

Creative Interchange in Groups

“All of us are smarter than any one of us, if we just don’t get in each other’s way. Of course, people often do get in each other’s way...Through creative interchange, you and I achieve results that are more than and different from what either of us could achieve working in isolation.” ~ Stacie Hagan and Charlie Palmgren

Most of us believe that the wisdom of many is greater than the wisdom of one. But as those of us who work in organizations know, the actual process of arriving at group wisdom can be challenging. Too often, meetings and strategy sessions leave us frustrated and not much further along in solving our problems. Finding consensus becomes an unhappy compromise. We’ve often thought, *There has to be an easier and more effective way to do this.*

There is, and it’s by engaging in **Creative Interchange**—the experience by which the wisdom of many becomes greater than the wisdom of one. Creative Interchange refers specifically to the process of shared exchange and creative integration whereby groups develop a shared vision and strategy that is meaningful for all involved. The best of collaborative thinking emerges when Creative Interchange is at play.

SynerChange Chicago, an organizational development and change management firm, provides a practical framework that allows Creative Interchange to flourish.

Based largely on the work of philosopher **Henry Nelson Wieman** (1884-1975), Creative Interchange is practiced by an international network of consultants, including **Patricia Moten Marshall**, President of *SynerChange Chicago*. “When we create an environment where Creative Interchange thrives,” says Marshall, “we can most effectively harness the creative power of the group and achieve extraordinary results.”

Instead of polarized debates or political posturing, Creative Interchange is based on the understanding that productive conversations require “both/and” rather than “either/or” thinking and acting. Awareness of mutual worth—that we are communicating based on the inherent worth of ourselves and others—and respectful, authentic interactions are keystones.

The **four-phase process** of Creative Interchange includes:

1. Authentic interacting: Sharing the diversity of perspectives and ideas.
2. Appreciative understanding: Listening to and finding value in the diverse views.
3. Creative integrating: Articulating and agreeing on something new and better that combines value.
4. Expanding capacity: Transforming ideas into actions and remaining committed to continuous improvement.

Creative Interchange, according to Marshall, occasionally emerges naturally in teams and organizations. More typically, though, human beings need a process to avoid ineffective communication habits and fully tap into the collective wisdom of all involved. “Creative Interchange provides the opportunity for people in organizations to take off their masks—which we have all been conditioned to wear—and offer real contributions that matter,” she says. “The result is an actual change of mind that allows something new that wasn’t there before.”

Many heads *are* better than one, but only if we can maximize the contribution, creativity and synergy of the many. Creative Interchange is the process that helps us perform at our highest potential both as individuals and as groups.

“In a corporation, creative interchange is a profound continuous improvement that has as its outcomes innovation, increased productivity, synergy among partners in a value network, and greater performance toward corporate goals and a state of self-reinvention.”

~ Charlie Palmgren and Bill Petrarca

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