

# Innovating creativity

*By Fons Trompenaars, PhD and Peter Woolliams, PhD*

Fons Trompenaars, PhD is director of Trompenaars Hampden-Turner Consulting, an innovative centre of excellence on intercultural management. He is the world's foremost authority on cross-cultural management and is author of many books and related articles.

Peter Woolliams, PhD is professor of international management at Anglia University (UK) and is a partner in Trompenaars Hampden-Turner Consulting. He has collaborated and published jointly with Fons over some 12 years.

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In today's rapidly changing and competitive world, innovation is more important than ever to survive. It is part of received wisdom that inventors and adapters should learn to cooperate to realize the business benefits of ideas to the market place.

Yes we need creative inventive individuals. And yes we need adapters who can control the excesses of wild ideas and continual attempts at redesign but they start from different cultural perspectives.

Adaptor culture	Inventor culture
Efficient, thorough, adaptable, methodical, organized, precise, reliable, dependable	Ingenious, original, independent, unconventional
Accepts problem definition	Challenges problem definition
Does things better	Does things differently
Concerned with resolving problems rather than finding them	Discovers problems and avenues for their solutions
Seeks solutions to problems in tried and understood ways	Manipulates problems by questioning existing assumptions
Reduces problems by improvement and greater efficiency, while aiming at continuity and stability	Is catalyst to unsettled groups, irreverent of their consensual views
Seems impervious to boredom; able to maintain high accuracy in long spells of detailed work	Capable of routine work (system maintenance) for only short bursts; quick to delegate routine tasks

Of course, much has been written about the separate topics of the creativity role and the adapter role but mostly consider only one of these extremes separately. Our new research reveals that real innovation really comes to fruition when these opposites are integrated to work with each other. The importance of reconciling these opposites is the cornerstone of our work. We have found there is too much one-dimensional thinking across too many management frameworks and claimed solutions. Thus analysis metrics for innovation such as the founding KAI by Kirton (and other HR frameworks like MBTI) usually tend to pigeon-hole people as being able to offer their contribution through mainly what is their preferred orientation which labels you as more of an adapter than inventor (or vice versa). And if you are more of one extreme, you must be less of the other. Traditional logic then purports that by combining several of such individuals ~ selected so that all required orientations are present ~ becomes the winning formula for the assembled group to be able to extend the innovation capacity of the organization.

But is building the innovative organization that simple? If members play different roles and have different orientations, then the team is full of potential conflict and misunderstanding. Globally we have found the Anglo Saxon world of the US and UK tends to be more individualistic while Asians take to a more communal. So as long as the Americans remain in

America managing all-American teams, while for example, the Chinese stay in China doing the same, then conflict and misunderstanding is at least on the local level. But in today's multi-cultural world, an American leader could be running a team of Thai, Chinese, French and English members. And of course, it is this diversity of ideas and approaches that goes to the very heart of innovation. Different points of view are desperately needed to offer innovative solutions but they have to be connected.

We recognized these limitations in (earlier versions of) our own cross-cultural frameworks. For example, we had earlier tried to place respondents along a scale with 'individual creativity at one end and 'collective adaptation' at the other. But in a multi-cultural environment, a highly individualized leader will agonize over the fact that many subordinates prefer to work with their team. Conversely, the group oriented leader will fail because of an apparent lack of not recognizing the efforts of highly creative individuals. Thus we have a dilemma between the seemingly opposing orientations of individual creativity or group adaptation.

We have investigated how well our respondents reconcile these seemingly opposing views by extending our own instruments to explore how well we can combine individual creativity and adaptation for the commercial benefits of the organization, but where adaptors encourage, stimulate, reward and celebrate individual inventiveness. As an example of what can be achieved, the US semi-conductor industry achieved global market dominance by fusing teams of creative individuals. The success from one of our clients came from not simply rewarding individuals for their creative ideas or teams for successful projects, but the integration of these opposites. The key was to reward creative individuals to give their findings to their team, and at the same time to reward teams for how they developed the creativity of their individuals.

In the same way that we have extended our own instruments, we have also sought to challenge respondents about what dilemmas they face in working in their team. Thus with Pepsico, Stream and other organizations we asked members of their senior team what tensions they face with working with other members of their team that had 'opposite' perspectives to themselves. Note that the focus was on the dilemmas they faced when working with other team members by virtue of the team roles, and not aspects of personality or inter-personal relationships. For many participants, simply posing these questions instantly generated new insights to how they were working with others and they were all well able to be creative about how they could reconcile their own team role with opposite team roles. Consider a team member who is an Inventor. What dilemma did he identify in working with the Adapter? ~ and how could he work better in the future by reconciling this dilemma?

Respondent	Working with a contrasting role	Other team member
Inventor		Adapter
This is what he said about himself: <i>“difficult for me to take on and develop ideas I have not had an original input to”</i>		And about his colleague: <i>“May not appear interested in alternative viewpoints as focus is on detail and delivery”</i>
This is what he proposed as a Reconciliation		
Request the finisher to structure meeting time to evaluate my new ideas and then to identify and		

discuss his/her concerns and how they could be overcome if my idea might be implemented

Similarly, consider a member who is naturally an Adapter. What dilemmas did she say she faces when working with an Inventor ~ and how could she integrate her role with her opposites?

Respondent	Working with a contrasting team role	Other team member
Inventor		Inventor
“I want to influence others to take action”		“Idea generation conflicts with need to meet deadlines and work with team”
This is what she proposed as a Reconciliation		
Create action plans with key deliverables with clear roles and responsibilities but which include specific tasks for the review of new ideas, their evaluation and assessment of their implication		

Given the importance of reconciling opposites, we are surprised that no instrument that measures this has been devised - not in published form, at any rate. Our concern about applying any linear model across international boundaries might be explained by our own over-developed reconciliation profiles. But we insist that with the combination of seemingly opposed orientations, a team can flourish in diversity. Yes, all roles need to be present and played out, but it is the reconciliation between them that makes the team surpass. And no-one has ever measured anything like that in us.

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**Linkage**  
**Burlington, MA**  
781.402.5555  
info@linkageinc.com