

# Creativity Boost

Practices for Developing  
Your Creative Capacity

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Learning **4** Learning  
Professionals



## Introducing... **Creativity Boost**

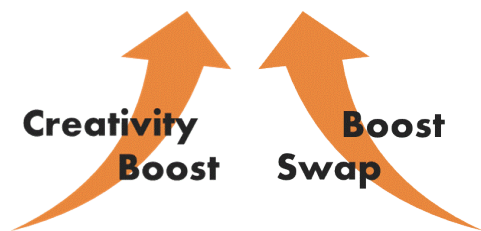
### **A framework and set of practices for increasing your creative capacity**

This packet provides a preview of some of the practices in **Creativity Boost**. On the following pages, the left column shows “Boost Swap” activities that are conducted during workshop sessions when we have limited time to get a taste of the possibilities. On the right is the complete practice (sometimes abridged for space).

If you find these practices valuable, I hope you’ll check out the full selection of 48 practices in **Creativity Boost**.

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## Creativity Boost Boost Swap Activity

Team up with a swap partner (or two) and share your Creativity Boost exercises with one another. Discuss briefly if you like.

You won't be able to set up your learning environment at the moment, but here's what you can do as a conference activity:

- 1) Identify and share one of your high priority development goals
- 2) Ask your swap partner for ideas and recommendations for resources, people, or formal learning that might help you to meet your development goal.



# Learning

## Development by Design

### Fine-tuning your learning environment

Just as we might do for our learners, we can set up a learning environment to support our own ongoing development goals. **Learning Environments by Design** (by Catherine Lombardozi, 2015) defines a learning environment as a curated set of resources for a specific development need.

Learning environment design borrows ideas from the concept of personal learning environments, and is aligned with other industry conversations around learning and performance ecosystems and academic learning environments. To design an environment, you curate resources and activities in a range of categories: resources, people, formal training and education, development practices, and experiential learning practices. The success of a learning environment is dependent on the degree to which learners are motivated to access the resources and manage their own development.

Using the **framework of learning environment design**, you can apply your design skills to the task of creating a learning path for yourself in the skills you most want to develop.

### *How to fine-tune your learning environment*

#### Identify a specific learning goal.

For ongoing professional development, it's important that you define specific goals for yourself. Describe what you want to be able to do and the context in which you want to be able to apply your learning.

#### Bolster your motivation to learn.

Self-directed learning requires persistence and determination. Increase your self-motivation by articulating and anticipating the benefits of learning, by sharing your goals with others who can provide encouragement and feedback, and perhaps by promising yourself rewards for certain milestones.

#### Seek resources.

Use your internet and networking skills to identify resources that you might use for learning. These may include videos, books, web sites, articles, podcasts and other resources. Use online tools to tag items you wish to explore further or to make a list for reference.

#### Engage with an appropriate network.

Identify peers and subject matter experts who may be helpful during your explorations. These people may be internal to your organization or part of the broader industry. Determine ways to stay in touch – regular conversations, social-media-based contacts, and social activities.

#### Consider formal learning opportunities.

Look for formal courses and events that might give you a solid foundation on key concepts and skills. There may be free or inexpensive events (e.g. webinars, professional meetings, online courses, and other opportunities) that can jump-start your development. If necessary, consider investing your own funds in pursuing some of these options.

#### Enlist the support of your manager.

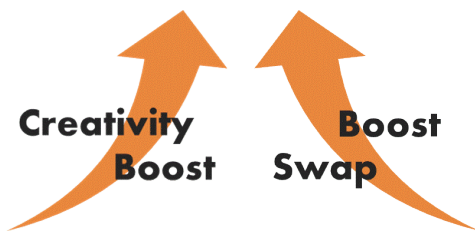
Determine how your manager or other leaders in your organization might be effective supports for your learning – as mentors, role models, coaches, sounding boards, and providers of feedback. Engage these people and ask for their support. Follow through with your commitments to them.

#### Learn from experience.

Day-to-day work provides many experiences to learn and to apply what you might have learned elsewhere. In order to learn from this experience, though, you must take the time to process it. Develop a set of criteria for your own success so that you will know if you are achieving your goals. Regularly review your actions and results and consider implications.

#### Continue until no longer a priority.

Only you will know when it's time to deprioritize a goal or change direction. You can always learn more, no matter how expert you become, but your deliberate development will have different focus points at different times in your career.



## Creativity Boost Boost Swap Activity

Team up with a swap partner (or two) and share your Creativity Boost exercises with one another. Discuss briefly if you like.

You can have a mini inspiration happy hour here for just a few minutes in this session:

- 1) Share with your partner one of your own sources of inspiration, which may be a demo site, creativity site, blog, discussion board or other tool.
- 2) Ask your partner to do the same for you.



## Sensing

# Inspiration Happy Hour

## Sharing technology-enabled inspiration

This exercise is simply a fun way to share technology-based sources of inspiration among folks who are always looking for ideas and great examples. Mixing and mingling is of course an age-old strategy for getting to know people and sharing ideas. An inspiration happy hour encourages people to share the web sites, apps, and creativity tools that serve as creative inspiration.

### *How to share technology-enabled inspiration*

#### **Determine the invitation list.**

Plan to invite at least a dozen people with varying creative roles and degrees of technical proficiency. Perhaps your guest list is everyone in your department, a multi-department mixer, a local professional organization, or a bunch of friends and colleagues. Like any party, consider who might enjoy some time together doing something a bit different, and be sure to invite folks who would have different interests so that their creative inspirations are not all the same. Consider whether you want to seed the invitation list with people who you know have plenty to share.

#### **Plan a venue and a menu.**

For your venue, decide what will work for the people you intend to invite to the party. You'll want somewhere that will allow people to mix comfortably, and that has wifi capabilities (or good cell service). Bar-height tables are probably best if you can get them. Arrange for refreshments (not necessarily alcoholic) and some light food. It may also be useful to arrange for electrical outlets that will allow folks to plug in without setting up a tripping hazard.

#### **Send invitations.**

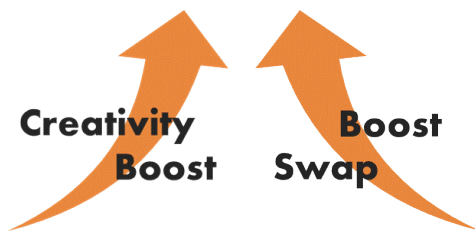
Let everyone know the purpose of the gathering so they can be prepared to bring up their favorite URLs and tools. Invite people to be ready to share places where they find creative inspiration online, which might be demo sites, creativity sites, blogs, discussion boards, or tools. Keep the time span relatively short (1-1.5 hours) to maintain the energy in the room throughout the event.

#### **Mix and mingle, and share tools.**

With some groups, you will need only to lay out the purpose and set folks loose. For other groups, you may want to consider a bit more guidance. Encourage people to freely share their favorite sites and ask each other for recommendations for options with specific kinds of inspiration. If people are sitting at tables and chairs to share their finds, then you may want to regularly encourage people to switch tables.

#### **Keep track of new finds you want to explore further.**

People will generally keep track of their own finds. You may want to set up a Google doc or other tool for people to post URLs for favorite inspirations so that everyone can access after the event to see what they may have missed.



## Creativity Boost Boost Swap Activity

Team up with a swap partner (or two) and share your Creativity Boost exercises with one another. Discuss briefly if you like.

You won't be able to fully work your project's frame in the time we have in this session, but here's what you can do:

- 1) Share with your partner one of the frameworks you find to be particularly useful in helping you to guide your questions and come up with more creative solutions.
- 2) Ask your partner to do the same for you.



## Framing

# Framing the Big Picture

## Finding the right framework to guide your project

Framing guides how you see the problem, and many expositions of the creative process begin with defining the goal or determining the problem you need to solve. Your description of a creative challenge is inextricably linked, then, to how you choose to frame it.

If you've ever taken a photo or artwork to a framing gallery, you've likely had a visceral experience regarding the difference a frame can make regarding what you see in the picture. Just as you take time to decide how to frame a picture, you need to take time to decide how to frame your creative endeavor. In learning and development and in higher ed, we have an array of frames to rival the collection you'll find in your local framing gallery. Different frameworks encourage you to attend to different aspects of the situation, impacting how you define the creative problem and the scope of the potential solution set.

Before you begin your project, it can be helpful, then, to ponder your choice of frames for the situation to see which one seems to be the best fit – which might highlight the most important aspects, or which blends in with other projects in the overall environment.

### How to find the right framework

#### Document your project's key parameters.

List some of the key characteristics of the problem or opportunity you want to address. A framework can help you to structure a more detailed needs assessment, and/or it can be used afterwards to help you to make sense of your data and consider possible recommendations.

#### Overlay frameworks for consideration.

Once you have some sense of what the project is, you can consider a framework for analysis. There are myriad frameworks that might prove useful across all kinds of L&D opportunities and challenges. The links below highlight just a few of the broad frameworks for L&D strategies, but there

are many more specific frameworks as well to guide analyzing particular situations and making recommendations. For your situation, peruse the various relevant frameworks to determine the best one to provide an overarching structure for your work.

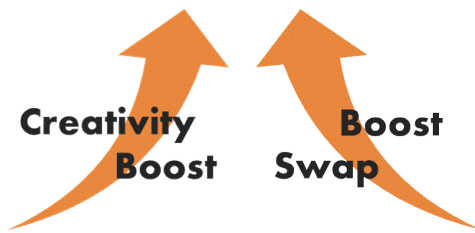
*List of links edited for space; more in **Creativity Boost**.*

- **Human performance technology** – encourages consultants to consider the entire performance system in analyzing problems and opportunities.
- **Learning and performance ecosystem** – describes a broader context for learning and performance that includes technologies, processes, content, and people.
- **Deloitte's work environment redesign principles** – makes recommendations for performance improvement priorities in modern work environments.
- **70:20:10 Framework** – suggests that more attention should be paid to on-the-job and social learning (the 70-20) in corporate learning strategies.
- **Dee Fink's significant learning experiences** – encourages academic course designers to focus on the lasting impact they want to have on students.

*NOTE: Links in this section are intended only to provide a quick reference for the given frameworks. It will be important for you to study the frameworks more deeply if you are going to use them in your work.*

## Select and apply appropriate framework(s).

Given the relevant options, select the most useful framework for your project at its current stage. Use the framework to guide the questions you ask while you are gathering data, analyzing the situation, and crafting a recommendation. Creative solutions are often generated by asking different questions than usual, so consider carefully how your inquiry into the situation and your definition of the problem is being framed. Devise assessments and outcomes to align with the framework, all the while considering how you may need to customize your own approach in ways that are not quite in alignment with your selected framework. You may also consider borrowing elements from several frameworks to help you to conceptualize your approach and fine-tune your recommendations.



## Creativity Boost Boost Swap Activity

Team up with a swap partner (or two) and share your Creativity Boost exercises with one another. Discuss briefly if you like.

To have a mini “work out loud” experience in this session:

- 1) Share with your partner one of your creative challenges – a project you are working on right now – and chat about it for a bit. Invite your partner to make comments and suggestions.
- 2) Ask your partner to share one of his/her projects with you as well.



## Conversing

# Work Out Loud

## Sharing day to day activities openly

Thought leaders in L&D often tout the value of “working out loud” – being open about your work projects and issues – as a way of inviting serendipitous feedback and collaborations as well as a way of sharing generously for others’ benefit. There are benefits to working out loud even if it essentially amounts to articulating your thought processes and capturing outcomes for your own reflection process and portfolio. There are several catches to working out loud: it sometimes takes extra time to work out loud, and you are missing opportunities if no one sees you doing it.

This exercise describes some practices that can help to ensure that your own working out loud is worth that little bit of extra effort.

### *How to share day-to-day activities*

#### **Establish a network.**

Most of the benefits of working out loud depend on others seeing your work and commenting on it, which requires a level of personal interest and relationship. Simply put, you need a network with whom to share your work. It can be a relatively small circle of colleagues, or a larger network of friends and followers. It may be a digital network of colleagues you’ve never met, or a more intimate network of team members within your organization – or some combination or hybrid of those connections.

#### **Determine your strategies for working out loud.**

There are many ways to work out loud, and you’ll want to select the strategies that work best for you and your network. Strategies include the following, which run the gamut from basic to more comprehensive and from highly informal to more formal strategies.

- Asking for help or feedback. When you have a strong group of colleagues (in person or online), you can often simply ping your network for quick input on a project. This is common on Twitter, email, and other quick communication channels.

- Posting your work in the open or online. You can share your work by blogging or by displaying work products outside your office or cubicle. Be sure to explicitly invite comment. Other forums for sharing work include discussion boards, team meetings, conferences, and shared document repositories.
- Sharing updates and brief progress reports. Social media and internal employee forums are often used to post brief updates that simply inform people about the projects on your desk at the moment. This quietly invites input and lets your network know where your current energies are being spent.
- Workshopping your project drafts. In the theatre world, creators often take their works-in-progress to a workshopping venue where experts and stakeholders can critique draft work to shape the next stage of development. Consider embracing this tactic as a routine part of your design and development process.
- Embracing pilot evaluation. Include opportunities for audiences to experience and critique your work along the way. These may be full scale beta tests or pilots, or may be test-runs of smaller portions of the product.

#### **Respond graciously to feedback.**

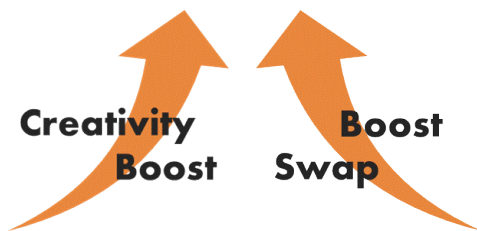
You don’t need to take all the advice that may be offered, but you should thank people for their input and when applicable, share how their comments shift your thinking. Expressions of gratitude demonstrate that you indeed value the feedback, even if you don’t always agree with it.

#### **Engage with others who are working out loud.**

If you want others to comment on your work, then you need to engage with your network when they work out loud. Respond to questions generously, comment on blogs, offer encouragement and helpful critique.

#### **Specific Advice from Experts**

- Show Your Work: The Payoffs and How-To’s of Working Out Loud, by Jane Bozarth, (Pfeiffer, 2014)
- Working Out Loud: For a Better Career and Life, by John Stepper (Ikigai Press, 2015)



## Creativity Boost Boost Swap Activity

Team up with a swap partner (or two) and share your Creativity Boost exercises with one another. Discuss briefly if you like.

During the session, you can practice “Parallel Lines” by doing this:

- 1) Consider a key concept or process in a current project.
- 2) Name the parallels that immediately come to mind (analogies and metaphors) and work with your swap partner to expand and explore them.



Playing

## Parallel Lines

### Drawing inspiration from like concepts

You can inspire yourself by applying analogies and metaphors to your project. You might make parallels to the process or task you are teaching, to your key concept, or to some specific characteristic of your product. These kinds of parallels are powerful because they bring with them a whole set of related concepts, ideas, and potential visuals that can be helpful to people who are trying to learn, remember, and apply something new. They can give you new perspective on how to explain something and new language that might resonate with learners.

Here are some examples of good use of parallels:

- The **Unlocking Human Potential** framework from Deloitte likens professional development activities to a set of “roots and shoots” similar to that of a living tree.
- The developing understanding of modern workplaces as learning and performance ecosystems. (See **David Kelly’s “Lessons from Nature” slide deck** for how this metaphor plays out, **or similar session recorded here.**)

### *How to draw inspiration from like concepts*

#### Identify an appropriate parallel.

An analogy is a comparison between two concepts (teaching is like being a fitness instructor of the mind, design is like composing for an orchestra). A metaphor is word usage that is not literally true (instructional design is a puzzle, a performance objective is the anchor for your program). Both analogies and metaphors provide similarities to consider. To identify a parallel that might prove useful, ask yourself: What is the thing you are trying to teach like?

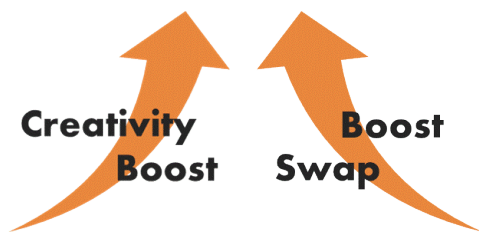
#### Mine the parallel representation.

You need to do more than simply toss off the analogy or metaphor. Some analogies don’t bear up under scrutiny; there are too many ways where the two concepts are actually dissimilar. That’s not to say that the parallel can’t work, but you don’t want to introduce something that turns out to be confusing rather than enlightening.

- What characteristics and truths about the analogy or metaphor are true about your project?
- What aspects of the parallel do not fit? Be wary of stretching metaphors too far, or of inappropriate or negative connotations that might be unwanted baggage for your work. (e.g. A teacher may be like a parent, but there are many attributes of parenting that do not apply.)
- How can these insights inform your explanations, flow, illustrations, etc.?

#### Apply the parallels.

Use the analogy or metaphor that most closely matches your intentions, and adopt the aspects of the parallel ideas that work well for your purposes. If necessary, mention the ways the metaphor doesn’t work so as not to confuse your learners. Applying analogies and metaphors extends beyond the language you use in explaining a concept. These kinds of parallels are often used to provide inspiration for graphics and exercises. Be careful about using multiple analogies or metaphors to minimize the risk of confusing or overcomplicating your explanations.



## Creativity Boost Boost Swap Activity

Team up with a swap partner (or two) and share your Creativity Boost exercises with one another. Discuss briefly if you like.

During the session, you can plan your own viable cross training strategy:

- 1) Share with your swap partner the cross training strategies you might want to try.
- 2) Discuss the strategies and potential barriers and work together to come up with a strategy that will work for each of you.



## Incubating

## Cross Training

### Changing up the nature of projects to improve creative expression

Doing different kinds of projects can feed creative energy. Much like cross training in the world of sports, alternating that nature of creative projects can strengthen creativity across all of them.

Twyla Tharp likes to move from full length dance pieces to more set pieces. Brandon Sanderson has multiple fantasy series in the works so that he can “rest” in between producing his epic (10-volume) Way of Kings books (at 1000+ pages) by writing shorter, less complex novels and short stories in between. Jim Henson often had several projects on tap at any given time: the ones that paid the bills and the ones that fueled his creative passions.

There are many ways to alternate the mix of creative projects. Many creatives deliberately have more than one project open at once, so that they can step away for a bit and still feel like they are being productive. Other creatives stick with one project at a time but deliberately choose their next projects to stretch different creative muscles.

You can do much the same thing to avoid stressing your creative energies.

### *How to change up your projects*

#### Determine your best strategy for cross training.

There are a number of ways you can switch up what you are doing to give your mind some space to ruminate on your creative challenges.

- Serial changes. If you can choose your next project, consider one that is substantially different than your current portfolio. You might consider a project that requires a different delivery format (classroom, e-learning, online, etc.), a different type of learner group (different client, different academic level), or a change-up of the scope of your project.

- Side projects. If your project portfolio in the near term looks to be more of the same, consider finding something different to work on the side. Perhaps there is a small initiative, a **side gig**, or a **skunk works project** for which you can find some time.
- Mentoring. You can stretch your mind in another direction by sharing what you have learned with someone a bit newer to the profession. Encouraging a new professional may remind you of the aspects of your work that you find most compelling.
- Volunteering. You may find a bit of fresh air by devoting some time and talent to a cause or an organization that you wish to support.

#### Identify projects.

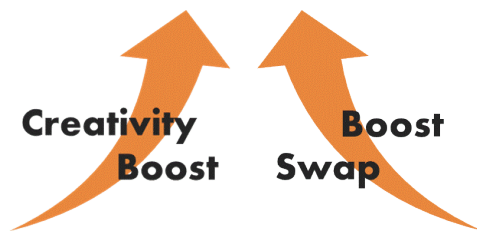
Once you've identified the change-up strategy that will best suit you, select a specific project to add to your portfolio. Determine how you will allocate time for it.

#### Organize your projects in separate spaces.

It can be easier to switch if you can change something about your physical space when you move from one to another. Keep project files in separate folders or drawers so you can physically put them aside and pull them out. Move to a different part of your work space or a different space altogether.

#### Implement cross training.

Now that you are prepared with alternate projects, switch up as you can. Be careful not to switch *quickly* back and forth between projects; that leads to a tremendous loss of momentum. Instead, organize yourself so that you can give undivided attention to each project in its turn.



### Creativity Boost Boost Swap Activity

Team up with a swap partner (or two) and share your Creativity Boost exercises with one another. Discuss briefly if you like.

During the session, you can explore your student-soul by doing this:

- 1) Share one of your current creative challenges.
- 2) Discuss with your partner the ways that you can turn that challenge into a learning opportunity.



**Daring**

## Soul of a Student

### Approaching challenges as learning opportunities

One of the joys of creative life is the ongoing learning that results from your needs to continuously develop mastery and to cultivate curiosity in the name of inspiration. A creative life is full of planned and unplanned learning. You may already be approaching each project as a learning opportunity (See Lessons Learned List under *Learning* practices), but roadblocks can generate unexpected learning needs, and may cause you to hesitate moving forward. When you have challenges, then, you can leverage them as opportunities to learn. On top of that, you can bolster courage by recognizing that you are in learning mode when you are working a project – it might lessen the pressure in your mind.

#### *How to leverage challenges for learning*

##### **Recognize the challenge.**

Rather than just powering through challenges, take a moment to stop and diagnose what is happening.

##### **Identify the learning needed to meet the challenge.**

Once you have a clear view of the challenge, identify the knowledge bases or skills that will be most pressed into service to meet the challenge. Assess whether your current knowledge and skill is sufficient. Where you see gaps, specifically define what you need to learn more deeply. Getting a grip on the precise knowledge and skills you need to develop in order to succeed can help you to redirect your nervous energy to that goal.

##### **Make a learning plan.**

Pause for a few minutes to consider the resources and activities that may be needed to deepen your knowledge base or skill, and how you will go about doing so. Quickly draft a plan that you can execute as you move forward.

##### **Recruit people to support your learning.**

Every plan should include garnering support from those around you. Who are the go-to people who can help you to rapidly develop knowledge and skill, or who can point you in the direction of the resources you need? Who can teach you and provide coaching? Line up support from these folks as well as from others who have a stake in your success on the project. These folks may also become allies that will bolster your confidence in the product.

##### **Make note of lessons learned as you go.**

Make a habit of reflecting on what you are learning daily. Commit to both moving forward with your creative project and with the concurrent learning plan that is supportive of your delivering the project with quality. Make adjustments as needed. Keep reminding yourself of your growing knowledge and skill, and let that build your courage.

##### **Reflect on the change in your knowledge base or skill.**

When the project is done, mentally or physically adjust your list of skill sets and accomplishments. Gaining confidence in your professional competency set can give you added courage in moments of need.