
FOSTERING SPACE FOR CREATIVITY IN RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract

The theological systems of today—churches, seminaries, and nonprofit organizations—face challenges that are cultural, social, and economic in nature. Realities such as an unpredictable economy, a changing landscape of religious vocation, and the democratization of knowledge often create serious adaptive challenges for theological organizations. An inability to address such adaptive challenges leaves organizations prone to chaos, even failure. Cultivating the ability to think and act creatively might be an antidote for failure. By understanding how human creativity takes its cue from the creative nature of God, leadership can work to construct safe yet challenging space that enables people to collaborate as they lean into God's call to participate in God's mission in the world.

Introduction

Today's religious organizations—churches, seminaries, and faith-based nonprofits—exist amidst a choppy sea of cultural, social, and economic challenges.¹ Leadership scholars agree that broadly speaking, two types of challenges arise: technical and adaptive. Technical challenges are problems that have clear solutions. They can be solved according to known algorithms or patterns. For example, if a community development organization is forced to move because their landlord is selling the building, they face a technical challenge. Although it might be difficult, a solution

¹ In his book, *Missional Map-Making*, Alan Roxburgh outlines eight forces of change that he posits are bearing weight on our current climate of ongoing adaptive change. He names globalization, pluralism, rapid technological change, postmodernism, staggering global need, loss of confidence in primary structures, the democratization of knowledge, and the return to romanticism. Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making: Skills for Leading in Times of Transition* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 88–110.

is fairly clear: find a new space. In contrast, adaptive challenges have unclear solutions that require organizations and individuals to address deeply held assumptions and experiment with new ways of being.² For instance, if that same community development organization realizes that due to gentrification, the people group they originally set out to serve no longer lives in the area where their offices are located, they face an adaptive challenge. In this case, the organization has to do the tough work of facing their most cherished values about why they do what they do, and whom they serve. They might also be motivated or forced to experiment with new activities and ways of accomplishing their mission. It is challenges like these, adaptive challenges,

² In this, I am leaning on the work of Ronald Heifetz, who in his exploration of adaptive change calls for a holding environment. Ronald Heifetz, along with Donald Laurie, discussed the concept of adaptive change in their 1997 article, "The Work of Leadership." Ronald A. Heifetz and Donald L. Laurie, "The Work of Leadership," *Harvard Business Review* (1997): 124–127. Heifetz defines a holding environment as psychological space that is *safe* enough to confront deeply held assumptions but *challenging* enough to be motivated toward change. The concept originates with psychologist D. W. Winnicott. Winnicott begins his discussion of holding in terms of mothers and infants. He notes that the primary feature of being an infant is dependency. Because the baby is dependent, it is the role of the mother, and eventually the father, to hold the baby in a way that adequately meets the needs for growth. The parent serves to love and provide as the baby grows in the developmental process. In an environment that holds the baby well enough, the baby is able to grow according to natural inclinations. As a child continues to be held and to grow, he or she moves toward autonomy. As the infant develops, the holding environment adapts and expands, meeting the growing needs of the child. In the same way that a mother or family member holds a child, Winnicott proposes that a clinician can provide a sense of holding in casework. Winnicott believed that clinical work was the professionalized aspect of the holding that occurs in familiar and social unites. See D. W. Winnicott, *The Maturation Process and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development* (New York: International Universities Press, 1965), 55; D. W. Winnicott, *Home Is Where We Start From: Essays by a Psychoanalyst* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1986); D. W. Winnicott, *Human Nature* (New York: Schocken Books, 1988); Douglas Hansen and Robert Drov Dahl, "The Holding Power of Love: John Wesley and D. W. Winnicott in Conversation," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 25(1) (2006): 54–63.

that require the tough work of leadership and for which we need an arsenal of practices and tools. Refusing to address adaptive challenges leaves organizations prone to chaos, even failure.

The dirty little secret, however, is that organizations are always prone to failure. At any given time, any number of cultural, social, or economic forces might conspire together to take down the best-laid plans of human beings. The realization that our best efforts to honor and serve God are always vulnerable, even flawed, can actually be quite freeing. By this I mean that when we realize that on our own we are never destined for greatness, we are able to rest in the reality that our vocation, as individuals and organizations, is to participate in what God is already up to in the world. For, “God is at work precisely in the places where the impossible seems absolute.”³ So, as we create structures and execute programs, we rely on the Spirit to help us continually locate and run with childlike glee toward God’s initiatives. For when we join together and listen,⁴ the Holy Spirit works to guide us in our grasping of God’s creativity as we look for ways to participate in places where God is making the impossible become possible.

Creativity, the ability to enact new ideas or meaning, is at the heart of facing adaptive change and freeing us to participate in God’s plan. Creativity might even be an antidote for organizational failure, a tool for the inevitable adaptive challenges we face in our classrooms, board meetings, and local churches. The difficulty lies in the fact that our religious organizations are not always poised to

³ Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 216.

⁴ Mark Lau Branson provides a helpful model for listening in the context of Christian Community. The model is a Practical Theology Method, but its heavy focus on sharing and listening makes it a great resource. Branson’s steps are: Name Current Praxis, Analyze the Praxis Using the Resources of Culture, Study and Reflect on Scripture and Christian Tradition, Recall and Discuss Stories, and Discern and Imagine a New Praxis. See Mark Lau Branson and Juan F. Martinez, *Churches, Cultures, Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Leadership* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: InterVarsity Press, 2011).

foster creativity in ways that enable people to join in with God's creative initiatives.

How, then, do we foster environments in which creativity can flourish so that we might more wholly join God? Creativity itself is an amorphous concept, one that takes on different shapes in different contexts and is hard to grasp.⁵ As Christians, we know God is creative and that we are made in God's image, but how do we enact a creative competency broadly across religious organizations? The goal of this paper is to explore how leadership can construct space that fosters creativity in religious organizations. First, I will work toward a brief understanding of what creativity is. Then, I will discuss how leadership can work to foster creativity.

Understanding Creativity

At a basic level, creativity is a novel and useful idea or product.⁶ It is central to the human experience and joining God's mission in the world. Creativity includes the end product/meaning and also the process by which we get there. The creative process is heuristic rather than algorithmic. The difference between a heuristic and an algorithmic process is similar to that of adaptive versus technical challenges. Algorithmic tasks, like technical challenges, are activities that have preset patterns for engagement. For example, if a church elder goes to a conference that her church has offered to pay for, a procedure is in place for how her expenses get reimbursed. Perhaps she collects receipts and then delivers them to a church treasurer. The treasurer then deducts the money owed to her from a specific line item within the church budget, stores the receipts in a file, and cuts her a check.

⁵ Steven M. Smith, David R. Gerkens, Jami J. Shah, and Noe Vargas-Hernandez, "Empirical Studies of Creative Cognition in Idea Generation," in *Creativity and Innovation in Organizational Teams*, eds. Leigh Thompson and Hook Seok Choi (New York: Psychology Press, 2006), 3–20.

⁶ Teresa M. Amabile, *Creativity in Context: Update to the Social Psychology of Creativity* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1996), 33.

Heuristic tasks, like adaptive challenges, are nonlinear and often do not have predictable outcomes. Let us imagine that the same church elder wants to attend a conference but the pastor tells her that the conference is too progressive so the church will not support her financially. If the elder still wants to go, she has to be creative in how she reaches her goal. Will she spend time working with her board to help them see the value in it? Will she listen to them and eventually decide the conference is too progressive for her as well? Will she decide to go but have to fundraise on her own because the church will not support her? Her path forward could take a number of routes and does not follow a prescribed set of actions. Whatever she chooses to do will require creative thinking and action.

When we create, individually or collectively, we do so most fully when we understand our creativity as rooted within God's creative power. In an effort to unpack this, let us discuss three attributes of human creativity: participation, anticipation, and collaboration.

Participation

First, human creativity is an act of participation—participation in God's creative and redemptive activity in this world. Rooted in the Biblical narrative of God bringing new life into our world, we understand God as the Creator. No natural wonder, animal, or human has come to exist outside of the creative capacity of God. Furthermore, God has generously and graciously gifted humanity with the ability to create. As a species, we long for newness and excitement, and we find pleasure in conquering the unknown. But it is important to frame newness and excitement within God's ongoing creative work. Andy Crouch writes, "We always start in the middle of things, working with raw materials given to us by God and the generations before us. Culture is what we make of the world, not what we make out of pure imagination."⁷ In other

⁷ Crouch, *Culture Making*, 104.

words, we do not create on our own; rather, we participate in all that has come before us and all that will come after us.

One of the primary places that we participate in God's ongoing movement is through the human task of work. Lee Hardy writes, "God chose to continue his creative activity in this world through the work of human hands."⁸ Humans have creatively participated in God's work in countless ways. We have raced to the moon, cured diseases, and conquered technological barriers. We have planted churches, helped tackle poverty, and worked to close gaps of discrimination. It is through our collective participation that God restores order and brings new life, and sheds light on the patterns of God's creation.⁹

And while it is true that God's creativity always reigns supreme, even the finite version of who we are made to be in God's image allows us to create in ways that surpasses our wildest imagination (again, racing to the moon, tackling poverty, and fighting disease). This is because we are formed in the image of God. When we work toward God's creative goals—toward God's redemption in this world—that which we create has dignity and meaning. And although all our human work will eventually pass away, the activities and pursuits we engage in can have eternal value. Our purpose then, is to listen together to what God is doing in the world and to subject ourselves to that which we hear.¹⁰

⁸ Lee Hardy, *The Fabric of This World: Inquiries into Calling, Career Choice, and the Design of Human Work* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990), 48.

⁹ Timothy Keller and Katherine Leary Alsdorf, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work* (New York: Dutton, 2012), 61.

¹⁰ I am influenced by the Missional Church conversation on this. For examples, see: Mark Lau Branson and Juan F. Martinez, *Churches, Cultures, Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Leadership* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: InterVarsity Press, 2011); Darrell Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998); and Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006).

Anticipation

Next, when humans create, we do so in anticipation—anticipation of God's final creation.¹¹ Not only do we create in reflection of God's established work, but God also beckons us to create in hope of what is to come. It is a common theological expression to say that we live in the tension between the now and the not yet—that we are fully present in this world, but we understand that our final home with God will be in God's coming kingdom. The anticipation of God's coming kingdom paves the way to imagination. We create in hope that we can catch a glimpse of how God is turning the impossible into the possible. It is in this hope that we root our understanding of creativity and take direction from God's initial and final creation.¹²

What might it look like within our religious organizations to create in anticipation? I am part of a community in North East Los Angeles that, drawing on the text of 2 Corinthians, understands our mission to be one of participating in God's reconciling work. On the one hand, God's reconciling work is thickly documented in the narrative of our Scriptures, culminating in Christ's salvific act on behalf of humanity. On the other hand, we get a sense that the fullest portrait of reconciliation will not be seen until God welcomes us into his new creation. We hope that a lot more is still possible. So, as our church works to create ministries, sermons, and even structures, we do so anticipating and imagining what God's reconciled kingdom might look like. We are anticipating God's ultimate glory.

Collaboration

Finally, when we create, we do so in collaboration with and for others. We must shed the notion that innovations are birthed from the mind of a single genius hunkered down somewhere in a lab or a study chamber. Although the role of the individual is important, creativity scholars widely agree

¹¹Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 54.

¹²Moltmann, 54.

that creativity happens amongst people and in teams.¹³ Even the most seemingly fresh ideas usually come about as the result of already existing information and structures, often cobbled together over a period of time and sometimes simply formatted in a new way.¹⁴ Remember, we are always jumping in the middle of things, the middle of God's work and those who have come before us.¹⁵ And, because God's own Trinitarian makeup predicates an understanding of human creativity as collaborative, we can embrace the notion that when we create together, we do so with dignity and meaning. When we participate in God's mission, we subject ourselves to God and to one another. And when we subject ourselves to something beyond ourselves, we are able through humility and eagerness to find that collaboration takes on an even richer and more hopeful dimension. We move beyond a set of individuals and toward a group gathered around a common purpose.¹⁶

One of my most formative experiences around collaboration came when I worked for a Christian residential counseling center. One of the yearly activities at this center was a two-week backpacking trip in the High Sierras of California. Each day of the trip, two people were picked to lead. Leading meant making decisions about what we would eat, where we would sleep, and generally attending to the other twelve members' needs. It also meant that the trip supervisors pointed to a spot on a topographical map to which the leaders were supposed to navigate by sundown.

¹³ Steven M. Smith et al., 4.

¹⁴ Steven M. Smith et al., 9; Teresa M. Amabile and Mukti Khair, "Creativity and the Role of the Leader," *Harvard Business Review* (October 2008): 104.

¹⁵ Crouch, *Culture Making*, 104.

¹⁶ Linda Hill et al. touch on six paradoxes of innovation in their book, *Collective Genius*. One of them is to affirm the individual but also the group. It is important to think about collaboration as a primary means for understanding creativity but not to lose sight of what the individual brings. See Linda A. Hill, Greg Brandeau, Emily Truelove, and Kent Lineback, *Collective Genius: The Art and Practice of Leading Innovation* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2014), 31–41.

When it was my day to lead, I was paired with a sixteen-year-old named Ricky. Because I was the adult and the camp counselor, I assumed that I would be responsible for most of the leading. But when I looked at the map and tried to chart a course for us, I quickly realized I was horrible with the compass. He gently made a few suggestions that revealed that he was talented with the map and compass. Following his lead, we agreed that he would be in the front charting the course (with occasional checks-ins). I was to be in the back watching the group to make sure everyone was okay and on pace. By collaborating with one another, we were both able to bring our full selves to the task and to lean on the other, as well. Our individual competencies were challenged, but as we leaned into each other's strengths, we created a day that was much better than if either of us had done it alone.

Leadership's Role in Fostering Creativity

Rooted in a multidimensional understanding of creativity, we can explore how to enable such creativity in our religious organizations. Some organizations naturally foster creativity, but many lack the necessary tool kit to enable creative thinking and action amongst their people. Organizationally speaking, joining God can happen from the center of an organization and at the margins. However, in my experience, creative experiments are more common on the margins. Given this, leadership's task is to encourage and foster creativity on the margins, but also to sanction and structure space for creativity at the center of an organization's structure. In order to do so, leadership can work to create space that fosters creativity by enacting certain responsibilities. Broadly speaking, it is not up to leaders to prescribe or dictate the creative processes, but instead to set the stage for creativity by managing a set of interwoven realities. In order to do this, leaders can focus on at least four responsibilities: providing a map for the creative process, providing safe space to fail, managing fears, and stimulating intrinsic motivation.

Provide a Map for the Creative Process

The first task of leadership in any creative endeavor is to provide a map for the process. A map is different than a route. I, like many people who live in large cities, am reliant on my phone's GPS to help me navigate through my week. And although I appreciate the convenience, I have come to realize that my entire focus is on the route the phone is telling me to take. I am the route's obedient subject. In contrast, when I go on vacation, I do not start by asking my phone to route me to a destination. Instead, I start by studying a map. I work to understand what lies between my current place and my final destination. Then, I make choices about a route based on points of interest, uniqueness, and the time I have. Simply put, I choose my route rather than having it pre-prescribed for me.

Providing maps in which participants have the flexibility and autonomy to choose their own routes is critical for fostering the creative process.¹⁷ I recently had a conversation with a group of professors tasked to create consistency among a core set of classes in a Christian college. Through the first rounds of experimenting, the biggest pushbacks they got were that they had created too much structure for the professors who would be teaching these classes. In other words, they had given the professors a pre-prescribed route, not a map. But, they had been tasked with giving these courses consistency. Would it not make sense to have everyone travel the same route? It is true that employees and participants do well when expectations are clearly set and managed. For many people though, creativity goes down when our time and tasks are overly structured. The goal then of leadership is to set expectations of what needs to be accomplished, but to build in room for discovery. The goal is to provide a map, not a route. Ultimately, the committee decided on a clear set of expectations in the way of learning outcomes and major course milestones. Within these expectations, professors had a host of choices to make

¹⁷ Teresa M. Amabile and Mukti Khaire, "Creativity and the Role of the Leader," *Harvard Business Review* (October 2008): 104.

about what they would have students read, what assignments would look like, and how to shape classroom time. By giving professors a detailed map of the possibilities and pointing to a final destination (much like my earlier example of leading in the wilderness), they cultivated an environment for individual and collective creativity. Additionally, they created an online space for creative ideas to be shared and for professors to build off one another. So, as professors wanted to learn more, they could work collaboratively with their peers in shaping lessons.

Provide Safe Space to Fail

In order to be creative, people need the freedom to fail.¹⁸ When individuals and teams know that failure is okay, even valued, they are more likely to produce creative ideas and work. Ed Catmull, founder of Pixar Animation, argues that errors are not a necessary evil. In fact, they are not bad at all. Instead, they are the natural and inevitable side effect of creativity.¹⁹ Amabile writes, “Some creative ideas soar; others sink. To enhance creativity, there should always be a safety net below the people who make suggestions.”²⁰ The safety net is that failure is okay, expected, and even valued. If leadership models that failure is okay, it allows people to deal with the loss that they experience.²¹ Jim Collins’s framework is helpful for thinking about how leadership can model a freedom to fail. In his book *Good to Great*, Collins talks about the concept of the mirror and the window. He argues that when something goes right in an organization, when a win occurs, leadership should do all it can to shine the light on others who made it possible. It is as if they are sending the praise out the window. But when something

¹⁸ Amabile, *Creativity in Context*, 231–232.

¹⁹ Ed Catmull and Amy Wallace, *Creativity, Inc.: Overcoming the Unseen Forces that Stand in the Way of True Inspiration* (San Francisco: Random House, 2014), 108.

²⁰ Teresa Amabile, “How to Kill Creativity,” *Harvard Business Review* (September-October 1998): 85.

²¹ Chris Argyris, “Teaching Smart People to Learn,” *Harvard Business Review* (May-June 1991): 5–15.

goes wrong and a failure occurs, leadership should work to look in the mirror, claiming credit for the loss or misstep.²²

I once visited the Google campus in Mountain View, California. While I was there, I noticed that in each bathroom stall there was a sign that asked, “How are you spending your twenty percent?” When I inquired about this, a Google employee told me that teams were expected to spend eighty percent of their workweek on required tasks and twenty percent on experimental projects of their choosing as long as they had the potential to benefit Google in some way. When I asked how well it worked, the employee told me that the majority of ideas people experimented with failed, but that this was normal and encouraged. Then I asked him if he had an example of something that did not fail. He asked, “Have you ever heard of Gmail? That was invented during a few employees’ twenty percent time.”

Stories that exhibit a freedom to fail are common in companies like Google and Pixar, companies that have creativity at the core of their DNA and also have the financial and personnel resources to invest in experimentation and failure. How does this translate to our religious organizations, where we are often strapped for resources? We know that as beings created in the image of God, we, too, have creativity built into our organizational DNA, but we perceivably lack the resources to fail on a regular basis. Walter Brueggemann’s work on scarcity versus abundance is insightful here. Brueggemann points out that in the Genesis narrative, we find stories of God’s abundance. God has created, and it is plentiful and good. But slowly over time, human greed and fear crept in, so much so that for many of us, our default way of understanding resources is one of scarcity.²³ Christian organizations are plagued by the myth of scarcity, a myth that paralyzes creativity. But, like with the children of Israel,

²² Jim Collins, *Good to Great* (New York: Collins, 2001), 33–35.

²³ Walter Brueggemann, “Liturgy of Abundance, the Myth of Scarcity,” *Christian Century* (March 1989): 1.

journeying in the desert on faith alone, God provides. Manna from heaven rains down. God's abundance does not always take the shape we expect, but it is always there. It is in this abundance that we can root a freedom to fail. It is in this abundance that we can trust that God is active in our midst.

Managing Fears

Next, leaders can work to facilitate creativity by managing fears. Simply put, fear holds us back from creatively engaging with God's mission. Tom and David Kelley, founders of leading design firm IDEO, name four fears that often prohibit creativity: fear of the messy unknown, fear of being judged, fear of the first step, and fear of losing control.²⁴ Creativity is vulnerable work. As part of my work, I regularly lead film teams to tell organizational stories. The first time I stepped into the process, I was so vulnerable—so afraid—that I almost could not participate. The first fear I experienced was that of the messy unknown. Because filmmaking is a heuristic task, a number of elements are unpredictable and therefore potentially chaotic. Furthermore, I was charting unknown territory and therefore risking failure and embarrassment. What if what we set out to do was not actually achievable?

Secondly, I feared being judged. I experienced this fear intensely. After that initial project was made and we screened it in front of a live audience for the first time, I was so nervous I literally could not stay in the room. What if people hated it? What if it did not make sense? Kelley and Kelley write:

If the scribbling, singing, dancing kindergartner symbolizes unfettered creative expression, the awkward teenager represents the opposite: someone who cares—deeply—about what other people think. It only takes a few years to develop that fear but it stays

²⁴ Tom Kelley and David Kelley, "Reclaim Your Creative Confidence," *Harvard Business Review* (December 2012): 2.

with us throughout our adult lives, often constraining our careers.²⁵

The authors' point here is that the fear of being judged is deeply conditioned and hard to abandon. They note that the biggest hurdle in overcoming this particular fear is resisting the urge to judge ourselves.²⁶ In my case, this was true. While opinions on the project varied, my harshest critic was myself.

Third, we often miss out on creative opportunities and expression because we are afraid of taking the first step. For many people, coming up with ideas is easy. Executing them is difficult, so difficult that when we imagine the task in front of us, we give in to the sensation of being overwhelmed and resist starting anything at all. Kelley and Kelley speak to this by urging people to start small and start quick.²⁷ Stop spending time thinking about how you will execute and take the first small step to put things in motion. In the film project, we talked about the idea exhaustively up front. We dreamed and planned and took no actual action until one day someone urged us just to put it on the calendar—to take the first step.

Lastly, when we embark on creative projects, we might fear losing control. For me, this took shape in the fact that the film project had thirty-five people on the team. I was technically in charge of the entire project, but each individual brought expertise and creativity that I did not have. Though I knew that our collective collaboration would yield a more creative outcome, it also meant that I had to give up control of all the various aspects. This frightened me. However, if we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that a great mystery of life is that we are never in control at all. The world moves, often rather chaotically, at its own pace and in its own ways. To recognize and lean into this reality is to live humbly in the presence of others and

²⁵ Kelley and Kelley, 6.

²⁶ Kelley and Kelley, 6.

²⁷ Kelley and Kelley, 7.

our God. And by leaning into this reality, we shed the layers of fear that hold us back from being creative.

The job of leadership, then, is to hold these fears, making it safe enough for people to confront them, but also challenging enough that people have to shed them. Scholars across fields talk about this tension between safety and challenge. Leadership scholar Ronald Heifetz calls this space a holding environment,²⁸ whereas Teresa Amabile discusses managing the stretch.²⁹ My mother, a veteran therapist, calls it holy ground. Regulating the rhythm and tension between safety and challenge can create space that fosters creativity. Broadly speaking, an environment should not be entirely safe or participants might feel unmotivated or bored. But it should not be so challenging that employees feel overwhelmed and opt out of creating. Leadership must work, like a thermostat, to contain and adjust the heat in order to respond to the needs of the people in the process.³⁰

Stimulate Intrinsic Motivation

In any setting, people are more likely to create when they are intrinsically motivated to do so.³¹ *Motivation* is one of Amabile's core components to creativity—alongside *imagination* and *expertise*.³² There are two types of motivation: extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic motivation means that people are motivated by factors external to themselves, for

²⁸ Ronald Heifetz talks about a holding environment in terms of adaptive change, not creativity. However, I am embedding his framework in a discussion of creativity because of the similarities between heuristic tasks and adaptive change. See Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002).

²⁹ Amabile, "How to Kill Creativity," 81.

³⁰ Heifetz, and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 106–116.

³¹ Amabile, *Creativity in Context*, 231–232.

³² Amabile's work is groundbreaking for an understanding of where and how creativity takes place. According to Amabile, creativity centers on three components that reside within individuals and teams: imagination, motivation, and expertise. The level to which an individual is able to bring these components to a team helps determine a team's opportunity for creativity. See Amabile, "How to Kill Creativity," 78–79.

example, if an employee is rewarded for performance with money or vacation time. Intrinsic motivation is when people are motivated from within themselves by the task at hand. In this case, the task at hand prompts an inner excitement, an urge to contribute.³³ Inner excitement is often stimulated by intellectual challenge and the ability to pursue passions.³⁴

An important part of stimulating intrinsic motivation is appropriately matching people to tasks.³⁵ People should be matched to tasks that spark intrinsic motivation, draw on applicable expertise, and call forth individual and collective imagination.³⁶ Catmull argues that people are the precursors to great ideas. An organization cannot produce meaningful projects and concepts unless it harnesses the creativity of its great people.³⁷ In order to harness the greatness of people, people must be motivated by the task at hand.

I once had an employee who was underperforming. This man was smart, energetic, and worked well in teams. I could not figure out why he was underperforming. When I sat down and talked with him, I realized that the way his duties were framed did not intrinsically motivate him. Although he made good money and the company gave him opportunity for growth, he did not get excited about the work he was supposed to do. So, I asked him what he really cared about. I listened long enough to get a sense of what made him want to get out of bed in the morning; I realized that he was really drawn to be an entrepreneur. He wanted to create structures

³³ Amabile, "How to Kill Creativity," 79.

³⁴ Amabile and Khaire, "Creativity and the Role of the Leader," 106.

³⁵ Similarly, leadership scholars have recognized the need to match people to appropriate tasks. Two examples of this come from Jim Collins and Max De Pree. In his book *Good to Great*, Jim Collins refers to this as "getting the right people on the bus." Jim Collins, *Good to Great* (New York: Collins, 2001), 41. Max De Pree highlights the necessity for interconnectedness as it relates to progress and change. He writes, "The quality of our relationships is the key to establishing a positive ethos for change. Long-lived and productive relationships spring up from a soil rich in covenants and trust." See Max De Pree, *Leadership Jazẓ* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 113.

³⁶ Amabile and Khaire, "Creativity and the Role of the Leader," 106.

³⁷ Ed Catmull and Amy Wallace, *Creativity, Inc.: Overcoming the Unseen Forces that Stand in the Way of True Inspiration* (San Francisco: Random House, 2014), 74.

from the ground up. So, we worked to reframe the majority of his responsibilities as entrepreneurial. In each duty, he was to bring an eye for newness to the team. He went on to develop numerous structures that helped our department and company. He went from underperforming to over performing. No additional money or new title was given. Instead, we collaborated to create new possibilities and reframe old tasks to stimulate his intrinsic motivation.

Conclusion

As leaders in religious organizations, we lead in times of uncertainty and possibility. Although we are eager to participate in God's mission, we often lack the core competencies that free us to do so. Creativity is a tool for engaging, for unlocking a depth of interaction with God and with each other. But creativity can too often be put on the back burner in light of high demands and strained resources in our workplaces and ministries. In the face of this, leadership can take an active role in understanding what creativity is, and how to develop a set of postures that help make way for creativity in an organization. Rooted in the reality that when we create, we do so in participation, anticipation, and collaboration, we can contextualize creativity as God's work. We can contextualize it as a tool in the face of adaptive challenges. And by creating space in which failure is acceptable, we manage fears and stimulate intrinsic motivation, and we can create environments in which the impossible is possible.

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