

What's Your Organizational CQ (and Why Does it Matter?)

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How 'smart' are you? How emotionally aware are you? How well do you interact with others? All of these metrics have become really important in the corporate world. HR professionals spend thousands administering various 'assessments' and they can all offer some real value if well interpreted. But the one question they never seem to ask is "how creative are you"? This is what I call your 'CQ'.

Ask these same HR professionals and they might tell you that for most of their people, creativity is not a required skill. It's perhaps a 'nice to have' but not a 'need to have'. And in some cases, they'll tell you that creativity could actually be a detriment to certain roles.

This fascinates the heck out of me. I understand that the term 'creativity' is a highly subjective one. It can come across as cotton candy – delicious, fluffy, not high in value and only something you really want when you're at the circus. Trying to find a place for it in the corporate world of concrete solutions and measurability can be a tough sell. Fair enough. So let's try and put a different spin on it.

Let's take an extreme example – say Financial Services. Not a place where you'd ideally want people to be particularly creative. In fact, the term 'creative accounting' implies some kind of fraud. This is definitely not an industry that would actively seek creative thinkers, right?

Not so fast you Left Brainers. The Financial Services sector perhaps more than any other industry is in the middle of some radical innovation driven by some very intentional and even some accidental creative thinking. A few examples; how about [Square](#) - the new tool that lets anyone accept physical credit card payments through a smartphone or computer just by plugging in a free sugar-cube-sized device — no expensive card reader required. Or [Venmo](#), an app that turns your phone into a direct payment system between friends and even lets you earn awards for each transaction. Of course there's [Google wallet](#), an app that lets you securely converge, store and use all of your existing credit and debit cards both instore and online. That's just the tip of the innovation iceberg.

So how did these game-changing ideas emerge? Was it a bunch of tenured senior executives holed up in a boardroom analyzing spreadsheets? Or how about a bunch of hotshot MBAs making predictions and looking at stock fluctuations. Wrong again. In most cases, it was a young entrepreneur who recognized a problem and wanted to fix it. They asked 'what if...' and went from there. Dwolla founder Ben Milne went from marketing intern to founder and CEO of an audio equipment sales, engineering and manufacturing to his financial services start-up in a mere 9 years. That's a lot of 'what if-ing'. Did he have a background in financial services? Clearly not.

So back to my original question; what possible use could there be for creativity in the Financial Services sector? All of the above innovations could have easily been developed to utilize, capitalize and build on existing banking infrastructures – not threatening to take their place. But because of the lack of belief in and lack of commit to creativity, the power is slowly ebbing away from big banks and into the hands of innovative young guns.

Here's a little secret. Creativity is the necessary precursor to innovation. You can't have one without the other. Just as creativity with no output can only be called 'imagination', attempts at innovation without creativity can only be called 'iteration'. Long term, iteration without creativity will result in stagnation.

So why would any organization not be concerned about the CQ of their employees? Where do they believe their next, new, best ideas are going to come from? Are they spending millions in external consultants, essentially buying the skills they could be growing? Research has proven that over 80% of business over the next 5 years will come from new, not existing ideas. That's like knowing that your current manufacturing processes will become 80% obsolete and yet you staunchly refuse to start building a new factory or radically updating the one you have. Your default strategy? Hoping.

Creativity isn't a nice to have. And it also isn't a department or just a skunkworks. It should be a developed mind and skillset that enables every team member at every level to look at all business challenges with a critical eye, turn the challenges into opportunities and then generate countless potential solutions. It's the natural desire and inclination for your people to ask 'what if...' and 'in what ways might we...' and then have the actual skills to follow through. So while the grey haired execs and the MBAs are busy using their IQ to figure out 'why' we need to innovate, and the HR professionals are using their EQ to determine 'what' impact this might have on the organization, everyone else could be using their CQ to figure out 'how' to actually do it. Because if not them, then who?

So ask yourself – "Do I know my organization's CQ? Do we even have one?" If the answer to either is "no", it may just be a matter of time before some high CQ entrepreneur comes along and starts eating your innovation lunch. And by then, it could be too late.