

Creativity In Context: Update To The Social Psychology Of Creativity *by* Teresa M Amabile



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Creativity in Context is an update of *The Social Psychology of Creativity*, a classic text for researchers, students, and other interested readers. *Creativity in Context* incorporates extensive new material, going far beyond the original to provide a comprehensive picture of how the motivation for creative behavior, and creativity itself, can be influenced by the social environment. Teresa Amabile describes new findings from both her own research and from the work of many others in the field, detailing not only the ways in which creativity can be killed by social-psychological influences, but also the ways in which it can be maintained and stimulated. The research and the theory have moved beyond a narrow focus on the immediate social environment to a consideration of broad social influences in business organizations, classrooms, and society at large; beyond a documentation of social influences to a consideration of the cognitive mechanisms by which social factors might impact creativity; and beyond subject populations consisting of children and college students to an inclusion of professional artists, research scientists, and other working adults. Amabile describes a greatly expanded set of methodologies for assessing creativity, and introduces a set of methodologies for assessing the social environment for creativity in non-experimental studies. Throughout, the book maintains a clear focus on a comprehensive view of creativity—how the social context can influence motivation and how motivation, in conjunction with personal skills and thinking styles, can lead to the expression of creative behavior within that context. The result is a clarified theory of how creativity actually happens, with strong implications for supporting and increasing essential aspects of human performance.



Reviews of the **Creativity In Context: Update To The Social Psychology Of Creativity** by Teresa M Amabile

- **Gold as Heart**

I am a management consultant for major corporations and also write business books. My clients frequently ask me to help them understand how to make their companies more creative. Almost all books on this subject ignore the influence of other people on the creative person. Teresa Amabile does just the opposite, and puts creativity into a context to explain how to establish a creative environment for everyone. This book is an update of her earlier work, and the additions are very valuable. If you are a business person who wants to learn how to grow sales and profits faster, you need to understand the lessons in this book. She wrote a summary of this book recently in HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW that you may want to read, also. CORPORATE CREATIVITY is another good book on this subject.

- **Wrathmaster**

The limitations of this book do not come from its author. She has covered a tremendous territory in a superbly orderly, clear, convincing, rigorous fashion. Rather the limitations come from what modern best-practice social psychology research methods are capable of--not all that much. We have known for about a 100 years (more if you are willing to take aristocratic idea play as pseudo-research) that creators operate more out of intrinsic than extrinsic motivation. We have known common folk opinions about what aspects of extrinsic motivation hinder creation. We have even had sources that suggested something like a distraction effect--any extrinsic motive that takes your eye off your process-of-creating contents and onto goals not yet reached or results not yet gathered reduce the quality and intensity of your process of creating. So this was known before Amabile came along with the first really competent application of social psychology research methods from the publish-or-perish generation of scholars raised up in universities by an older generation that did not abide by publish-or-perish norms themselves though they imposed such norms on a younger generation. The result is paradoxical--Amabile is very thorough, systematic, comprehensive, rigorous in her research. Her virtues as a scholar and a person stand out so well in her work that the somewhat modest increments of overall new knowledge produced by that work surprises. It is not her fault. He is using imperfect tools masterfully. It literally is the fault of the tools. Modern social psychology has good enough tools to frame somewhat precisely research topics like "creativity". However as a sub-field of psychology and sociology it lacks tools adequate for a host of extremely important recent research questions about creativity. Wolfram in New Kind of Science and Kauffman in Investigations along with a Santa Fe Institute host of others have put major conceptual underpinning under the old creativity conundrum--is it eras and fields that create creators and their creations or is it individual heroic Western style people who create fields and eras with their creations. Probably the single most important conceptual frame for such issues is Epstein and Axtel's Brookings/MIT Press book on

Growing Artificial Societies. It reports simulated software hunter gatherer agents from which new social institution inventions arose without any individual agent, planning, intending, or inventing them. In other words it proved that new inventions can come into the world, the human civilized world, without any creator creating them. This result is percolating through the social sciences the way chaos theory percolated through the physical sciences years ago. Amabile is wonderful, make no doubt about it, buy everything that she writes if you are interested in creativity and well done research. However, in pursuing her own research frame on creativity she gets separated from major side frames invented by others, like the Wolfram, Kauffman, Epstein/Axtel 1996 one just mentioned. That makes her musings on "social" effects hindering/helping creativity less than complete, comprehensive, and unfortunately less than correct in a strict research sense. There are so many bright people in the world today that being wonderful yourself is not enough--you have to suffer daily the immense pain of importing into the core of your own barely formed work/ideation the wonders just discovered/invented by others. Amabile pursues one tool set and what it can show about social and motivation-in-particular effects on creation but in doing so she omits extremely powerful frameworks by others that undermine, enhance, contradict, and elaborate her own discoveries. There is no blame here--she is only a human being and cannot simultaneously pursue even with a Harvard budget every creative avenue of social effect research on creativity--no one can. Only a super-human could. She is as good as human researchers get. Her books are never fast, sloppy, or commercial. She is wonderful, pure and simple. However, such wonderfulness has very severe limits, given the limited tools we have for social research these days and for the foreseeable future. Therefore, the other reviewers here who suggest her book is a final or complete source on social effects on creation are simply wrong--dangerously wrong. She is as good as it gets for her chosen tools, but there are other tools around that are extremely powerful in handling the same questions and that have produced immensely powerful results, some of which her tools cannot now handle as well. Read her and more, in sum.

Finally, and I hate to say this, when famous wonderful scholars develop really significant commercial consultancy operations from their work, businesses and others tend to apotheosize what they buy from such consulting scholars. These messages blend in academic and commercial markets making partial, tentative results, not representative of all that plural research approaches are now producing, into "the" knowledge on social effects on creativity. This chthonian exaggeration harms research and confuses markets, driving customers away from less famous emerging scholars and their alternative approaches. It unfortunately can turn into Harvard drawing so many funds for one research tool set and approach that a dozen less famous approaches emerging get nothing and are not heard or pursued. Society is the loser and history is hurt by these institutional forces. Again no individual is at fault--this is an institutional context flaw we all work in--but being aware of it in one's own work means inviting in for reader notice approaches not taken by oneself and recently emerging with potential for great contribution. She does a bit of this but only for well trodden famous other researchers, I am afraid.

- **sunrise bird**

This is an updated classic that any creativity researcher should have on their shelf. It may seem dry to most but it's packed with fantastic information that articulates the need to look at creativity as a social phenomena, not an individual one. I'm an academic so I don't want fluff I want the research, this book does that. It's not written like journal articles so any person can pick it up and read it, I'm just warning that this book is about the research, not some anecdotal stories that follow the author's experiences of "being creative"

- **Hugighma**

Outstanding analysis of psychological research on creativity and motivation. Must reading for scholars and laypeople alike who are interested in creativity.

- **Adaly**

This book is so dry that I thought that I was reading soda crackers. If there is valuable information between these covers, it is buried in dust.

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