevance of each of these multiple variables vary from organization to organization and from time to time.

A key step in the creative climate assessment process is understanding the vision and objectives of senior leaders as it relates to the creation of creative and innovative climates and culture. The vision and objectives are key to determine what and where the focus of the assessment should be.

Since subordinates' creativity is a function of their perceptions of the general work environment for creativity, and the environment for creativity is a function of the relationship that subordinates have with their direct manager, when assessing creative climates, a key focus should be around understanding the current subordinate's perception on the support management is providing.

Creative climate assessments should have a balance of qualitative (formal and informal interviews) and quantitative measures (KEYS®) to ensure that not only well known variables get assessed but also to allow for unknown variables to be uncovered.

Although this master journey started as a destination, it ended up being a long journey not close to end anytime soon. In the future, I see myself:

- Deepen my knowledge on what other non-traditional options are available to assess creative climates. Specifically, I will start a search of consulting firms that offer this service and learn from their approaches.
- Have a thorough vision and objectives discussion with the senior leader of the department of the focal company to tighten the creative climate assessment plan.
- Generate a very detailed work plan that specifies the how and when each step of the creative climate assessment for the department of the focal company will be executed. Then execute the assessment.
- Capture the learnings from the assessment to improve the subsequent assessment that will be executed in the rest of the focal organization.

- Write a paper that captures and summarizes the pre-assessment and post-assessment learnings from this Master Project Journey.

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**APPENDIX A**

**The Concept Paper**

**An Assessment Plan a Department of a Large Fortune 500  
Company**

**Name:** Vincenzo Piscopo

**Date Submitted:** 10/03/2008

**Project Type:**

This project will use what I have learned about creativity, creativity assessments and corporate innovation climates through the International Center for the Studies in Creativity in conjunction with my knowledge and experience in training and leading innovation projects, to evaluate and complement the process a large fortune 500 company currently uses to assess innovation climates. The project will include a potential plan to assess the innovation climate of a department of this company.

**What Is This Project About?**

The purpose of this project is to identify best practices in innovation climate assessments and to draft an approach to assess the culture for creativity and innovation of a Department of a large fortune 500 company.

This project will include:

1. A review of the approaches other organizations have taken to assess innovation climate.
2. An evaluation of the approach that the focal company of the study currently uses.
3. A plan to assess the innovation climate for a department of the focal company that incorporates best practices to complement and improve the current approach.

**Rationale for Choice:**



In my role as Director of Insights, Ideas and Impact in a large multinational company, I am in charge of assessing the culture of innovation of many company departments and regions around the world.

This project will help me establish a best in class approach to assess innovation and creativity climates that is consistent across the organization and provide a common language to benchmark the different company regions and departments.

In addition, if proved successful, this project will allow the company to save several millions of dollars in agency and consulting fees. Finally, it will allow me and my group to make an impact in the overall company culture for innovation.

What Will be the Tangible Product(s) or Outcomes?

The outcome of this project will be threefold. First, it will provide a summary of best practices and academia learnings on innovation climate assessments. Second, it will have an evaluation of the current approach the focal company uses to assess innovation climates and third will have a plan to assess the innovation climate of a department of the focal company.

The output will be presented in Microsoft Word document and additionally it may be presented in a Microsoft Power Point presentation.

What Criteria Will You Use To Measure The Effectiveness Of Your Achievement?

I will know that I have been successful, if:

1. I get a positive feedback from my manager and the Senior Vice President of the department about the

approach and there is appetite to execute the plan in the department.

2. There is interest from other departments or divisions of the company to execute the assessment.

**Who Will Be Involved or Influenced; What Will Your Role Be?**

I will involve several associates of the department to conduct informal conversations to identify areas in which the department in specific and the company in general, can change to make the climate more conducive for creativity and innovation.

I will also involve my manager and Senior Vice President of the department for feedback and guidance. Finally, I will have to influence my department senior managers to buy-in the approach I will delineate.

**When Will This Project Take Place?**

This project is phase one of a three phase implementation of a culture for creativity and innovation for the company.

Phase one, which includes the three areas of the Master Project (best practices, own approach evaluation and assessment plan) will be completed by December 2008. Phase two, the execution of the department assessment will potentially take place during the first semester of 2009 and in phase three the company roll-out will take place during the subsequent years.

**Where Will This Project Occur?**

This project will take place at a department of a large global fortune 500 consumer goods corporation.

**Why Is It Important to Do This?**

The last 10 years have been particularly difficult for Corporate America. Globalization and the unfronterization of information have made it difficult for companies to satisfy consumers. Consumers now have more choices than ever and have access to information that allows them to be more selective ("pickier") in their decision making. Consumers are becoming less loyal to products and are more prone to be variety seekers. As a consequence, players in each industry are becoming fiercer to capture and retain its consumer (Koprowski, 1997.) The pace of change in the next five years will be relentless. The companies that best understand the dynamics of this change and adapt fastest to the emerging business landscape will be the likeliest to prosper (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2007). The vast majority of companies place their survival hopes in innovation.

For Innovation to happen in a sustainable way, companies have to foster a culture for creativity and innovation. This study will be a starting point of assessing and building a culture for innovation for the company.

#### Personal Learning Goals:

My personal goals for this project are:

- Have an approach that will allow me to deliver upon one of my business objectives in my current role. That is, build a culture for innovation for the company
- Increase my expertise at assessing corporation innovation climates.
- Make the department for which I work more innovative and creative.
- Realize the impact that I, as a manager, can have in improving the culture for innovation of my department.

How Do You Plan to Achieve Your Goals and Outcomes?

### 1. Literature Review:

I will identify and review literature on creating cultures, creating innovation and creative cultures, barriers to innovation, intervention plans and creativity assessments. I will also research what other companies have used to assess innovation climates.

### 2. Evaluation of company current approach:

Based on the results of the literature review, I will evaluate the current approach used in the company to identify areas of improvement.

### 3. Creativity assessment tools selection:

I will identify, select or create the assessment tools I will utilize in the project.

### 4. Develop a plan

I will develop a specific step by step plan for the execution of the assessment.

### 5. Management feedback and buy-in:

I will review the plan with my manager and the department SVP, to get and incorporate their feedback.

### 6. Project write-up:

I will compile all the information and complete the remaining chapters of the master Project.

### 7. Cohort Presentation:

Once completed my project, I will present the outcome to my cohort.

## **Evaluation:**

To evaluate the results of this project, I plan to obtain a 360 feedback. First, I will use the

evaluation that my manager and the SVP of the department will provide. Second, I will share the project write up with a couple of colleagues from my department for their evaluation. Third, I will have the evaluation of my SBP, classmates and Professor.

Prepare Project Timeline:

<b>What</b>	<b>By When</b>	<b>Total of Hours</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Literature Review	10/10/2008	40	
Evaluation of company current approach:	10/20/2008	30	
Creativity assessment tools selection	10/30/2008	20	
Develop a plan	11/20/2008	50	This plan will be based on the assessment tools selected.
Management Feedback	11/30/2008	2	I need to have approval from my management before I execute the assessments.
Project Write-up	12/8/2008	30	
Cohort Presentation	12/8/2008	2	

**Identify Pertinent Literature or Resources:**

I will use commercial search engines (Google and yahoo) and the Buffalo State College and Georgia State University libraries. I am hoping to use my cohort and my professor as an additional source of potential data. I might review presentations from some Innovation Agencies.

**APPENDIX B**

**SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL TO ASSESS THE CREATIVE CLIMATE OF A  
DEPARTMENT OF A FORTUNE 500 COMPANY**

**1) Identify the Look of Success**

The objective of this step is to understand what the concrete output is if success is accomplished. To perform this step, I recommend the execution of two "Exploring the Vision" tools of the Creative Problem Process: Wishful Thinking and Success Zones (Murdock, Mance, & Puccio, 2007). These tools should be executed with the leader of the department as a minimum and with his leadership team as optimal.

**2) Establish the Baseline**

Once the output of the look of success has been established, I recommend determining a baseline as a reference, to compare the output of one year from now, to the output of the current year. The baseline will be the number against which the output should be compared to determine if success has been accomplished or if a modification of the intervention plan should be implemented.

**3) Execute KEYS**

The third step is the actual execution of KEYS, the organizational survey that assesses the climate for creativity and innovation that exists within a work

group, division or organization. The KEYS survey should be sent to all the associates of the department.

#### **4) *Execute Qualitative Assessment***

The 4<sup>th</sup> step is the execution of a qualitative open-ended assessment. This assessment is performed by a trained team of associates, some members from the department, some members from outside the department. The team will spend a full day collecting information "clues" around the creative and innovative culture of the department. The specific focus of the questions will be determined by the vision of the project agreed on step 1. The clues will come both from the team observing the members of the department performing their daily job and interacting with each other and from informal interviews to members of the department and direct and indirect clients to the department.

Once the team has collected all the "clues", "clues will be posted in a wall. The team will identify patterns on the data that will help understand the strength and weakness of the creative culture of the department and areas of opportunity. This step will



also uncover areas that although non-related or external to the creation of creative climates, are having an impact on how the associate feel with their work and the environment.

#### **5) *Physical Space Assessment***

The objective of this step is to assess how the physical environment under which the department works is conducive of creativity and innovation. This assessment will analyze 4 components of the physical space:

- **Playfulness of the space:** is the physical space where the team lives and interacts sterile looking and formal or is it an inviting space full of colors and stimulus.
- **Places to Diverge:** Does the department have enough and appropriate space for their associates to diverge? Do the employees work in square cubicles with no natural light? Are there enough appropriate rooms for associates to gather and generate ideas?
- **Places to Converge:** Does the department offer enough places for associates to get into converging thinking? Are there enough quite

places where associates can think and work with no interruption?

- **Access to stimulus:** Is there easy access to different stimulus to allow for divergent thinking? Or is the department located in an isolated space with no access or far away from any kind of external stimulus?

#### **6) *Compare and Synthesize Information***

The objective of this step is to analyze and synthesize the information generated by KEYS®, the qualitative analysis and the physical space assessment. The output will draw a picture of current reality and will expose the key challenges. The output of this step will be the summary of the results that will be presented to the leadership team of the department.

#### **7) *Present Results to the Leadership Team and Develop Intervention Plan***

The objective of this step is to present the results of the three assessments to stimulate debate among the leadership team. The output of this step will be the crystallization of an intervention plan

that will address the areas of opportunities  
summarized in step 6.

